

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

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## Former Commander Of Nagorno Karabakh Army Sentenced to Five Years' Imprisonment

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

The Former Commander of the Nagorno Karabakh Defense Army Jalal Harutyunyan has been sentenced to five years and six months imprisonment after previously being found guilty of negligence. His lawyers have vowed to appeal the verdict.



Jalal Harutyunyan, the former Commander of the Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Army. Image via Armenpress.

According to his lawyers, Harutyunyan maintained his innocence before the sentencing on Friday, February 7.

"We will also challenge the severity of the sentence," Andranik Mnatsakanyan, Harutyunyan's lawyer, told CivilNet.

Mnatsakanyan also said that Harutyunyan has "a debilitating illness" and should undergo a medical examination, which the court "unjustifiably denied" although Harutyunyan had undergone surgery at least seven times in the past.

Harutyunyan was injured during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War when a military vehicle he was travelling in was blown up.

see IMPRISONMENT, page 3

## Nine Sentenced to Life in Dink Assassination Retrial

ISTANBUL (Turkish Minute) — A Turkish court has sentenced nine defendants to life in prison in the retrial of public officials accused of complicity in the 2007 assassination of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, following a Supreme Court of Appeals ruling that overturned previous verdicts for being too lenient, Turkish media reported on Saturday, February 8.

The İstanbul 14th High Criminal Court convicted former Trabzon Gendarmerie Commander Ali Öz, along with Okan Şimşek, Mehmet Ayhan, Onur Karakaya, Osman Gülbül and Hasan Durmuşoğlu, of "attempting to overthrow the constitutional order," sentencing each of them to life imprisonment. Former gendarmerie officer Muharrem Demirkale received a life sentence for "premeditated murder," while Yavuz Karakaya and Bekir Yokuş were sentenced to 12 years and 10 years, respectively, for aiding and abetting the murder. Another defendant, Veysel Şahin, was sentenced to 15 years for "negligent homicide" but was acquitted of terrorism-related charges.

see RETRIAL, page 5



Hrant Dink was assassinated in front of Agos' office on Jan. 19, 2007



## Pashinyan Warns Of Azeri Aggression Against Armenia

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Azerbaijan may be preparing the ground to attack Armenia, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan claimed on Monday, February 10.

"Azerbaijan's official propaganda is increasingly focusing on the notion that Armenia is arming itself and preparing to attack Azerbaijan and that Azerbaijan therefore has the right to defend itself and take preventive measures," he said in an article published by the official Armenpress news agency.

Pashinyan pointed to Baku's "aggressive rhetoric," major military buildup and continuing description of most of Armenia's internationally recognized territory as "Western Azerbaijan." He said the Azerbaijani leadership may thus be "trying to form the basis" for another military aggression against Armenia.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev implicitly threatened such military action a month ago, branding Armenia as a "fascist" state and complaining about Yerevan's reluctance to open an extraterritorial land corridor to Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan exclave. Pashinyan responded at the time by signaling readiness for more concessions to Baku, including dissolution of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group on Nagorno-Karabakh. The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry dismissed his overtures.

Pashinyan stressed on Monday that Armenia unconditionally recognizes Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and has no "plan, intention or goal for any see AGGRESSION, page 2

## TCA Boston Holds Early Celebration Of St. Valentine's and St. Sarkis's Days

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — The Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter (TCA) celebrated both St. Valentine's

and St. Sarkis's holidays a few days early, on February 1, with a full house at the Baikar Center, which was transformed into a romantic venue, thanks to charming decorations accompanied by great music and Italian food.

Maral Der Torossian, recording secretary of the chapter, welcomed guests in English to a celebration of love, culture and community which also supports the cultural mission of TCA. One by one, at various points in the musical program, she introduced the three musicians performing that evening. Contralto Angelina Nazarian, only 19 years old, was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, but lived in six different countries. A student now at Berklee School of Music, she appeared on NBC's show see TCA SOIREE, page 10



Love was truly in the air at the Tekeyan Valentine's Soiree (Maral and Vatche Der Torossian)



From left, Angelina Nazarian, Marina Margarian and Armenuhi Hovakimian cut the Valentine's Soiree cake (photo Aram Arkun)

### ARMENIA

#### Artsakh Public TV Relaunches Broadcasts

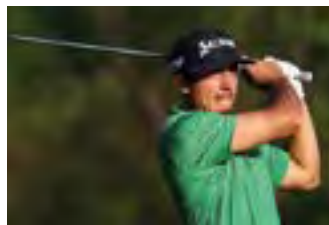
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### QATAR

#### Bekirian Becomes First Armenian to Make DP World Tour Cut

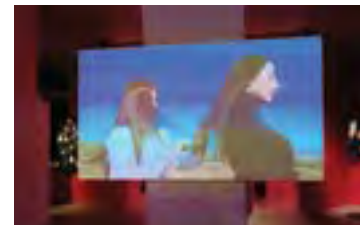
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### GERMANY

#### Silvina Der Meguerditchian: An Artist Who Cares

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## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Zangezur Copper Plant Workers End Strike

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Workers at the Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Plant, who had gone on strike, have decided to return to work, according to Vahe Mkhitarian, a member of the strike coordination council.

On February 10, the plant's management made a concession by announcing an average 20-percent salary increase and guaranteeing the installation of modern ventilation systems, RFE/RL reported.

The strike began on January 31, with workers demanding higher wages and improved working conditions.

### Artsakh Refugees Continue Exodus from Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — By January 1, 2025, 26,397 forcibly displaced Artsakh residents had left Armenia, while 14,871 had returned, according to data provided by Armenia's National Security Service (NSS). This means that following the 2020 war and the forced displacement of September 2023, 11,526 Artsakh refugees have left Armenia and have not returned, CivilNet reported on February 11.

At the same time, there is a noticeable increase in the number of returnees. A slight positive trend has been observed in recent months, though the overall emigration process continues.

Starting in April, financial aid for displaced persons — previously set at 50,000 drams (40,000+10,000) — will be reduced to 40,000 drams and will be allocated only to specific groups.

On October 26, 2023, the Armenian government granted temporary protection to Artsakh refugees, officially recognizing them as refugees under the law.

### Defense Ministry Plans Structural Reform in Territorial Defense

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Deputy Defense Minister Arman Sargsyan announced in the National Assembly on February 11 that the Ministry of Defense is proposing the creation of local defense forces to replace the existing militia system. He presented a package of legislative amendments outlining these changes.

"According to this proposal, the current militia system will be replaced by local defense forces," Sargsyan stated, as reported by *Aravot*.

He clarified that the overall command of these forces will be carried out by the army corps leadership.

According to him, local defense forces will be formed from individuals registered in their respective communities who are not assigned to active wartime positions, belong to the second reserve group, or have been removed from military records.

# Analysis: Armenian Prime Minister Sells His 'Peace Agenda' in Washington

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan made an extended visit to Washington hoping to solidify his country's image as Eurasia's new democratization darling in the eyes of the West. It is uncertain, however, whether his message is resonating with the Trump administration.

Pashinyan's government over the past 18 months has broken with Russia and moved to boost cooperation with the United States and the European Union. In comments made during an appearance at the Atlantic Council on February 4, the Armenian Prime Minister voiced an intent to double down on his embrace of the West, expounding on the necessity of building a Western-style democracy in Armenia.

Describing Armenia presently as a "striving democracy," Pashinyan said developing a full-blown democratic system, featuring "protection of human rights" and an "independent judiciary" offered the best means for stabilizing the country following its decisive defeat at the hands of Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War.

"We want [Armenia citizens] to feel that democracy is truly a factor that is capable of ensuring security, prosperity, more and more opportunities for all citizens and all people living in Armenia," Pashinyan stated. "We hope that as a result of these reforms, Armenia will become a more attractive country for investing, living, visiting."

Later, he emphasized that for Armenia's democratization experiment to be successful, the country needed peace — not only with Azerbaijan, but also Turkey, another historical enemy.

"It is obviously impossible to have real and growing independence, prosperity and security without peace," Pashinyan added, adding that "we cannot have democracy in an environment of war."

It is clear that Pashinyan's message is designed to entice the United States into providing robust assistance. He is trying to seize what he perceives as an opportunity for Armenia to replace Georgia — the leaders of which have spurned Western values and moved in an authoritarian direction — as the Caucasus' most favored nation for

democratization help.

Under most circumstances, Pashinyan's pitch would be music to the ears of Washington policymakers. But what may have been a sure thing even in the very recent past is anything but in the early days of the second Trump administration. Under the new normal in Washington, Pashinyan's beat does not seem to be keeping time with the metronome of current affairs.

The foundation of Pashinyan's democratization blueprint is a peace deal with Azerbaijan. Talks are presently at a standstill, but the prime minister emphasized that 15 of 17 articles of the draft peace treaty are already finalized, and agreement on the outstanding points just requires "political will."

While Armenia and Azerbaijan remain intent on settling their differences bilaterally without mediation, Pashinyan stressed that "the attention and support of the international community would be very useful in creating a proper environment for achieving sustainable peace." He went on to describe peace in the South Caucasus as "low-hanging fruit" for the West.

It is far from certain that the Trump administration will heed Pashinyan's appeal for the kind of diplomatic attention that can help push the peace deal past the finish line. And as for the broader topic of democratization aid, the administration's efforts to overhaul USAID suggest the United States will not be a strong contributor in building out Pashinyan's rule-of-law vision, at least over the medium-term.

Pashinyan ended up gaining a meeting with Vice President JD Vance at the White House. A statement issued by the prime minister's office on February 7, contained little information other than a photo of Pashinyan and Vance together. The two discussed "issues related to Armenia-US bilateral relations, as well as the regional agenda," according to the two-line statement, which gave no time or day of the meeting. Pashinyan's other only other public contact with decision-makers was a meeting with a congressional delegation on Capitol Hill.

The administration's uncertain stance is just part of the challenge Pashinyan is con-

fronting in Washington. His "peace agenda" is facing stiff opposition domestically and among Diaspora Armenians.

A key element of Pashinyan's plan to normalize relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey involves drawing a line on the past and focusing on the future, or as he put it, "to open a new era with a new, empty and clear page." But he is finding that the notion of de-prioritizing historical grievances associated with the 1915 Armenian genocide at the hands of the Turks, or war crimes committed by Azerbaijani forces in Karabakh, or the very loss of Karabakh itself, is abhorrent to many Armenians, at home and abroad.

A scathing statement issued by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, a leading Diaspora group, called on Diaspora members to boycott his public events in Washington, so as not to serve as "stage props, and to normalize his shameful surrender of Armenian lives and land, democracy and dignity."

The statement castigated Pashinyan for downplaying "the Armenian Genocide — aligning himself with [Turkish leader Recep Tayyip] Erdogan's denial of this crime." It similarly assailed the prime minister for betraying the interests of Artsakh, the Armenian term for Karabakh.

At his Atlantic Council appearance, Pashinyan said "a mission for our government" is getting Armenians to move on from what he described as a "victim mentality." It seems that the extent to which Pashinyan's government succeeds in this mission will determine whether the rest his democratization vision can be fulfilled.

(This article originally ran on the website [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org) on February 9.)

### Pashinyan Warns Of Azeri Aggression Against Armenia

AGGRESSION, from page 1  
military action against Azerbaijan." He said Yerevan will not even use force to try to liberate more than 200 square kilometers of Armenian territory mostly occupied by Azerbaijani forces in 2021 and 2022.

Pashinyan also renewed his calls for the quick signing of an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty. Aliyev has repeatedly set multiple preconditions for such an agreement which includes a change of Armenia's constitution.

Armenian opposition leaders maintain that Pashinyan's appeasement policy is only encouraging Aliyev to demand more Armenian concessions and increasing the likelihood of another military conflict.

"What Pashinyan says is, 'Look, we've given you what you demanded. What else do you want? We are ready to concede everything,'" one of them, Artur Khachatryan, said, commenting on the Armenian premier's latest statement. "Contrary to these authorities' assurances that we are negotiating in good faith, going towards peace, Azerbaijan is threatening Armenia with war."

Hayk Konjoryan, the parliamentary leader of the ruling Civil Contract, refused to say whether Pashinyan's statement actually means that the peace process is deadlocked.

## Vardanyan Accuses Baku Court Of Bias, Challenges Composition

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Former Artsakh State Minister Ruben Vardanyan, currently facing trial in Baku, has accused the court of bias, arguing that the judges of the Baku military court are interested in his prosecution. He filed a complaint against the court's composition, but his motion was rejected, according to Caucasian Knot, on February 11.

The February 10 hearing was presided over by Judge Zeynal Aghayev.

Vardanyan's lawyer, Abraham Berman, petitioned the court to allow a private meeting with his client. The court granted this request. After the meeting, the hearing continued. The presiding judge announced the involvement of new translators, to which neither party objected, Minval.az reported.

Earlier, Siranush Sahakyan, a lawyer representing Armenian prisoners at the European Court of Human Rights, shared details of Vardanyan's trial based on information provided by his local attorney. She revealed that, in addition to the case consisting of 422 volumes in Azerbaijani, Vardanyan's assigned translator failed to provide adequate verbal translations and



Ruben Vardanyan in court

made serious mistakes. Written translations or even note-taking were not permitted.

In late December 2024, Vardanyan's case was transferred to the Baku Military Court. He claimed that Azerbaijani investigators had falsified interrogation records and demanded an open trial with international journalists and humanitarian organizations present.

Vardanyan's case is being considered separately. He faces around 45 new charges under 20 articles of Azerbaijan's Criminal Code, with a potential sentence of life imprisonment. On January 27, the court denied his request for house arrest.

# NKR's Voice Still Resounds: Artsakh Public TV Relaunches Broadcasts

By Haykaram Nahapetyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WASHINGTON — *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator* partnered with Artsakh's Public TV when it was still in Artsakh, in a three-story building in Stepanakert. Back then, news presented on Nagorno-Karabakh's TV's was translated into English and periodically posted in video form on both the Mirror's regular and YouTube websites.



Narek Sahakyan

In 2023, Azerbaijan's unprovoked aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh silenced the free voice of Artsakh. But not for too long, as rising from the ashes is not something new for Armenians. Now, a dedicated group is reestablishing Artsakh television operations in the Republic of Armenia.

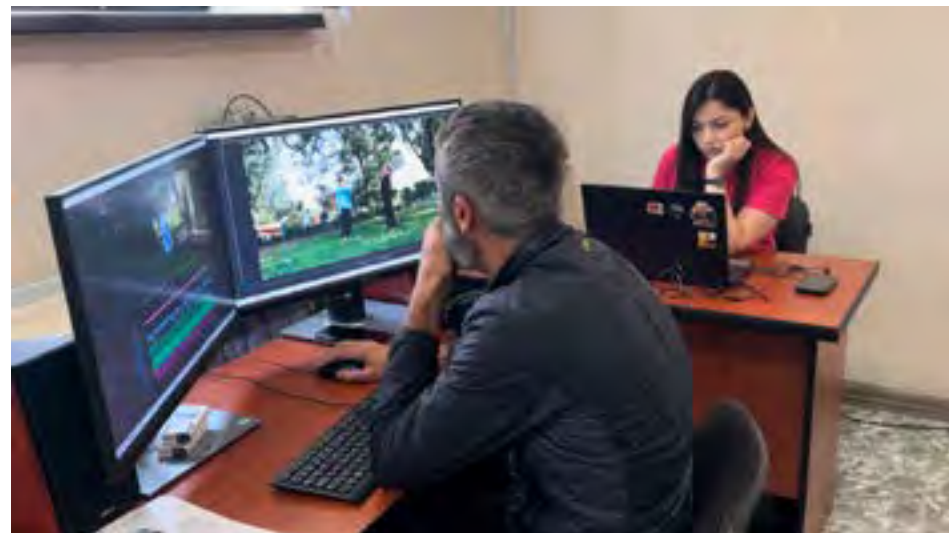
"As most of our staff found refuge here, we tried to bring them together to preserve our culture, identity, and traditions by setting up our programs. The primary goal is

When we sat down with Narek at his news studio, we decided to take a step back first, revisiting the dark days of 2023.

"During the months of blockade, we witnessed Azerbaijan tirelessly attempting to enforce an informational vacuum: they were disrupting our internet, cutting the cables, blocking the electricity and/or gas supplies from Armenia," recalls Narek, assuring that despite all the hassles, Artsakh TV continued to function, as the team recognized the profound importance of their informational work.

On September 19, 2023, Azerbaijan, whose population exceeds 10 million according to its official numbers, attacked Nagorno-Karabakh with its 100,000 Armenian population. While the people had to leave their homeland, the staff was able to take some of the equipment with them, but much was left behind. What particularly concerned Narek was the film and video archive.

The first broadcast of Artsakh TV took place on June 1, 1988. Therefore, Artsakh TV and the Karabakh movement are roughly the same age and the company's archive materials contained the chronology of events from the start to the end of free Karabakh. "We tried to get out of Artsakh all video-records that we could, and at this stage, we are working on putting together



The newsroom and the staff

to raise awareness about Artsakh, spread updates about the people of Artsakh, and struggle for their collective right to return. On July 1, 2024, we formally started our broadcasts," noted Narek Sahakyan, the program director of Artsakh TV.

those materials," noted Narek.

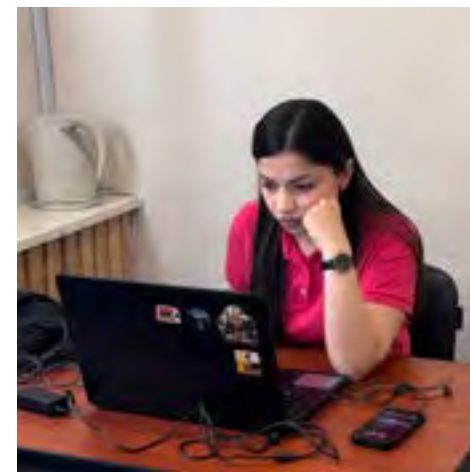
In addition to news, the Artsakh TV channel, which is at present only broadcasting online, currently reports about the culture and history of Artsakh and tells the story of incredible sacrifices that had been

made for the sake of their liberty and democracy. A program called "The Tenth State" (seventh-century geographer Anania Shirakatsi referred to Artsakh as the tenth administrative unit of Greater Armenia) is about the history of Artsakh.

"In years from now, people will start forgetting the details of what they have been through. And we work to prevent this from happening," noted Narek.

They are pursuing crowdfunding on the Patreon and ReArmenia platforms for that purpose.

The video segment at [mirrorspectator.com](https://mirrorspectator.com) includes an interview with Narek Sahakyan.



A staff member at work

## Armenian Government Backs Bill on EU Accession Process

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Armenian government has proposed voting in favor of the bill titled "On launching the process of Armenia's accession to the European Union." Deputy Foreign Minister Paruyr Hovhannisyanyan stated this during a parliamentary discussion on the bill.

He clarified that adopting the bill does not constitute an application for EU membership. According to him, the document is intended to reinforce relations with the European Union, elevate Armenia's approaches, and reflect the aspirations of its citizens, Armenpress reports.

"The bill also aligns with Armenia's balanced and diversification-oriented foreign policy, which aims to expand economic and security cooperation. In this context, one should also consider the unprecedented dynamic in Armenia-EU relations in recent years, which has manifested in nearly all areas of cooperation," Hovhannisyanyan emphasized.

The deputy minister highlighted key achievements in Armenia-EU relations over the past years.

"In September 2024, dialogue on visa liberalization with the EU officially began. Technical negotiations are currently underway between the parties. Meanwhile, discussions are ongoing regarding a document titled 'Armenia-European Union Partnership: A New Agenda,' which will further expand and deepen cooperation under the existing Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership

Agreement (CEPA) between Armenia and the EU. Essentially, these two documents will serve as the legal and political foundation for the Armenia-EU partnership," he said.

According to him, Armenia attaches great importance to the effective implementation of the CEPA and is working closely with the EU in this regard.

"Armenia has been included in the European Peace Facility, a significant political decision by the EU. Since 2022, the EU Civilian Monitoring Mission has been stationed in Armenia, proving to be a pillar of stability in the region. Recently, the EU Council decided to extend the mission's mandate for another two years. The European Union remains Armenia's largest development cooperation donor and a key supporter of its reforms. Under the 'Resilience and Growth' program, Armenia has been allocated financial support for the next four years and is the only non-candidate country to benefit from this initiative. The EU continues to be Armenia's primary partner in fostering institutions based on shared values. The EU-supported reforms aim to strengthen human rights, the rule of law, effective governance, and anti-corruption efforts," Hovhannisyanyan noted.

On February 11, the Armenian National Assembly convened its regular session, with eight items on the agenda, including the bill on launching the EU accession process.

## Former Commander of Nagorno Karabakh Army Sentenced to Five Years' Imprisonment

IMPRISONMENT, from page 1

In mid-January, Harutyunyan was found guilty of having a negligent attitude towards military service during martial law and war, resulting in the death of 20 soldiers of the Tsor military unit during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

According to Liparit Simonyan, who represented the victims in the case, on October 12, 2020, the division, located in a combat position, spotted a group of soldiers approaching from the opposite direction. As they tried to determine their identity, they reportedly received confirmation that the soldiers were Armenians.

"[Harutyunyan] personally said that they are 100 percent ours. He said it twice.

As a result [Azerbaijanis] came and surrounded those children [referring to the soldiers]. The children resisted as much as they could, but due to the inequality of forces, there were 20 casualties," Simonyan said.

Harutyunyan's other lawyer, Arsen Sardaryan, put the responsibility of Harutyunyan's command on the intelligence report, however.

"Secondly, there is no evidence, apart from the testimony of a single person, that Jalal Harutyunyan said '[they are] ours. Jalal Harutyunyan says, 'I said, they should be ours, they might be ours,' and there was sufficient data for that," Sardaryan told RFE/RL.

RFE/RL also quoted Simonyan, who countered this claim by quoting an unnamed intelligence head.

"He [the unnamed intelligence head] even said that 'it was very surprising to me, because I, being the person responsible for the intelligence, could not decide at that time whether they were ours or not, and he declares that 'they are ours,'" Simonyan said.

Two charges were brought against Harutyunyan in September 2022, after which he was suspended from his post as Head of the Military Oversight Service of the Armenian Ministry of Defense and was banned from leaving the country.

Harutyunyan had been appointed to the

position in Armenia's Defense Ministry in February 2021.

In November 2023, Harutyunyan was acquitted of the charges related to a counterattack on October 7, 2020. According to the charges, Harutyunyan allegedly showed a negligent attitude causing serious consequences — the counterattack failed, and Armenian units suffered large losses of military equipment and manpower.

The head of the Tsor unit's artillery division, Gevorg Gevorgyan, is also facing charges of inaction by the authorities during martial law. He is accused of acting out of personal interest in order to save his own life, which caused serious material consequences.

## INTERNATIONAL

## Azeri Gov. Charges Former Minister with Being Russian Spy

YEREVAN (News.am) — Azerbaijan has accused several people of representing Russian interests has been unmasked, Azerbaijani media reported on February 10.

According to local media, the head of this structure was former head of the presidential administration Ramiz Mehdiyev, known as the “gray cardinal.”

The group also included former Azerbaijani Culture Minister Abulfas Garayev, former Azerbaijani Youth and Sports Minister Azad Rahimov and former Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov. Former Minister of National Security Eldar Mahmudov reportedly attended meetings of this group from time to time.

## Pashinyan, von der Leyen Discuss Armenia-EU Relations

PARIS (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenian Prime Minister discussed the further development of Armenia-European Union with Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, during a visit to Paris on February 11.

The meeting took place on the sidelines of the AI Action Summit in Paris.

The event was attended by French President Emmanuel Macron, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US Vice President James David Vance, UN Secretary-General António Guterres, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, leaders and heads of government of a number of other countries.

## Azerbaijan's FM Again Complains about Armenia's Constitution

February 10, 2025 - 18:29 AMT  
YEREVA (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov met with Slovenia's State Secretary at the Foreign Ministry, Marko Štucin, on February 10, where he complained about Armenia's Constitution and armament.

Discussing the normalization process between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Bayramov claimed that despite certain agreements and progress, “the territorial claims present in Armenia's Constitution, as well as its rapid military buildup amid revanchist sentiments, pose serious threats to the peace process in the region,” reports Inews.az .

The meeting also addressed bilateral and multilateral cooperation between Azerbaijan and Slovenia, as well as regional and international security matters.

Earlier, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev had stated that Armenia must engage in dialogue with the so-called “Western Azerbaijan” community — a term used by Baku to refer to nearly all of Armenia's territory, including Yerevan.

# 2024 Aurora Prize Laureate Mukwege Selects Humanitarian Aid Recipients

WASHINGTON — The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative announced on February 11 that 2024 Aurora Prize Laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege has selected recipients of the first cycle of participatory grants to local humanitarians.

Mukwege, a world-renowned gynecological surgeon and human rights activist from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), was named the 2024 Laureate at the Aurora Prize events in Los Angeles in May 2024.

The Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity recognizes individuals who risk their own lives to save the lives of others suffering due to violent conflict or atrocity crimes. After receiving the Prize, Aurora Laureates continue the circle of giving by designating grassroots humanitarians and organizations to support, amplifying the impact of their courageous work. In a moment of uncertainty around the future of United States' humanitarian funding, Aurora—which has not received money from donor governments — provides funds directly to our grantees in support of their life-saving work.

“I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to share the Aurora Prize award with remarkable Luminaries and organizations whose work transforms lives. Together, we will be able to continue building brighter futures for women and children through access to education, clean water, and healthcare,” said Mukwege. “The Aurora Prize grant model amplifies our collective mission — not only to support those survivors who have endured unimaginable hardship but to invest in lasting solutions that prevent atrocities, strengthen communities, and foster resilience.”

Mukwege has designated the following beneficiary organizations and individuals to support during the first cycle of funding:

\* Fartuun Adan and Ilwad Elman (Somalia), 2020 Aurora Laureates, a mother and



Dr. Denis Mukwege

daughter team protecting women's rights, promoting peacebuilding, and rehabilitating child soldiers

\* Julienne Lusenge (DRC), 2021 Aurora Laureate, human rights defender helping the victims of wartime sexual violence

\* Nadia Murad (Iraq), Aurora Luminary, Yazidi human rights activist renown for her advocacy for survivors of genocide and sexual violence

\* Angélique Namaïka (DRC), Aurora Luminary, an activist supporting displaced women and children who fell victims to the civil war in her country

\* CEPAC-Nacibunda (DRC), a primary school for children in South Kivu Province, DRC

\* Interface Compassion International (DRC), a non-profit in DRC empowering women and children through access to healthcare, gender equality, economic support, and education

\* Malaika (DRC), a girls' school that promotes a comprehensive approach to supporting communities by providing them with access to education, water and healthcare

\* Yennega Progress (Burkina Faso), an initiative focused on improving education,

health services, and basic infrastructure in regions where access to social services is limited.

“For Aurora, a key part of our philosophy is championing grassroots humanitarians who know exactly what their communities need,” noted Armine Afeyan, CEO of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative. “These participatory grants are designed with the belief that those on the ground are best equipped to determine how resources should be used, and we're excited to see the enhanced impact this model creates. At its core, Aurora is all about continuing the cycle of giving while putting the ‘human’ back in ‘humanitarian’—directly supporting remarkable people who are transforming lives every day.”

The \$1 million Aurora Prize is allocated among the Laureate, their designated beneficiaries, and the Aurora Humanitarians (Aurora Prize Finalists). The Aurora Laureate is awarded \$300,000 in three equal installments of \$100,000 each over three years. The Laureate receives a further \$600,000 over three years to fund other grassroots humanitarians and organizations, including Aurora Luminaries (\$25,000 to up to eight recipients per year). The remaining \$100,000 is divided evenly between the two other finalists. In 2024, those Aurora Humanitarians were Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh and Bahraini human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja.

Founded on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and in gratitude to their saviors, the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2025. Aurora has already improved the lives of more than 3.4 million people across 60 countries and territories, deploying funding toward 463 projects that support emergency response, food, water, education, medical care, psychosocial support and more for underserved communities.

## France Reaffirms Support for Armenia's Borders

PARIS (Azatutyun) — French President Emmanuel Macron reaffirmed his country's strong support for Armenia's territorial integrity when he held talks with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Paris on Monday.

The two leaders discussed bilateral ties

full support for the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as the signing of a peace treaty in accordance with international law,” read a statement released by the presidential Elysée Palace. “He also reiterated France's

of cooperation projects between France and Armenia, particularly in the fields of energy, defense and transport.” Pashinyan was quoted by his press office as saying that French-Armenian relations have “reached a new level” in the past year.

France, which is home to an influential Armenian community, has emerged in recent years as Armenia's leading Western backer and supplier of weapons. The two countries have signed a series of contracts for the delivery of French weapons to the Armenian military, prompting strong condemnation from Azerbaijan.

Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papiqyan underlined their growing military cooperation during a recent visit to Paris in December. The visit coincided with French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot's calls for the European Union to deepen its ties with Armenia and “provide it with all the support it has the right to expect.”

Pashinyan's office said he also discussed with Macron “prospects for further development of the Armenia-EU cooperation.” It did not give any details.

The Armenian parliament is due to debate and approve this week a government-backed bill on the “start of a process of Armenia's accession to the European Union.” Neither France nor any other EU member state has so far publicly voiced support for the South Caucasus nation's EU membership bid resented by Russia.



French President Emmanuel Macron and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meet in Paris, February 10, 2025

and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, according to official readouts of the talks held on the sidelines of the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit taking place in the French capital.

“The Head of State reiterated France's

determination to support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Armenia as well as the aspirations of the Armenian people for peace, security and democracy.”

The statement said Macron and Pashinyan “agreed to continue the development

# Kavala Links Arrest of Celebrity Manager to Ongoing Effort to Criminalize Gezi Park Protests

ISTANBUL (Turkish Minute) — Jailed businessman and rights activist Osman Kavala said on February 7 that the recent arrest of a celebrity manager over her alleged involvement in the anti-government Gezi Park protests of 2013 is an attempt at “manipulating public perception” and part of efforts to criminalize the protests.

The Gezi Park protests, which began over an urban development plan in central İstanbul in the summer of 2013 and spread to other cities in Turkey, posed a serious challenge to the rule of then-prime minister and current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. They were violently suppressed by the government of Erdoğan, who later labelled the protests as a “coup attempt” against him.

The protests have once again returned to Turkey’s agenda 12 years later with the arrest of Ayşe Barım, a prominent figure in Turkey’s television and film industry who works with many famous actors, due to her alleged role in the protests.

Barım is accused of “attempting to overthrow the Turkish Republic or prevent it from fulfilling its duties” as one of the alleged “organizers” of the protests. She denies the charges.

The İstanbul Chief Public Prosecutor’s

Office, leading the investigation, claims that Barım had “intensive communications” with defendants in the Gezi Park trial during the protests, including Kavala, who is serving a life sentence due to his alleged role in the protests.

Kavala said in a written statement released on his website through his lawyers on Friday that it is “impossible” for the judicial authorities not to recognize that his phone conversations with Barım, based on the prosecutor’s call records, began only after the Gezi protests had ended. He added that the prosecutor is well aware that no such conversation, as claimed, ever took place.

“What has been done to Ayşe Barım is a striking example of distorting reality and manipulating perception regarding the Gezi trial,” Kavala said, adding that Barım’s arrest is part of ongoing efforts to criminalize the protests.

Meanwhile, Barım’s sister, an attorney, and a friend were also detained on Thursday on charges of “evidence tampering” in connection with Barım’s case, according to Turkish media.

The detentions took place after Barım’s sister, I.S.G., and her friend visited a bank on the night of Barım’s arrest, taking a bag and an envelope containing gold to avoid



Osman Kavala

financial losses if a trustee was appointed to ID Communications, the company co-owned by Barım. Reports also said that Barım transferred ownership of her company to her sister before her arrest.

Kavala, who has been imprisoned since November 2017 on charges related to the Gezi Park protests, was sentenced to life in prison in 2022 for allegedly attempting to overthrow the government of then-prime minister Erdoğan. His conviction, seen by some as politically motivated, was upheld

by the Supreme Court of Appeals in September 2023.

Turkey has refused to release Kavala despite a 2019 European Court of Human Rights ruling that found his detention was in pursuance of an “ulterior motive,” that of silencing him as a human rights defender.

The non-implementation of the rulings prompted the Council of Europe’s (CoE) Committee of Ministers to launch an infringement procedure against Turkey in February 2022 that is still ongoing.

## Azerbaijan and Russia Back at It over Downing of Civilian Jetliner

After going through a dormant phase, Azerbaijani-Russian rancor is bubbling up again over the accidental Russian shoot-down of a civilian Azerbaijani jetliner. This round of rhetorical sparring is featuring personal attacks that may well make it harder for either side to back down, thus increasing the risk of a breakdown in bilateral relations.

The spat revived following the release of preliminary findings by Kazakhstani investigators into the December 25 crash, in which 38 of the 67 people aboard died. Without specifically blaming Russia, the report indicated that the plane was hit by “external” metal objects in the sky over Grozny, its intended destination, causing it to lose control over operating systems.

The report generally upheld the Azerbaijani version of events, in which the plane was critically damaged by Russian anti-aircraft fire. Russia, meanwhile, has steadfastly refused an Azerbaijani demand to take

responsibility and pay compensation to victims and their families.

Helping to stoke tension was Azerbaijan’s February 5 move to shutter the Baku offices of Rossotrudnichestvo, an entity used by Russia to exert soft power. The move was widely interpreted as a signal of Azerbaijani displeasure over Russia’s continuing reluctance to own the accident. Azerbaijan is additionally planning to file a lawsuit in an international court to seek justice over the crash.

Before the crash, the Azerbaijani-Russian relationship seemed rock solid, with the self-proclaimed strategic partners benefiting from robust north-south trade. The two sides also tightened security cooperation in October, ostensibly to counter Western influence in the region. But in the seven weeks since the crash, ties have frayed with startling speed.

“The doors for dialogue with Russia remain open. Moscow must openly admit its

guilt and take responsibility. Otherwise, Baku is ready for the next steps,” a report published by the official Azerbaijani news agency APA stated.

The door may be open, but it does not seem Russia will be walking through it any time soon. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists February 7 that Russian leader Vladimir Putin has no plans to comment on the crash.

In the meantime, various Russian officials have been tossing verbal brickbats at Baku, using high-handed language while effectively calling on Azerbaijani officials to let the matter drop.

Yevgeny Primakov, a grandson of a former Russian prime minister and current head of Rossotrudnichestvo, characterized Baku’s response to the jet crash as “overly emotional,” and expressed hope that Baku would soon “put these emotions on hold, and that an adequate, sane solution will be found.”

Konstantin Zatulin, the Kremlin’s point man for CIS affairs in the State Duma, took direct aim at Aliyev, blaming him for putting Russia on the spot, and questioning his leadership abilities. Azerbaijan’s “ambitions are so puffed up” that it feels “it can snub Russia,” the RTVI outlet quoted Zatulin as saying on February 6.

He went on to suggest Ilham Aliyev’s father, Heydar, a former Soviet Politburo member and Azerbaijani head of state, would have handled this situation differently were he still alive. “It would have been wiser [for Ilham] to behave as Heydar Aliyev would have ... to exhibit some outward, at least, decency,” Zatulin said. “The son is different from the father in this regard.”

State Duma representatives, meanwhile, have threatened to introduce retaliatory measures against Azerbaijani nationals who legally reside in Russia, including press-ganging them into service in the Ukraine war, as well as confiscating Azerbaijani owned entities in the country.

Ilham Aliyev, who was outspoken in his criticism of Russia in the early days after the crash, has been silent of late, although the presidential website continues to publish letters of condolence received from the leaders of countries around the world.

Some state-affiliated outlets, however, have started to respond, using derisive and churlish language to punch back at Russian critics.

“Azerbaijan, independent of anyone, is open to cooperation with everyone, but does not accept such behavior,” a commentary published by the government-connected Caliber.az website stated, referring to threatened Russian punitive measures. “Azerbaijan has never had any offensive attacks against the Russian leadership and the Russian people. However, the current rhetoric of propagandists close to the Kremlin gives serious reasons to think again about what is happening in the Russian ruling circles.”

(This article ran on [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org) on February 10.)

## Nine Sentenced to Life in Dink Assassination Retrial

RETRIAL, from page 1

The verdicts come after the Supreme Court of Appeals ruled in 2023 that prior sentences handed down in the case were insufficient. The retrial focused on evidence that some officials had prior knowledge of the assassination plot but failed to act. Testimony during the trial indicated that intelligence about a planned attack on Dink had been deliberately misdated and concealed under the orders of senior officials. Şahin testified that former Gendarmerie Commander Öz instructed subordinates to suppress intelligence received six months before the murder, documenting it instead as arriving one day after the killing.

Hrant Dink, the editor-in-chief of the Turkish-Armenian bilingual weekly *Agos*, was shot and killed outside his office in İstanbul on January 19, 2007 by then-17-year-old Oğün Samast. Samast was convicted and sentenced to nearly 23 years in

prison in 2011. However, investigations revealed that multiple public officials had knowledge of the assassination plot but failed to prevent it.

The initial trial concluded in 2021 with 27 convictions and 33 acquittals, including former Trabzon police intelligence chief Engin Dinç and İstanbul intelligence head Ahmet İlhan Güler, who were cleared of “negligent homicide.” Former high-ranking police officials Ramazan Akyürek and Ali Fuat Yılmaz received aggravated life sentences for “premeditated murder.” The Supreme Court of Appeals upheld these sentences but overturned other convictions, leading to the retrial.

International observers such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) have described the investigation into the assassination as politicized.

The family of Dink has also frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the court

proceedings, which they said failed to go after the real actors behind the murder.

Samast, who was released from prison in November 2023 after serving more than 16 years, has claimed that he was told before carrying out the act that there would be government support behind him after committing the murder and that he should have no worries about it.

The latest verdicts mark another chapter in the prolonged legal battle over Dink’s killing, but they are unlikely to be the final ones, as defense attorneys have indicated plans to appeal.

Dink, a prominent advocate for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, had faced threats and harassment before his murder, particularly due to his writings on the Armenian genocide. His assassination sparked widespread protests and remains one of Turkey’s most politically sensitive cases.

# Secret Report Shows Turkish Intelligence Expanded Surveillance In Europe and US, Targeting Humanitarian Aid

By Levent Kenez

STOCKHOLM (Nordic Monitor) — A shocking secret report from Turkey's Ministry of Treasury and Finance prepared by the Financial Crimes Investigation Board (MASAK) has revealed a large-scale international intelligence operation that extends beyond Turkish citizens to include foreign nationals. The report suggests that the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) and Turkish diplomatic missions abroad have not only been monitoring individuals suspected of links to the Gülen movement, a group critical of the government, but have also been conducting surveillance on organizations and foreign individuals, raising significant diplomatic and legal concerns. Additionally, the report accuses humanitarian aid organizations of financing terrorism, an allegation widely seen as an effort to discredit their work and stifle opposition.

The Gülen movement, inspired by the late Turkish Muslim scholar Fethullah Gülen, is a faith-based organization. Gülen, who had lived in self-imposed exile in the United States since 1999, passed away on October 20, 2024, from multiple health complications. The movement has long been critical of Turkey's Islamist President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on various issues, including pervasive government corruption and Turkey's support for radical jihadist groups. The Erdogan government's designation of the group as the Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ), a derogatory acronym coined by the president, has not been acknowledged by democratically governed nations that uphold the rule of law.

The Turkish government's secret report detailing how international aid organizations and individuals abroad were monitored using information from Turkish intelligence and diplomatic missions. Parts mentioning individuals' names have been redacted for security reasons:

The 224-page report dated July 22, 2024, identifies intelligence activities in multiple countries, including the United States, Germany, Greece, Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, Denmark, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Tanzania, Romania and New Zealand. According to the document, Turkish intelligence operatives have been tracking individuals and organiza-

tions in these countries, often labeling their charitable efforts as fronts for illegal activities. The scope of this operation suggests a systematic campaign aimed at suppressing dissent and criminalizing humanitarian aid.

MİT has been supplying intelligence to the Ministry of Treasury and Finance, which has been using this information to conduct financial investigations and freeze assets under Turkey's controversial anti-terrorism financing laws. These measures have resulted in the designation of individuals and entities as terrorist supporters without substantial evidence, raising serious concerns about political manipulation of financial regulations. Turkish diplomatic missions have allegedly

claims have been met with skepticism as these organizations are legally registered and have been operating for years without previous allegations of wrongdoing. Critics argue that these accusations are politically motivated, aimed at shutting down organizations that provide aid to groups and individuals Turkey deems adversarial.

The report also includes a project to dig wells in Tanzania launched by the "Time To Help UK" organization in Tanzania.

A particularly troubling aspect of the report is the inclusion of Greek nationals in Turkey's intelligence assessments. The document names several Greek citizens accused of supporting organizations allegedly linked to "FETÖ." Among them are mayors, lawyers, film producers and other private citizens, all mentioned in intelligence briefings for allegedly taking part in the activities of groups deemed to be threats by Ankara.

Turkish citizens abroad working with these aid organizations, including directors, volunteers and donors, have also been the subject of criminal investigations. Turkish authorities have launched terrorism-related probes into people merely associated with these groups, effectively deterring engagement in humanitarian efforts.

The report describes one of its primary objectives as facilitating requests to foreign governments for asset freezes while implementing financial restrictions on suspected individuals and organizations in Turkey. This provision, under Turkey's anti-terrorism financing laws, aims to cut off what Turkish authorities claim to be illicit funding networks. However, critics argue that this strategy is being weaponized to suppress political opponents and silence international dissent.

Published in the Official Gazette on January 7, a listing of US-based foundations and companies whose assets were frozen:

Nordic Monitor previously reported that Turkish diplomats were involved in espionage activities, which have now led to the freezing of assets of US-based organizations. On January 7 the Turkish government froze the assets of nine US-based organizations, including six educational foundations, accusing them of links to the Gülen movement. These organizations are mentioned in the MASAK report.

## PREVIOUSLY LEAKED DOCUMENTS REVEALED THAT IN 2016-2017 ALONE, TURKISH EMBASSIES PROFILED OVER 4,000 DISSIDENTS

played a role in these intelligence-gathering operations, further fueling suspicions about the misuse of diplomatic resources for internal security purposes abroad.

Previously leaked documents revealed that in 2016-2017 alone, Turkish embassies profiled over 4,000 dissidents, sharing this information with Turkish intelligence and law enforcement agencies for further legal action.

One of the most alarming aspects of the report is the inclusion of foreign nationals in Turkish intelligence assessments. The document lists individuals residing in countries such as the US, Germany and Greece, accusing them of involvement in terrorist financing or aiding organizations linked to "FETÖ." This broad-reaching surveillance appears to have led to diplomatic tensions since Turkey reportedly pressures foreign governments to take legal action based on intelligence that lacks transparency and due process.

The report goes further by targeting international humanitarian aid organizations. Groups such as Embrace Relief in the US, Time to Help e.V. in Germany and Pigi Koinsep in Greece have been accused of serving as conduits for financing terrorism. These

## Nora Bayraktarian Appointed to Lebanese Cabinet

BEIRUT (Armenpress) — Nora Bayraktarian has been appointed Lebanon's Minister of Youth and Sports, the Lebanese *Aztag* newspaper reported on February 11.

Bayraktarian, an Armenian-Lebanese Professor, is a lecturer at the Lebanese University and the American University of Beirut. She is currently a member of the Central Committee of the Armenian Orthodox Church Holy See of Cilicia and has represented the Catholicosate in international arenas, particularly in the World Council of Churches. She is co-chair of the World Council of Churches international affairs commission.



## Trump Picks Michael Kavoukjian as Next US Ambassador to Norway

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on February 7 announced the nomination of Michael E. Kavoukjian as the next United States Ambassador to Norway.

"I am pleased to announce that Michael E. Kavoukjian will serve as the next United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Norway," Trump said on social media.

"Michael is a brilliant attorney, who currently serves as a Senior Partner at White & Case, where he has led complex commercial litigation teams around the World. He previously served our Country as a CIA Operations Officer. Michael is a graduate of Stanford University and Harvard Law School. Congratulations Michael!"



# Community News

## California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation Announces Scholarships in Remembrance of Armenian Genocide

SACRAMENTO — The California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation is hosting two scholarship contests in remembrance of the Armenian Genocide. California high school students (grades 9-12) are invited to participate in an essay and/or a visual arts contest to increase awareness of the Armenian Genocide on its 110th anniversary. All scholarship applications must be submitted by the Friday, March 28, 2025, deadline.

Winners will be announced to mainstream and Armenian media on Thursday, April 24, 2025. The California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation will contact all winners directly to award them at its Annual Armenian Advocacy Day. Winners will also receive special recognition from the Foundation's members. Original artwork may be requested from visual arts finalists for display in the California State Capitol.

Criteria for each contest are detailed below. Students may enter both contests, but each application must be submitted separately. All applications must be submitted to the California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation using this submission form ([bit.ly/2025CALCF](https://bit.ly/2025CALCF)) to register and submit the application by or before 11:59 PM on Friday, March 28, 2025. No exceptions.

Essay Scholarship Awards are First Place \$1,000, Second Place \$750, and Third Place \$500.

Visual Arts Scholarship Awards are First Place \$1,000, Second Place \$750, and Third Place \$500.

### Essay Scholarship

Prompt: You are hired as the Executive Director of the California Hall of Fame. You must select a prominent historical Armenian figure from California to be featured in the Hall of Fame. Who do you decide to feature? Explain your choice. Identify the individual's most significant contributions and their impacts to California. Describe how their accomplishments have positively impacted the Armenian American diaspora.

Requirements: Essay must directly respond to the essay prompt. Responses must be 750-1000 words and no more than four (4) pages in length. Responses must be typed on 8 1/2" x 11" paper, one-inch margins, in Arial 11-point font, and double-spaced. Applicant's first and last name must be included at the top of each page with a page number.

### Visual Arts Scholarship

Prompt: Illustrate the achievements and importance of California's Armenian community. Discuss the impacts and contributions of California's Armenian diaspora to the state's cultural and social prominence.

Requirements: Include a 300-500 word personal statement explaining the artwork. Must be typed on 8 1/2" x 11" paper, one-inch margins, see SCHOLARSHIPS, page 12



Olesya Taylor with her daughters Olivia Ter and Av Ter. Photo: Courtesy of Andrey Ter

## Dad Found One Last Video Of Wife and Daughter Taking Off Before DC Plane Crash: 'Always in Our Hearts'

By Abigail Adams and Wendy Grossman Kantor

WASHINGTON (People) — A man is fondly remembering his wife and daughter who were killed in the Washington, D.C. plane crash while he waited at the airport.

Andrey Ter tells PEOPLE his wife Olesya Taylor, 50, and youngest daughter Olivia Ter, 12, were among the 67 people killed when American Airlines Flight 5342 collided with a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter near Reagan National Airport on Wednesday, January 29.

The father of two is an Armenian refugee, having fled Azerbaijan to Ukraine in the 1980s when he was 16 years old. "It left a scar on my heart," he says. (He and his family were and are members of St. Mary Armenian Church in Washington.)

For 20 years, Andrey had nightmares about his experience as a refugee. Now, the 51-year-old has "a new nightmare" to deal with: "My family is gone."

Andrey and Olesya met at work in the early 2000s and married in April 2007. They shared two daughters together, Olivia, who was killed in the plane crash, and 14-year-old Anne Valerie, who goes by the nickname A.V.

Olesya was born in Ukraine and attended medical school in St. Petersburg, Russia. She was a pediatrician but was working as a medical assistant in Falls Church while she studied to get certified to practice medicine in the U.S., according to Andrey.

Andrey says his late wife "was a very beautiful woman." He also described her as "a really kind and generous person" to others. "I was an extremely lucky person to have somebody special like her in my life," Andrey tells PEOPLE.

Olesya was very supportive of both daughters, who participated in a variety of activities. "She took every minute of her time to make sure they have [a] chance to explore these opportunities while she could give those to them," Andrey notes.

Meanwhile, Olivia was very "driven" and "goal-oriented," as well as "very athletic," Andrey says. "If she set something for herself, she will do anything to get to that goal," he recalls.

Olivia had her sights set on the Olympics, according to her dad. She recently placed fourth among her age group in the Eastern Division of U.S. figure skating after being ranked 30th at the same time the year prior.

"She would have this whole plan in her head [of] what she needs to do and when the next Olympiad is going to be that she can qualify for," Andrey explains. "That's the thing that she dreamt of."

Iliia Kulik, Olivia's Russian coach who won a gold Olympic medal in 1997, see CRASH, page 8

## Jean Bekirian Becomes First Armenian to Make DP World Tour Cut in Qatar

DOHA (europeantour.com) — After an opening four-under-par 68 at Doha Golf Club, the 22-year-old carded a 74 on Friday, February 7, to ensure safe progress to the weekend at two under.

Bekirian, who changed his nationality from French to Armenian last year, is making his third start of the 2025 Race to Dubai after earning his DP World Tour card via Qualifying School.

He began his second round with a birdie at the tenth but made bogeys at the 11th and 16th along with a double-bogey at the 18th, before recovering one of those dropped shots at the fourth in a blemish-free back nine.

"I am very happy about that (making history)," he said.

"It was a very tough day today. The game was good, like yesterday,



Jean Bekirian

but my wedging wasn't very good. I needed to play one under on the back nine to make the cut and I'm very happy about that. I hope this will lead to another cut in the future."

The DP World Tour has players from 41 different countries exempt for the 2025 season.

"Every first time is very difficult," Bekirian added. "So I'm very happy about that. I'm happy for my country of Armenia too."

Bekirian played on the HotelPlanner Tour in 2023, before last year appearing on the Pro Golf Tour as he went on to finish in a tie for tenth at Final Stage of DP World Tour Qualifying School.

He made starts in Australia and Mauritius during the DP World Tour's Opening Swing at the end of last year, before making back-to-back starts on the HotelPlanner Tour prior to making the trip to Qatar.

"In the past I had trouble making cuts, a lot of times I missed by one or two," he reflected.

"So I'm very happy to make the cut and I'll do my best to finish as well as I can in the tournament.

"Last week on the HotelPlanner Tour I had a very good weekend (finishing tied 13th at the MyGolfLife Open hosted by Pecanwood Estate).

"I just made the cut on the line, so I hope this week will be the same."

## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Dad Found One Last Video of Wife and Daughter Taking Off Before D.C. Plane Crash: ‘Always in Our Hearts’

CRASH, from page 7

told Olivia’s parents that she would “definitely be able to compete” on a national level within the next couple of years.

“We lost a very talented ice skater, maybe a future champion,” Andrey tells PEOPLE. He adds, “She was a really good ice skater with a very bright potential. And she really wanted to be, and that’s all she wanted to do.”

Olivia was also an animal lover. “She would pick them up and try to carry them babies,” he recalls, adding that his daughter “loved everything that moved — all of it.”

Olesya and Olivia went to the Wich-

“We drive by that airport daily,” he says, noting that sometimes the family would go to Gravelly Point Park and just watch the planes taking off and landing.

At 8:47 p.m. local time, Andrey received one last message from his wife as their plane attempted to land at Reagan saying, “We are landing.”

The plane crashed one minute later at 8:48 p.m., but Andrey did not witness the incident. He tried calling his wife and daughter multiple times after their plane was supposed to land, but they did not respond.

He then called his 14-year-old daughter A.V. and asked if her mother and sister had

“Yes, it’s cold. Yes, it’s dark. It’s shallow water,” he says. He told himself they probably got out and swam. “It’s only 8 feet of water — and now it’s cold, but it’s close to the airport. They could have easily swam.”

His 14-year-old reassured him with similar logic. “She was saying, ‘Dad, don’t worry. You know how well mom and Olivia swim. They’re probably just sitting on the bank on the river.’”

Eventually, Andrey received a call from the police that confirmed his fears: his wife and daughter had died. “At that point ... you are in shock,” Andrey tells PEOPLE, adding, “Your wife is gone, and you don’t even want to think about what happened to your daughter.”

His eldest daughter later told him, “It’s done. And there’s nothing we can do about it.”

Andrey doesn’t follow the investigation

and doesn’t watch the news. “I’m tired of hearing about it,” he says.

Andrey says he “was probably the happiest man on Earth” until the tragic crash killed his wife and daughter. “I had everything that I needed, everything that I wanted. And God took two of the dearest things I had away from me,” he tells PEOPLE. “Half of me is gone, and it’s no longer there.”

He then wondered, “Why me, God? Are you punishing me? And then I realized it’s 67 — God is punishing more than me.”

Andrey wishes he “could have done more” for Olesya and Olivia. “All we can do is make sure that they’re remembered,” he says. “They’re always in our hearts.”

A GoFundMe established in memory of Olivia and Olesya has raised over \$60,000 of its \$100,000 goal as of the time of publication.



Andrey Ter, lost both his wife Olesya Taylor, 50, and youngest daughter Olivia Ter, 12 in the Washington D.C. plane crash (Photo courtesy Andrey Ter)

ta-Sedgwick County Historical Museum before boarding a plane in the same city to head home. That’s where Olesya and Andrey had their last conversation.

“My wife [was] talking with me about them being in [the] museum and Olivia being excited,” Andrey tells PEOPLE. He says there is a picture of Olivia holding a piece of paper that she used a typewriter to print on.

Andrey has one last video of his wife and daughter taking off from the airport, which he recovered by backing up his wife’s phone to the cloud.

Andrey was already inside the airport garage when the crash occurred. The airport is 15 minutes from where Andrey and his family live in Alexandria, Va.

called. She said no, but relayed that she got a text message from her mother asking if she was going to pick them up.

A short time later, Andrey saw emergency vehicles pass by “with sirens” on. Soon, he saw headlines stating a small plane crash had occurred at the airport.

So Andrey went inside the airport, hoping to gather more information, but no one was at the desk to help him. He says the airport was in “disarray,” and that no one had answers.

Turning back to the news, Andrey quickly realized that the plane involved in the crash was the one his family was on. Initially, he was in denial and reminded himself that his wife and daughter are strong swimmers.

## Archbishop Derderian Pledges Continued Support of ABMDR

LOS ANGELES — On January 29, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese, received a delegation from the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR).

During the meeting, which took place at the Western Diocese, in Burbank, ABMDR Board members and volunteers familiarized Arch. Derderian with the Registry’s most recent achievements and current activities, as well as some of the difficulties the organization faces. These include the ongoing challenge of expanding ABMDR’s ranks since the loss of a large number of Artsakh residents who were ABMDR donors, and especially those who served in Artsakh’s armed forces.

Derderian pledged his continued support of ABMDR’s life-saving mission, including support for various recruitment and outreach efforts in the United States and Armenia alike. The Primate and the ABMDR delegation agreed to have the year’s first Diocese-hosted bone marrow donor recruitment event on February 3.

In addition, he designated March 16 of this year as a day of compassion, when prayers will be offered at the Diocese’s Saint Leon Cathedral, as well as other churches throughout the West Coast, for ABMDR patients and families.

“I’d like to express our great appreciation of Archbishop Derderian for continually motivating our community to contribute to our life-saving mission,” said ABMDR president Dr. Frieda Jordan and continued, “We also would like to convey our gratitude to the Primate for his strong dedication to helping raise awareness of our work.”



Arch. Hovnan Derderian with the ABMDR delegation, including Board members and volunteers, at the Western Diocese

## First-Ever Armenian American Forum to Bring Together Leaders in Nashville

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — For the first time, Armenian-American professionals, entrepreneurs, and executives will gather in Nashville for the Armenian American Forum 2025 — a focused leadership and networking event designed to strengthen professional and community ties, March 7 to 9.

Hosted by the Hyeland Project, a non-profit working to build a thriving Armenian community in Tennessee, the forum will provide an opportunity for high-level discussions on business, governance, and the future of the Armenian diaspora in the US.

“We created this forum to give Armenian American leaders and supporters a dedicated space to connect, collaborate, and share ideas,” said Sevan Chorluyan, co-founder of the Hyeland Project. “Our goal is not to build unity or create consensus. Rather we aim to support a strong network of leaders who can help each other and explore new opportunities for our



Gruhn Guitars in Nashville

community’s future.”

The weekend will feature keynote speeches, expert talks, and structured networking sessions, with a focus on meaningful connections. Limited tickets are

available; early registration is encouraged.

For media inquiries or sponsorship opportunities, contact: [hyelandproject@gmail.com](mailto:hyelandproject@gmail.com)

The Hyeland Project is committed to

strengthening Armenian networks through leadership, collaboration, and innovation. It is actively working to establish a vibrant Armenian community in Tennessee, fostering cultural and economic opportunities.





## OBITUARY

## Dr. William Frazer

### Founding Chairman of AUA Board of Trustees

YEREVAN, Armenia — The American University of Armenia (AUA) announced last week the passing of AUA trustee, benefactor and longtime friend, Dr. William Frazer.

Frazer served as senior vice president of the University of California (UC) system and professor of physics, UC Berkeley. He also chaired the External Advisory Panel for the UC-Caltech Thirty-Meter Telescope project, and was a member of the Boards of Governors of Los Alamos National Security, LLC, the contractor for Los Alamos National Laboratory, and Lawrence Livermore National Security, LLC, the contractor for Livermore.

As the founding chairman of the AUA Board of Trustees, Frazer's involvement with AUA extends back to the founding of the University, when he led the task force to establish its affiliation with the UC. Throughout the past three decades, his support was monumental in helping advance the mission of the University, and in the process he built long standing friendships with fellow board members, including Edward Avedisian who, before his passing, named an endowed professorship at AUA in Dr. Frazer's name.

"Throughout the past 30+ years, Bill has been an ardent and steadfast supporter of AUA. He has been such a passionate advocate for improving AUA's academic status, regularly reminding the AUA Board of Trustees of its responsibility to emphasize a strong education of our students and increasing the research efforts of our faculty. He put together the initial process that allied AUA with the UC, and as our founding AUAC Board of Trustees chair, he was instrumental in helping the early survival and success of the University," said Dr. Lawrence Pitts, chairman of the AUA Board of Trustees.

Frazer was born in Indianapolis, Ind., in 1933. He attended Carleton College before obtaining his MA in physics from UC Berkeley in 1956, and subsequently his PhD in 1959. From 1960 to 1981, Frazer was a member of the UC San Diego Department of Physics, where he conducted research and published extensively on the theory of the elementary particles. He was also a fellow of the American Physical Society. From 1985 to 1991, Dr. Frazer served as a member of the Board of Trustees of the university research associates, which managed the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory for the Department of Energy. In 1978 and 1979, he chaired the Academic Assembly and Council, the UC systemwide bodies by which the faculty exercised their shared governance responsibilities. From 1981 to 1991, he was provost of the University of California's nine-campus system. In addition to academic planning for and admissions to the UC, his responsibilities included oversight of the scientific programs of the Los Alamos, Livermore, and Berkeley National Laboratories, managed by the UC for the Department of Energy. After leaving the provost's position he was charged with organizing UC's oversight structure, the President's Council on the National Laboratories and its panels, and was the first chair of its Science and Technology Panel.

During Frazer's term as senior vice

president of UC, a gift of almost \$200 million from the Keck Foundation was given to UC, in partnership with Caltech, providing the opportunity to design, build, and operate the twin 10-meter Keck telescopes atop Mauna Kea on the island of Hawaii. Frazer was the first chairman of the Board of Directors of the California Association for Research in Astronomy, the nonprofit corporation set up by UC and Caltech to build and operate the observatory. Each of these 10-meter telescopes is currently the largest and most powerful in the world.

In recalling his initial involvement with AUA, Frazer said, "When I was UC provost, three faculty members paid me a visit: Mihran Agbabian, Armen Der Kiureghian and Stepan Karamardian. They wanted to help Armenia recover from the great [Spitak] earthquake that had just occurred. They proposed to found an American-style university, privately funded, but with UC participation to ensure the quality of education, an admissions process free of corruption, a dignified student culture, etc., and so I proposed and led a visit to Armenia by a UC delegation to decide whether that vision was possible." After the task force visited Armenia in 1990, the Regents of the UC unanimously voted in favor of the affiliation, establishing Dr. Frazer as the first chair of the Board of Trustees. "I had the honor of presenting this resolution to the regents, and it was the only time I ever received a round of applause!" he exclaimed.

At AUA's 26th Commencement ceremony, Frazer was awarded the Presidential Commendation award. When presenting the award, AUA co-founder, President Emeritus, and Trustee Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian recognized him as an individual who had made extraordinary contributions in advancing education and scholarship with special impact on Armenia. He remarked, "Dr. William R. Frazer has had a decisive role in the founding of AUA, and all of us, indeed the Republic of Armenia, are indebted to him for his leadership during the early years of establishing and developing the University." Upon accepting the award, Frazer thanked Der Kiureghian and asked the graduating students "to remain involved with AUA, to remain part of the family, to become active alumni, because without your support, the University cannot achieve its full potential."

In 2008, for the opening of the AUA Paramaz Avedisian Building, Frazer and his wife Jane participated in the ribbon cutting ceremony for a classroom named in their honor.

In 2022, philanthropist and AUA Trustee Edward Avedisian announced the establishment of two endowed professorships, a magnanimous gift that enabled AUA's ability to attract highly accomplished scholars and educators from across the world. Both of the professorships were named in honor of colleagues and fellow trustees Dr. Judson King and Dr. William Frazer, respectively. Commenting on the gift, Dr. Frazer said: "I feel deeply honored. Helping to found AUA is one of the two most satisfying accomplishments of my career, but more important is the value of the gift of these Endowed Named Professorships. These will be a great help



Jane Frazer, Dr. William Frazer, and AUA President Emeritus Dr. Haroutune Armenian at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Dr. William and Jane Frazer Classroom at AUA, 2008

to AUA's recruitment of distinguished research scholars."

Avedisian's vision at the time was that the contribution would help spur research initiatives at the University: "Both the Dr. King and Dr. Frazer Endowed Professorships set the beginning of the final stage for AUA's development in becoming a research university, attracting the best international professors and students to explore the future through research. Their continuing contributions to AUA are most appreciated, and we thank them as we look forward to a very bright and promising future with the establishment of the final phase of an academic university as AUA begins to offer doctoral programs." This was also Frazer's sentiment, who commented, "I trust that a determination to maintain and enhance quality remains

foremost. And I hope that an elusive goal is finally achieved: establishing a culture of research."

AUA President Bruce Boghosian said, "It has been an honor and a privilege for me to have had the opportunity to work with Bill Frazer during both my first and second terms as AUA president. His immense knowledge about academic administration and his experience acquired from decades of work at one of the foremost academic institutions in the world has been of immense benefit to AUA over the years. His vision has shaped the development of AUA in myriad ways, and his influence underlies our growth and our emphasis on research."

Dr. William Frazer is survived by his wife of 70 years, Jane; and his children, Bruce and Katherine.

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## Donation

Ara and Aline Araz, Franklin Lakes, NJ donated \$100 to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.



COMMUNITY NEWS

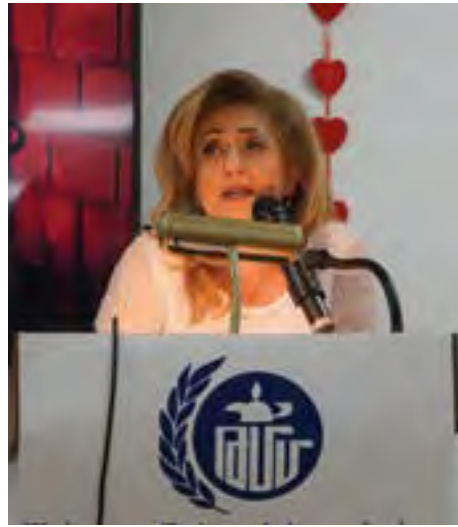
# Tekeyan Boston Celebrates Early St. Valentine's and St. Sarkis

TCA SOIREE, from page 1

“The Voice” in 2023 on season 24. She is a composer as well as a singer who released her first EP at the age of 15. Last year, Der Torossian said, Nazarian had joined the TCA Boston committee, bringing fresh positive energy to the group.

Angelina sang three songs in the formal program, including *Sareri Hoverin Mernem* in Armenian, but acceded to two consecutive and insistent calls for encores to continue to entertain the audience with songs by Charles Aznavour and Edith Piaf.

Violinist Armenuhi Hovakimian, born in Armenia, played the violin since the age of 7, Der Torossian said, and has performed throughout the US, Russia, Canada, Armenia, Germany, France and England. In the US, she has worked with musicians from major orchestras such as the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. She performs both classical and jazz music and was the cofounder of the Arlina Ensemble and the violinist of the Transatlantic Quintet,



Maral Der Torossian (photo Aram Arkun)

nity for the past 30 years. Born and raised in Yerevan with a doctorate in piano, music theory and music education, she has taught in the AGBU School, the Armenian Sisters' Academy, St. Stephen's Saturday School, St. James Saturday School, Belmont Nurs-



Rita Balyozian (photo Aram Arkun)

Catholic Church Choir and the founder and director of Meghedi Children's Vocal Ensemble of Boston. She has created more than 30 compositions.

Chapter co-chair Rita Balyozian spoke in Armenian about the role of love in life,



Poet Sargis Gavlakian makes a toast (photo Aram Arkun)

who are in our lives bringing happiness and warmth. She explained that for Armenians, St. Sarkis was not only a military leader but a defender of love. Armenian youth prayer every year for him to illuminate the path to finding true love. Traditionally, the youth eat salty cookies the prior night in the hope of seeing their future spouse in their dreams.

Balyozian also spoke briefly of the many activities the Boston TCA chapter has organized over the past year, including lectures, cooking demonstrations, luncheons, dance lessons, and events full of poetry and music. She noted that on March 2 it is hosting a Poon Paregentan luncheon with masks, games, and great food and wine, while on April 11, Dr. Elyse Semerdjian of Clark University will lecture on her book *Remnants*, about the Armenian Genocide and its memories left to surviving women and children.

*continued on next page*



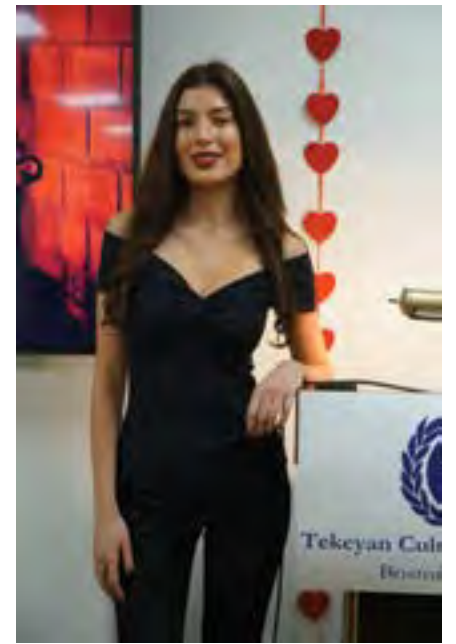
The TCA Boston organizing committee plus musicians

which has won numerous awards. She is the senior sales consultant at the Carriage House Violins in Newton, Mass.

Last, but certainly not least, Der Torossian introduced pianist Marina Margarian as an active member of the local commu-

ity School and the Kendall School in Belmont. She has founded and directs the Do Re Mi School of Music in Waltham, where she teaches children and adults piano, solfege and music theory. She is the organizer and director of the Holy Cross Armenian

which gives us strength, inspires us and gives meaning to our lives. She pointed out that love must not only be expressed through words but through acts, and asked that we take advantage of the opportunity this evening to thank those individuals



Angelina Nazarian (photo Aram Arkun)



From left, Susy Naroian, Grigor Hovakimian, and Jeanine Shememian conduct the raffle (photo Aram Arkun)



Marina Margarian on piano with Armenuhi Hovakimian playing the violin (photo Aram Arkun)



## COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

Der Torossian presented poet and TCA Boston Chapter Vice Chair Sargis Gavlakian as a surprise portion of the program. His presence on the program was fitting considering his forename. He related that when he was to be born, his parents had decided to name him Haroutioun but his mother saw the same dream three times with St. Sarkis on horseback, and so they changed their minds and named him Sargis. Just as St. Sarkis serves for Armenians as a symbol for love, Gavlakian said he cannot live without love. In this materialistic world, he said that we need the spiritual more than ever. Our souls need culture, he stressed, as well as those who defend and perpetuate it, like the members of TCA.

Gavlakian said that he has been a TCA member for 35 years and his first published book of poetry had been presented in the very same Baikar Building hall he was speaking at this night. He recited the preface to his second book of poetry, which was dedicated to his wife Vardouhi, as well as several of his poems, including one accompanied by music.

Jeanine Shememian, corresponding secretary of the TCA chapter, presided over

a game in the spirit of fun, love and romance. She asked the audience a series of questions, such as which couple was married the longest, and the winners received prizes.

TCA Boston Chapter Assistant Treasurer Suzy Naroian announced raffle items, which were donated by Harry Gigian and Company Jewelers, the Naroian family, Dr. Raffi and Jeanine Shememian, Sossy and Ara Yogurtian, Sargis Gavlakian, Total Wines and Costco.

Shememian ran an auction of red roses before raffle winners were chosen at the end of the evening with the help of Grigor and Ariana, the children of Armenuhi Hovakimian, and announced by Shememian, with the help of Naroian.

Chapter Co-chair Dr. Aida Yavshayan closed the formal program by thanking the musicians, the organizing TCA members, the donors and the guests and wishing them all love and good fortune in their lives.

Among the generous donors who enriched the evening with delicious desserts were Spinelli's Catering Team of Lynnfield ([spinellis.com](http://spinellis.com)) and Vardouhi Karajian (with her famous *trubochki*).



Musicians, from left, Armenuhi Hovakimian, Angelina Nazarian and Marina Margarian (photo Aram Arkun)

# END THE DENIAL

## THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

### NYC ANNUAL COMMEMORATION

# SUNDAY

## APRIL 27, 2025

### 1:30PM

#### TIMES SQUARE



## COMMUNITY NEWS

## New book Titled *The Armenian Women's Movement in the Late Ottoman Empire: Modernity, Nationalism and Gender* Published

LONDON/NEW YORK—I. B. Tauris, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, has announced the publication of Dr. Hasmik Khalapyan's *The Armenian Women's Movement in the Late Ottoman Empire: Modernity, Nationalism and Gender*. The book is part of the series *Armenians in the Modern and Early Modern World* edited by Bedross Der Matossian (University of Nebraska, Lincoln).

The last decades of the Ottoman Empire saw heated debates about and changes to the role of women in society. This book analyses the history of the women's movement among Ottoman Armenians. Examining debates on the role of women in the Armenian context, Armenian women's access



Hasmik Khalapyan

to education, work and marriage rights, it reveals how women were empowered by nationalist discourses and the wider movement for reform in the empire, and the ways these limited or broadened women's activism. Drawing from a wide array of archival primary source material, it provides a comprehensive and comparative analysis of changes to the socio-economic, political, cultural status of Ottoman Armenian women from end of the Tanzimat period to the outbreak of World War I.

Khalapyan commented on the book, saying, "I am very happy that my research project of many years has materialized in this volume. Women's history has been an essential part of global scholarship for many years, and I am thrilled that this book, dedicated to the history of the Armenian women's movement in the Ottoman Empire, will find its place within that broader body of global women's history."

According to Khalapyan, the Armenian women's movement in the late Ottoman Empire emerged as a complex interplay between national, imperial and European forces, where women both shaped and were shaped by the evolving nationalist and modernist ideals of their time. Amid the debates surrounding the "New Nation" and the cultural, legal, economic, and social transformations sweeping the Empire, Khalapyan illustrates how women navigated the tension between tradition and modernity, actively contributing to nationalist projects. They did so not only by advocating for their rights within existing reforms but also by forging new pathways in education, social work, employment and family structures.

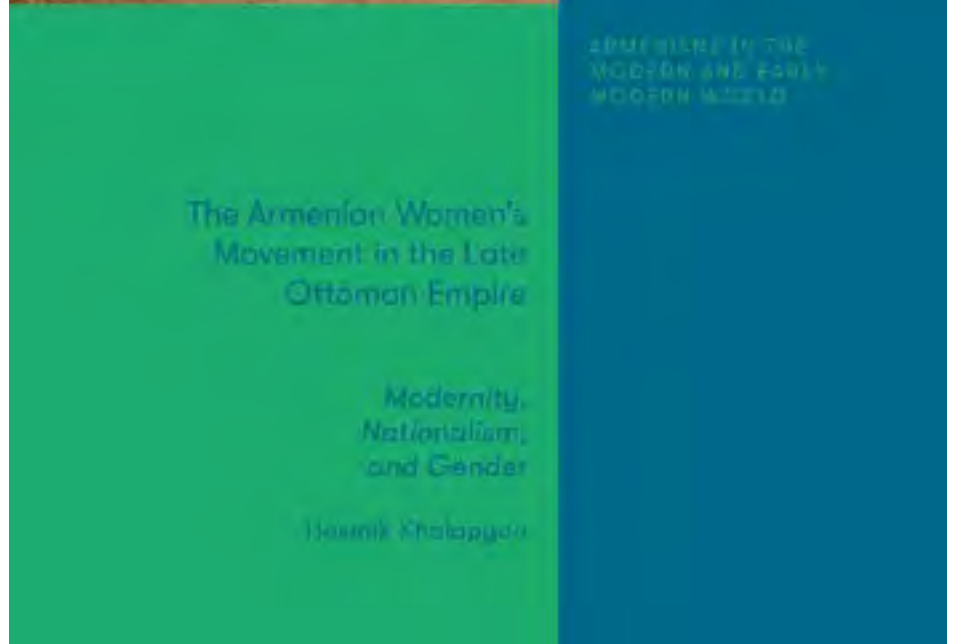
"It has been my intention to show that women's activism was inextricably tied to both local and global contexts, marked by the push and pull of European influence, Ottoman policies, and the national aspirations of the Armenian people," she said. "Through a nuanced examination of these intersecting forces presented in the book, I hope my readers will see the multifaceted nature of Armenian modernity and gain a richer understanding of the complex dynamics that shaped the Armenian community and the women who played pivotal roles in its transformation."

"This is an outstanding study of the history of the Armenian women's movement in the Ottoman Empire, a topic that has long remained marginalized," said Der Matossian, editor of the series. "Khalapyan has successfully woven the history of the movement by situating it within the global, regional, and local contexts of women's movements."

### Reviews

"Khalapyan's examination of Armenian feminist writers narrates the intertwined histories of Ottoman Turks and Armenians. The writers she taps across five languages were central to the rise of Armenian national consciousness in the late Ottoman Empire. A much-needed manuscript in the field, it situates Ottoman Armenian feminism within the broader global movements for women's liberation," wrote Prof. Elyse Semerdjian of Clark University.

"Meticulously researched through Armenian, Turkish, French and Russian sources, this most impressive book traces the historical emergence of the Armenian women's movement by triangulating Europe (modernity), the Ottoman Empire



(imperial state), and its colonial subjects (Armenian community). The empirical focus on local dynamics reveals three endeavors that actualize the new emerging Armenian womanhood: i) taking care of the nation through organized charity and education; ii) campaigning for paid labor and a job market for women; iii) improving marriage and the family. Theoretically, the author cogently demonstrates how social movements negotiate local, national and global conditions and how women's movements in particular undergird these negotiations. A must read for those interested in how women imperial subjects employ their agency to study the intersection of history, modernity, and empire as Ottoman Armenian women do," added Prof. Fatma Müge Göçek, University of Michigan.

"An important contribution to our understanding of the gender politics permitting Armenian feminists to navigate extremely troubled waters," noted Prof. Suraiya Faroqhi, Ibn Haldun University, Turkey

Khalapyan is an associate professor at the American University of Armenia (AUA), specializing in Ottoman history, the history

of social and labor movements, and women's history. Her scholarly work has been published in esteemed international journals and edited volumes, with translations in both Western Armenian and Turkish.

Copies of *The Armenian Women's Movement in the Late Ottoman Empire: Modernity, Nationalism and Gender* are available for purchase from the Bloomsbury Press website. Enter code GLR AT8 at the checkout on bloomsbury.com for 35% off.

### Scholarships in Remembrance of Armenian Genocide

SCHOLARSHIPS, from page 12 in Arial 11-point font, double-spaced, and include the applicant's first and last name at the top of the page. Artwork must be original work created by the applicant. Only two-dimensional, visual art submissions will be accepted. Submission types are limited to drawings, paintings, photographs, digital illustrations, and graphic design. Artwork may not exceed an 11x17 frame and must weigh less than 25 pounds.

Artwork and the accompanying personal statement may not include any nudity, excessive and/or graphic violence, racial slurs, derogatory and/or offensive language, profanity, and may not make use of or replicate existing artwork.

Include up to five (5) high-definition photographs of the artwork. Take pictures in good lighting to ensure reviewers can see the details in the artwork. Provide different angles to showcase the depth of the artwork.

## Merrimack Valley Marks 110th Anniversary of Armenian Genocide

CHELMSFORD, Mass. — On Sunday, April 27, the Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee of the Merrimack Valley (AGCCMV) will observe the remembrance of the Holy Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide, marking the 110th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. The event will be hosted by Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church, 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford.

A Divine Liturgy will be jointly celebrated at 10 a.m. by the area Armenian churches including Saint Gregory Armenian Church (Merrimack Valley), Holy Archangel

Armenian Church, Saint Michael and Saint Gabriel (Haverhill), and the Ararat Congregational Church (Salem, N.H.).

Following the Divine Liturgy, participants will proceed to the Armenian Martyrs Monument on the church grounds to offer a prayer service and lay flowers. A program on the sainthood of our Armenian Martyrs will be offered for church school students concurrent with the Divine Liturgy.

A luncheon will be served followed by a cultural program in the Kazanjian Memorial Ballroom. The guest speaker for the

program is Aram Arkun, managing editor of the *Armenian-Mirror Spectator* and executive director of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada. A performance will be offered by the Sayat-Nova Dance Ensemble and youth musicians from the participating parishes.

Donations received from the event will benefit an Armenian cause. Over the recent years, the AGCCMV has donated nearly \$40,000 from April 24 commemorative events to some 30 different Armenian charitable organizations.

# Arts & Culture

## IALA, NAASR and The Zohrab Center Return with Monthly Reading Series Literary Lights 2025

The International Armenian Literary Alliance, the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, and the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center will host *Literary Lights 2025*, their third monthly reading series showcasing new works of literature by Armenian authors. Each event—held online or in-person—will feature a writer reading from their work, followed by a discussion with an interviewer and audience members.

Their launch event—featuring the editors and contributors of the special *Wasafiri Magazine* issue “Armenia(n)s – Elevation”—will take place on Saturday, February 15, at 9 a.m. Pacific | 12:00 PM Eastern.

The event, cosponsored by *Wasafiri Magazine*, will have editors Tatevik Aivazyan and Naneh Hovhannisyan in conversation with contributors Dr. Jesse Arlen, Eddie Arnavoudian, Olivia Katrandjian, Lola Koundakjian, Nancy Kricorian, Christopher Millis, Margarit Ordukhanyan, Thomas Toghramadjian, Taline Voskeritchian, and guest reader Hovsep Markarian.

**“Wasafiri: Armenia(n)s – Elevation” by Tatevik Aivazyan and Naneh V Hovhannisyan**

From poetry and fiction to thought-provoking book reviews, art, life writing and in-depth interviews, this landmark edition is a rich tapestry of modern Armenian voices. It offers readers a profound and eloquent exploration of the human condition through meditations on the Armenian language, culture, and identity. Featured contributors include award-winners such as Chris Bohjalian, Nancy Kricorian, and many more.

***The Burning Heart of the World* by Nancy Kricorian**

Returning to the fabular tone of *Zabelle*, her popular first novel, Kricorian conjures up the lost worlds and intergenerational traumas that haunt a family in permanent exile. Leavened with humor and imbued with the timelessness of a folktale, *The Burning Heart of the World* is a sweeping saga that takes readers on an epic journey from the mountains of Cilicia to contemporary New York City.

***Forest Euphoria* by Patty Kai-shian**

A thrilling collection of essays converging on themes of natural history, deep/queer ecology, philosophy of science, climate grief, and more-than-human belonging. Wide-ranging, richly observant, and full of surprise, *Forest Euphoria: The Abounding Queerness of Nature* will open your eyes and change how you look at the world around you.

***Waterline* by Aram Mrjoian**

In this deeply moving debut, a close-knit Armenian American family grapples with the aftermath of losing one of their own. Aram Mrjoian’s *Waterline: A Novel* explores the complex beauty of diaspora, the weight see READINGS, page 15



Resonances

## Silvina Der Meguerditchian

### *An Artist Who Cares*

**By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach**

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

BERLIN — There is no mystery behind the fact that Armenian art, especially in the diaspora, bears the imprint of the genocide: directly, as in representational figurative art or literature; obliquely, as in musical reflections; or symbolically, as in abstract conceptual impressions. An exhibition that has just opened in Berlin features the works of an artist who explores all three modes of expression, in depth and beauty. Silvina Der Meguerditchian, born in Argentina where her grandparents had found a new home, has lived in Berlin since 1988. Her experience encompasses multiple language cultures and her art speaks in several genres, motivated by the quest for identity and intercultural harmony.

The current show, which opened on January 31 and runs until April 6, is hosted by the Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien. This “art exhibition space” in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg is a former hospital now dedicated to contemporary artistic and cultural exhibitions. Curators of the exhibition entitled, “Those Who Take Care of Us,” are Barbara Höffer and Lusin Reinsch.

The exhibition, which unfolds in thirteen interconnected rooms, displays many new creations of the prize-winning artist and is her most comprehensive show thus far. It is organized in three themes, Resonances, Memory, and Care. The first features music, that of the kanun, presented through installations, videos, and the instrument itself to be seen and heard, not only in the Armenian context but internationally. It is as if the kanun, itself, migrates and spreads its melodies.

Enormous hanging collages composed of personal items, photographs, and traditional textiles recall personal and collective past experiences, expulsion from the homeland, migration, loss, and new interrelationships. Der Meguerditchian explores the opposing and complementary themes of past and present, personal family histories, customs, and languages. The assembly of artistic creations embraces a network of “generations, cultures, and lifestyles, suggesting a global responsibility – a connection that extends far beyond the visible,” as the exhibition catalogue describes it.

This thematic space recalls the remarkable achievements of the Houshamadyan project, for which Der Meguerditchian has served as artistic director since 2010. The project ([www.houshamadyan.org](http://www.houshamadyan.org)) is dedicated to documenting Armenian life before the genocide, by assembling photographs, archives, written records, and see ARTIST, page 17



Silvina Der Meguerditchian

## Arjun Krishna Lal:

*Uncovering Armenia’s Layers Again and Again*



**By Artsvi Bakhchinyan**

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN-TRIVANDRUM, India — Arjun Krishna Lal is an Armenia and India-based author, entrepreneur, and an emerging leader in the B2B content industry, servicing the US market. While in college, Arjun started his career as a freelance journalist and B2B content specialist. From preschool to high school, Arjun lived and was educated in the United States and later continued his education under the Cambridge board in India. His education culminated in a triple major degree in journalism, psychology and English. He is the director of content at Flying V Group, Los Angeles. He is one of the co-founders of Create-On, a revolutionary New Jersey-based AI content creation startup, enabling businesses to 10X their content pipelines. His debut novel in English, *Wicked Games*, was published by Penguin Random House in 2014. In 2024, his novel, *Life, Love, Wine. An Indian’s Strange (Sometimes Awful) Adventures in Armenia* was published in Armenian (translated by Roza Grigoryan). He remains an active contributor to several magazines and specialist tech websites around the world, including PC Magazine, IGN, and Digit.

**Arjun, although you are frequently invited to Armenian TV shows, I’d like to introduce you to a wider audience. While many non-Armenian writers have written about Armenia and its people, you seem to be the first to truly capture contemporary Armenia. As you wrote: “I want to write about this incredible place that I call home and about the people who became my family,” and then added: “I should say again: it is never not interesting in Yerevan.” Is that still how you feel?**

After three years living in Yerevan, I can say that that is exactly how I feel to this day. A sense of belonging and community is something I’ve always see LAL, page 14

# Arjun Krishna Lal: Uncovering Armenia's Layers Again and Again

LAL, from page 13

wished for in life. While I was born in India, I moved with family to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, when I was just a year old. I lived there until high school, when we moved back to India. In both countries, I struggled with feelings of not quite fitting in. Speaking to friends and acquaintances I came to realize I had many of the same experiences and challenges first-generation Armenian immigrants faced in the States. When we moved back, it was more of the same but in reverse — I was never quite “Indian” enough — I struggled to make friends. My first book, *Wicked Games*, talks about these experiences.

I decided to move to Armenia on a whim. I wanted to go to a place that I had no connection to whatsoever and therefore none of that baggage of trying to fit in. I figured, if I was welcomed at all, it would be on my terms as an individual. I was terrified when I stepped on that first flight to Yerevan, but I wanted to give it a shot.

I wasn't prepared for the *hyurasirutyun* (hospitality) and the warmth — it was the opposite of what I'd come to expect from life. I made friends; I had such an incredible amount of adventures — I was essentially adopted into my best friend's family — my parents are visiting to attend his sister's wedding in April. I fell in love — with a person — but also with an entire group of people. As I learned more about the struggles Armenians faced historically — and continue to face to this day — I came to value the love and acceptance I receive in Yerevan all the more - it would be easier to keep an outsider at a safe distance, or to hate or fear from a place of pain — but that is never what I experienced. All of this has had a tangible impact on my life and, indeed on my identity, the way I see myself. The majority of my friends and close ones at this point are Armenian. My content marketing business has been relocated to Armenia and I'm proud to work alongside Armenians and create local opportunities. I'm actually in India for the month, visiting family and what surprised me was, even here, Armenian's the language I make use of the most on a day-to-day basis, whether for work, talking to friends, or watching Armenian humorous episodes. As I write these answers, I'm finishing off the last of the *pnduk* (hazelnut) I'd brought along.

**What about this statement: “How multilayered Yerevan is! And every day I reveal this place again. Unbelievable.” Does that still ring true for you? And does this suggest that you might write another book about Armenia?**

At first glance, Yerevan won't strike you as the most vibrant or diverse place in the world - and that is perfectly fine: it's not meant to be that way. It is, sadly, the last sizeable Armenian majority city in the entire world. As someone the city took in, I strongly believe it needs to retain that character. What surprises me, though, is that, under the surface there is such a depth of peoples, cuisines, and cultures waiting to be discovered and you won't see much of it as a tourist or a short-term visitor.

Whether it's the time I accidentally stumbled upon a West African food delivery service, acted as an unofficial tour guide to a group of Iranians, spent a New Year's I still can't quite remember with Russian friends, or the surreal experience of being taught yoga for the first time by a Lebanese Armenian personal trainer who learned with masters in India — Yerevan keeps on giving. There is a diversity here, but something that adds character and spice to the city's fundamental identity, without

altering it.

As for writing another book, that's an interesting question! It is definitely an idea I've considered. *Kyanq, Ser, Gini* (Life, Love, Wine) was a very raw bit of writing — I wrote it as I went through various experiences. I'd like to revisit those themes



one day, but more reflectively.

**You mentioned changing nine different places of residence in Yerevan — has that number increased since the book's publication?**

We can add Buzand to the list after the book's publication, making that an even 10! I do plan to settle down somewhere in Kentron eventually, but I've deliberately moved around every few months to quite literally see the city from different angles, whether that's from a penthouse on Hyusisain (Northern avenue) or a khrushchekva in “Bangladesh.”

As a writer, it's important for me to be able to walk in other people's shoes, and whether it's short or long-term, living differently and in different parts of the city (and outside of it) have given me insights into how all kinds of Yerevantsis live.

I love walking the city streets and just absorbing as much as I can. I touched briefly on the idea of writing another book, and for that to happen, I want to truly know Yerevan, in as many ways as is possible. It's a long-term project.

**You are fluent in five languages. There's a common belief that Indians tend to learn Armenian more quickly than other nationalities. Do you think there's some truth to that?**

This is an interesting question and I'd love to provide some context here! There is a common misconception that India's a monolithic state with a single language, Hindi. This couldn't be further from the truth. Historically, the Indian subcontinent was just as diverse as Europe, with dozens of languages spanning entire language families, and hundreds of ethnicities. Modern India was divided into states on an ethnolinguistic basis and, alongside English and Hindi, 22 other languages have official status. My mother tongue Malayalam, for instance is spoken by 35 million people and it isn't even an Indo-European language — Hindi's actually closer to Armenian than to it. Because of the nature of the Indian education system and because of internal migration patterns — with people seeking education and employment in larger cities, multilingualism is the norm. Most people have a regional language as their native tongue, and have some of degree of proficiency in both Hindi and English. A good portion of the population is effectively tri-

lingual and I think that primes people to be able to learn other languages faster and to also communicate with people who speak other languages, since those are core skills to be able to thrive in India. Apart from all of this, Armenian does have quite a lot in common with Hindi and other North Indian languages — there's quite a large lexicon of Persian words that are used commonly in both Hindi and Armenian — things like *tava* (pan), *shalvar* (tousers) and even *himar* (silly).

**There's a growing Indian presence in Yerevan. What do you think this brings to both Armenia and India?**

This is a question I've been asked by at least 10 different Yandex taxi drivers and I think we should look at it from a wider context. Many people in Armenia seem to think that there is focused Indian migration towards Armenia but this misses the picture of overall trends in the Indian diaspora. India has the world's largest diasporic community, numbering around 70 million people. Indians migrate, in sizeable numbers, to almost everywhere in the world, for a variety of reasons, and across socioeconomic divides. Because Armenia has a relatively small population, though, the Indian community in the country can appear disproportionately large.

One thing I'd want to point out here is the outsized role that immigration scams and trafficking seem to play in Indian migration to Armenia. There is an unfortunate system where vulnerable, less educated people are lied to and told that Armenia's an EU country, and that it's easy to obtain a Schengen visa via Armenia, and that salaries are very high. Typical salaries for construction and other unskilled labor in Yerevan are actually slightly lower than in Trivandrum, my hometown. Vulnerable individuals are

preyed on by agents in both India and Armenia, brought on tourist visas, and they end up in a cycle of working poorly-paid jobs and not even being able to save enough to leave. The vast majority of the community is ephemeral — these are people who don't intend to stay in Armenia - the same can be said about medical students — most study in Armenia with the objective of going back to India and writing an equivalency exam in order to be able to practice. I personally believe that immigration reform is critical: a large pool of cheaper labor can depress wages even further in Armenia, and many of these people end up living in horrific conditions — it's really a lose-lose situation the way it is right now. I think that policy needs to change to draw a different kind of demographic of Indian: educated professionals and business owners who are able to contribute to the tourism industry and create jobs, and freelancers and digital nomads. Because of India's sheer population, there are millions of people like that — they're already out there, holidaying in Europe and Egypt. If Armenia can become a more attractive location for business owners and higher-end tourists, the Indian presence in the country can turn into a win-win. These are also exactly the kind of people with greater to industries including the defense sector, and that can add depth to the strategic defense cooperation we're seeing between India and Armenia.

**I wholeheartedly share your sentiment: “In life, I mostly love to gain experience, memories, and people.” I hope you continue to gather more experiences, memories, and connections, and that you keep uncovering Armenia's layers again and again!**

*Shnorhakalutyun* (thanks), and that is exactly what I intend to do!



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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



## Butternut Squash and Swiss Chard Lasagna

TOPANGA, CA — “This pasta-free, gluten-free lasagna is soothing to the gut. Feel free to substitute kale for the chard, or use a mixture of the two. You can also make it without the sausage if you prefer to serve it as a lighter side with a meat or fish dish. This one takes some assembly time, but it’s worth it. You can scale this recipe up by 50 percent — great for when you’re serving a crowd,” says Hilary Boynton, cookbook author, certified holistic health counselor, and the founder of School of Lunch (SOL).

The devoted mother of five young kids, Hilary refused to accept the quality of food her children were being served during school lunch. She has seen the power of nutritional healing firsthand. Inspired by her own experience of “food as medicine,” she has dedicated herself to helping others on their path to wellness as a cook, coach, and professional educator. Hilary supports her clients by integrating “Paleo” and “Primal” philosophies with the wisdom of the Ancestral Health Movement and the Weston A. Price Foundation. Hilary is a Weston A. Price chapter leader, runs several local food co-ops, teaches cooking classes out of her house, and helped to open a farm-to-table restaurant in Concord, Massachusetts. She lives in Marina Del Ray, California with her family.

She began a relentless mission to change the status quo, and eventually took over the lunch program at her local school in Topanga, California. She worked



Hilary Boynton, the founder of School of Lunch (SOL), is a mother of five who refused to accept the quality of food her children were being served during school lunch (Photo courtesy of Hilary Boynton)

with local farmers and food producers to create an affordable nutrient dense meal program that was based on the foundation of ancestral ways of eating. The results were astounding.

“The School of Lunch Training Academy is a multi-day intensive program designed to introduce you to, and inspire you with the foundational principles of our SOL/Regen-Living lifestyle. Held in the pristine canyons of Topanga, this recurring event will re-frame your approach to food as the primary tool for nurturing the life force of all those you feed. Classes in protein, fermentation, fats, and philosophy will lay the groundwork for a healthier lifestyle. Attendees will engage with farmers, local and national food brands, artisan producers and experts in the healthy lifestyle and nutrition. Explore on trips to farms, farmers markets and even a brief excursion to jump into the Pacific Ocean to cleanse the soul. Not to be missed...”

Makes 6 to 8 entrée servings, or 10 to 12 side-dish servings

Preparation time: 30 minutes; bake time: 60 minutes

### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 large or 2 small butternut squashes, peeled, seeded, and sliced 1/8 inch thick
- Sea salt and pepper to taste
- 3 tablespoons butter, cut into pieces, or fat of choice
- 1 or 2 large bunches Swiss chard, chopped (leave out stems, if you wish)
- 1 to 2 cups cooked ground sausage
- 2 to 3 tablespoons dried thyme
- 1 1/2 to 2 cups grated cheddar (optional), divided
- 1 to 2 cups chicken broth
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan (optional)

### PREPARATION:

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Grease a 9x13 nonstick baking dish. Layer a third of the squash slices on the bottom of the pan; season with salt, pepper, and a little chopped butter.

Top with half the chard; add a layer of sausage, a big pinch of thyme, and more salt, pepper, and butter. Add a third of the cheddar. Top with half of the remaining squash, then all the remaining chard, salt, pepper, butter, and thyme, and another layer of sausage. Add half the remaining cheddar, then finish with the last of the squash. Carefully pour the broth over the dish. Cover tightly with foil, and bake for 60 minutes. Remove from oven, and take off the foil. Top the lasagna with the remaining cheeses. Broil until the cheese is melted and golden.

For this recipe, go to: <https://experiencelife.lifetime.life/recipe/butternut-squash-and-swiss-chard-lasagna/>

For more recipes, see:

<https://experiencelife.lifetime.life/author/hboynton/>

<https://experiencelife.lifetime.life/?s=hilary>

<https://battlebornhealth.com/the-body-blog/nutrition-and-diet/three-recipes-for-gut-health-and-to-relieve-ibs/>

For How to Make Bone Broth, go to: <https://experiencelife.lifetime.life/recipe/beef-bone-broth/>

For Hilary’s basic meat stock, go to: <https://experiencelife.lifetime.life/recipe/basic-meat-stock/>

The Heal Your Gut Cookbook: Nutrient-Dense Recipes for Intestinal Health Using the GAPS Diet - over 200 straightforward, nutrient-dense, delicious recipes. The Heal Your Gut Cookbook was created by Gut and Psychology Syndrome (GAPS) Diet experts Hilary Boynton and Mary G. Brackett to help heal your gut and to manage the illnesses that stem from it. Pioneering British MD, Dr. Natasha Campbell-McBride provides the book’s Foreword. GAPS addresses disorders, including: ADD/ADHD, autism, addictions, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, stemming from or exacerbated by leaky gut and dysbiosis. It refers to chronic gut-related physical conditions, including: Celiac disease, Rheumatoid arthritis, type-one diabetes, Crohn’s disease, Asthma, Eczema, Allergies, Thyroid disorders and more.

“The Lunch Lady” is a short documentary filmed in 2018 during Hilary’s first semester running the lunch program at the Manzanita School in Topanga California. See video at: <https://www.schooloflunch.com/about/hilary>

See: <https://voyagela.com/interview/check-out-hilary-boyntons-story/>

Questions? Email: [trainingacademy@schooloflunch.com](mailto:trainingacademy@schooloflunch.com)

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## IALA, NAASR and the Zohrab Center Return with Monthly Reading Series

READINGS, from page 13

of inherited trauma, and the echoes of the Genocide on contemporary Armenian life. Learn more here.

***Nostalgia for the Future* by Gregory Djanikian**

With *Nostalgia for the Future: New and Selected Poems, 1984-2023*, award-winning poet Gregory Djanikian returns to the literary scene with a collection that spans and celebrates his prolific career. Learn more here.

***To Say With Passion: Why Am I Here?* by Tenny Arlen**

Tenny Arlen’s book of posthumous Armenian poetry, *Կիրքով ըսելու՛ ինչն՝ Ի հոս էս* (ARI Literature Foundation, 2021) is among the first

books of creative literature written in Armenian by an American-born author. For the most part written during the author’s years at UCLA (2011-2013), the poetry of Tenny Arlen represents not only a new phenomenon but a new voice in Modern Armenian literature. At the request of many, a bilingual edition of the book, featuring the author’s own English-language translations of her poetry, lightly edited by the poet’s brother, Dr. Jesse Arlen. To be released in April 2025 by Tarkman Press.

Read along with the series by purchasing titles at IALA’s Bookshop storefront!

To register, visit <https://us06web.zoom.us/join/register/1mBSPYM8TciMvd6Tec3Z-w#/registration> or visit [www.armenianliterary.org](http://www.armenianliterary.org).



# Books

## *This Is Not Love* by Vahe Berberian

By Christopher Atamian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Julian is the type of character whom everyone apparently loves — at least he seems to think so. Evidence to the contrary, he appears to be right. A tall, thin Armenian artist born in Paris, the 52-year-old (anti)hero in Vahe Berberian's latest English-language novel, *This is Not Love*, is a self-described womanizer who also possesses a secret weapon in life. He can kill people by sheer willpower. Underneath his jovial appearance and his overactive libido, he's kind of a menace to society, murdering others at will and leaving broken hearts strewn about.

This is not Berberian's first novel: a polyglot born in Lebanon, he is one of the few writers in America equally at ease writing in both Western Armenian and English.

When this chatty novel with dark undertones first opens, Julian is happily smoking and drinking himself to death, while working as a successful painter and celebrity in LA's insular Armenian community. Then one day there's a knock at the door and in walks Kylie, the sexy 20-something daughter of his former wife, Lisa. She is also a painter in search of a mentor. At her insistence and against all his better instincts — he has a few — Julian takes her in as a charge and begins to tutor her.

Over the ensuing months, Julien parses out rules and advice to being a successful artist the way Julia Child might list ingredients in coq au vin. These extend to banal

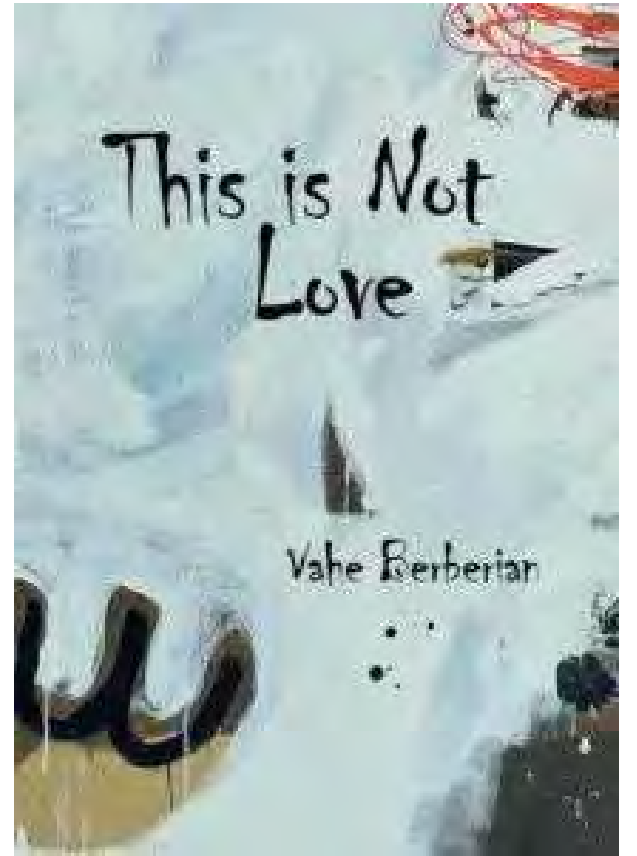


Vahe Berberian

statements about eating habits (“Eat three times a day, not when you're famished.”) and painting (“Always keep your paint brushes clean.”). Inevitably, Julian and Kylie seduce each other and end up shagging like teenagers. At times Julian also makes sweeping pronouncements, including the idea that Western Civilization exists only to satisfy men's carnal urges and that only men, due to the differences in their genitalia, are creative. In 2025, you wonder why she lets this slide. Elsewhere Julian likens the creative process — and by extension life itself, to a distasteful bodily function: “The creative process... It's painful. Painful and messy. It's like thrusting your finger in your throat and throwing up... Life is like a banquet where you walk around tasting a sandwich here and an hors d'oeuvres there, and you drink and drink until your body can't handle it anymore. So, you thrust your finger in your throat, and you throw up.”

Like many people, Julian has trouble controlling his own self-destructive urges, including when it comes to his former wife. Lisa is described as brilliant and intuitive, yet it takes her a rather long time to figure out that her former husband and her daughter are canoodling in bed. Similarly, when Julian invites Kylie to be part of the preparations for his Paris exhibition, he introduces her to his sexy nephew Shant, and then leaves them to go sauntering into the French night together. There are moments of clarity in this story from some of the novel's minor characters, as when his friend Lucy, referring to Kylie, exclaims: “She's smart, she's beautiful, she can even be funny, but she's a manipulative bitch.” Julian nicknames his student “Kyelig” or “little wolf” in Armenian, and indeed there's a bit of a wolf to her predatory ways.

In a sense, *This Is Not Love* is a *Bildungsroman* of sorts, but the person receiving the emotional education is the 52-year-old Julian and not young Kylie. For part of



the novel, she's also dating a hot young blond guy named Jeff, who stands in direct competition to Julien. The reader wonders who, after all, is zooming whom.

Without going into any more plot details, the novel advances at a fast clip. The reader is eager to find out what happens to this seemingly doomed love affair. Stylistically, an interesting slippage or disconnect develops between the jaunty, almost airy tone of Berberian's description and the truly dark impulses and events that he describes. Berberian is an important standup humorist, artist and writer. He has created seven stellar Armenian comedic monologues and, in the novelistic field, his 1999 *Յանունն Հոր և Որդույ (In the Name of the Father and the Son)* and *Նամակներ Զաաթարէն (Letters from Zaatar, 2006)*. Both fans of his work as well as those who have yet to discover it, will find this latest modern-day tale of romance and deceit an enjoyable read.

## Chris Bohjalian to Launch His Newest Novel at Armenian Museum of America in Boston

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Museum of America, in partnership with *An Unlikely Story*, will host a conversation with Chris Bohjalian, for the launch of his latest novel *The Jackal's Mistress* on Tuesday, March 11.

This special event will be held at the museum at 7 p.m., offering an evening of literary excitement and historical conversation.

Bohjalian will discuss *The Jackal's Mistress* in a lively and thought-provoking discussion with Khatchig Mouradian, a Genocide scholar, lecturer at Columbia University, and the Armenian and Georgian Area Specialist at the Library of Congress. Together, they will explore the historical context of the novel and delve into the powerful themes of love and survival in times of conflict, followed by a question-and-answer session with the audience.

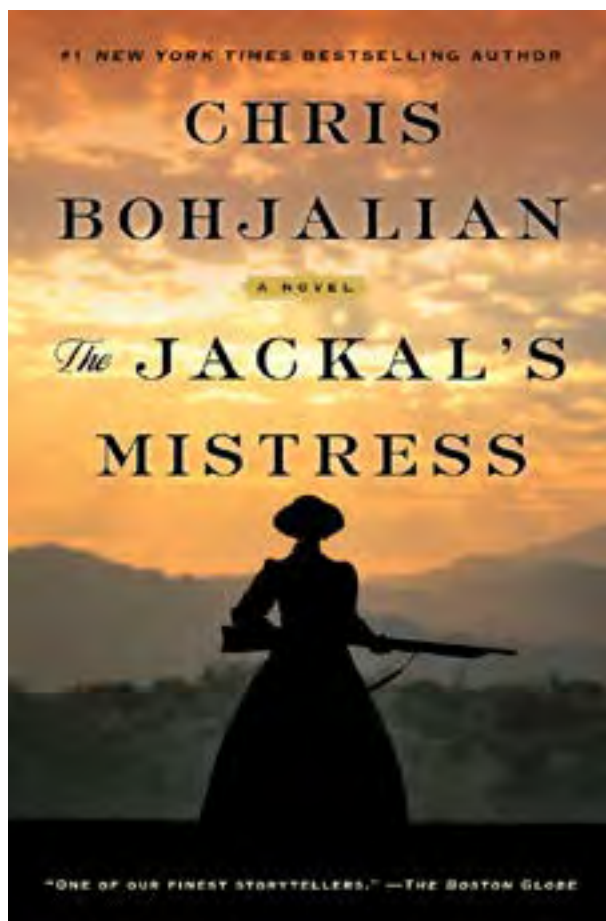
*The Jackal's Mistress* is set in the Shenandoah Valley in 1864, during the height of the Civil War. The story follows Libby Steadman, a woman who must navigate love and survival when she discovers a wounded Union captain and smuggles him in a perilous journey to Harper's Ferry. As the two characters form an unexpected bond, their story unfolds in a sweeping tale of love, sacrifice, and survival amidst the chaos of war.



Chris Bohjalian

As the two characters form an unexpected bond, their story unfolds in a sweeping tale of love, sacrifice, and survival amidst the chaos of war.

Chris Bohjalian is a *New York Times* bestselling author, known for his diverse range of captivating stories. From historical fiction to



contemporary thrillers, his books — including *Midwives*, *The Flight Attendant*, and *The Sandcastle Girls* — have earned him a devoted global following. *The Jackal's Mistress* marks his 25th novel, blending meticulous historical research with his signature evocative prose, creating a poignant Civil War-era love story based on real-life events.

“We are honored that Chris Bohjalian is launching his new book tour at the Armenian Museum. This will be his only appearance in the Greater Boston area,” says Exec-

utive Director Jason Sohigian. “The event will feature a conversation with his long-time friend and fellow traveler, the esteemed Khatchig Mouradian. They have told us the conversation will range from their journeys together to Historic Armenia to the importance of *The Sandcastle Girls*, one of our favorite novels.”

Space is limited so RSVPs are required to attend. Each ticket includes a copy of *The Jackal's Mistress* and entry to the event. Additional copies of the book, along with other titles from Chris Bohjalian will be available at the event, with books sold by *An Unlikely Story*.

The Armenian Museum is located at 65 Main St., Watertown.



We have received the New Year's donation list for the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Sponsor a Teacher Program 2025 in Armenia from the TCA Detroit Chapter as follows:

- Mr. & Mrs. Martin Shoushanian, Farmington Hills, MI. (\$200)
- Mr. & Mrs. Edward Haroutunian, Detroit, MI (\$250)
- Mr. & Mrs. Phillip Mooradian, Bloomfield Hills, MI (\$300)
- Mr. & Mrs. Dan Yessian, Farmington Hills, MI (\$200)
- Ms. Stephanie Dallakian, West Bloomfield, MI (\$100)
- The Hagopian Family Foundation, Birmingham, MI (\$1000)
- Dr. Salpi Toroyan, Farmington Hills, MI (\$50)
- Mr. and Mrs. Edward & Yvonne Korkoian, Farmington Hills, MI (\$200)





## COMMENTARY

# Silvina Der Meguerditchian: An Artist Who Cares

ARTIST, from page 13

artefacts preserved by descendants to reconstruct what life was like in Kharpert or Trabzon, Arapgir or Diarbekir: what did the homes and churches look like, how did the people live, what occupations and pass-times did they have, what did the local dress look like, the dances, the food? It is a project that continues the process of remembering, in which individual family documents contribute to remodeling the vast mosaic of Armenian economic, religious, and cultural life in the Ottoman Empire. One can clearly see how Der Meguerditchian's experience with Houshamadyan

seem to juxtapose the contrasting realities while at the same time encouraging their coexistence. To overcome the otherness in a society transformed by migration requires empathy, human warmth, and compassion.

Thus, the importance of the third theme, Care. Here, the person-to-person relationship comes to the fore, again depicted in traditional as well as contemporary forms. We see a video of two women, one combing the other's long silken hair. We see heavy "Healing Coats" which offer protection and strength.

Although the Armenian historical experi-



Care

is interwoven in her activity as an artist.

This is evident also in the second theme, Memory, which highlights cultural identity and the "texture of identity" as expressed in works composed of photographs, and objects. Photographs taken by the artist show us Beirut and Aleppo, Hiroshima and Berlin, cities that have lived through past catastrophes, and are reliving them in the present. Berlin, which has known destruction and reconstruction, is also a city of migrants, among them, the artist herself. Der Meguerditchian's compositions

ence provides the impetus and material for Der Meguerditchian's works in this exhibition, one cannot escape the relevance it has on our current world. In a period in which many governments and their frightened people are responding increasingly with fear to the continuing flows of migrants, and migrants who are desperately seeking to escape war, starvation, and genocide are met with closed borders, armed police, and internment camps, the human message that Der Meguerditchian is transmitting through art is worthy of note and praise.



Memory

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

**FEBRUARY 24 — UNDER THE SNOW MOON.** Monday, 4 p.m., virtually, to keep connected. Program of the Friends of Armenian Heritage Park. For details and to register, [ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar](http://ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar)

**MARCH 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](http://stsvartanantz.com), or by contacting Corie Horan, [coriehoran@gmail.com](mailto:coriehoran@gmail.com).

**MARCH 2 — Poon Paregentan Luncheon** with cultural program, games, masks, great food, wine, desserts presented by the Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter, March 2, 2 pm, Baikar Building 755 Mt. Auburn St. Watertown. Purchase tickets by Feb. 26 from Sossy syogurtian@comcast.net or 617 281-1647, \$50/adult, \$35 students, children under 5 free.

**MARCH 3 — Monday, St. James Men's Club dinner and fellowship,** Guest speaker Steve Langone. Steve has worked for the Boston Red Sox since 2009, was a Major League Scout from 2013-2019, and is currently a Special Assistant in Pro Scouting. 6.15 mezza, 7 p.m. Dinner, Losh Kebab and Kheyma, \$25 per person. 465 Mount Auburn St., Watertown.

**MARCH 15 — Global Arts Live,** in collaboration with The Friends of Armenian Culture Society presents: The Naghash Ensemble - First Boston Appearance! With its eye on the 21st century, the Naghash Ensemble combines the earthy spirituality of Armenian folk song, new classical music, and medieval polyphonic vocal music. 8 PM, Berklee Performance Center - 136 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston. Tickets: \$30, \$38, \$48, \$58 [www.globalartslive.org/content/event\\_page/10301](http://www.globalartslive.org/content/event_page/10301)

**MARCH 21 — Society of Istanbul Armenians of Boston** presents The Secret Trio, consisting of Ara Dinkjian on oud, Tamer Pinarbasi on kanun and Ismail Lumanovski on clarinet, in concert at the Mosesian Center for the Arts, 321 Arsenal St., Watertown. 7.30 p.m. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [www.mosesianarts.org](http://www.mosesianarts.org). Proceeds will benefit Armenian Schools in Istanbul.

**APRIL 10 — LET'S PARTY FOR THE PARK!** Thursday, 7-9 p.m. Abigail Adams Ballroom, InterContinental Hotel, Boston. Benefit to raise funds to Care for & Maintain Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway. Advance Reservations only. For reservations, [ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support](http://ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support)

**APRIL 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 Baikar Center, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. (Use Norseman Ave. entrance.) Free admission. Book signing. For info, email [syogurtian@comcast.net](mailto: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.

**APRIL 27 — Remembrance of the Holy Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide.** Divine Liturgy, Reception, and Cultural Program with the participation of the Armenian Churches of the Merrimack Valley. Armenian Church. Guest Speaker, Aram Arkun, Performance by the Sayat Nova Dance Ensemble, and musical selections by parish youth. Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church, 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. Divine Liturgy will begin at 10:00 a.m. Special Sunday School Program for the Youth.

**APRIL 29-May 3 — 123rd Diocesan Annual Assembly & Clergy Conference** April 29-May 3, 2025 hosted by Holy Archangels Armenian Church, St. Michael & St. Gabriel (Haverhill MA) Details to follow. Gala Banquet on Friday, May 2, open to the public, at the Hilton Boston Woburn 2 Forbes Rd., Woburn. For more information, visit <https://www.hypointearmenianchurch.org/>

**APRIL 29-May 3 — 123rd Diocesan Annual Assembly & Clergy Conference** April 29-May 3, 2025 hosted by Holy Archangels Armenian Church, St. Michael & St. Gabriel (Haverhill MA) Details to follow. Gala Banquet on Friday, May 2, open to the public, at the Hilton Boston Woburn 2 Forbes Rd., Woburn. For more information, visit <https://www.hypointearmenianchurch.org/>

### TENNESSEE

**MARCH 7-9 — Armenian American Forum 2025.** Hosted by the Hyeland Project, this forum brings together Armenian American leaders, entrepreneurs, and community builders for a weekend of discussion, collaboration, and networking in Nashville, TN. Master of Ceremony: Sona Movsesian. Key-note Speakers: Garo Armen and Emma Arakelyan. For details and registration, visit [tennessee.hyelandproject.com/armenian-american-forum-2025/](http://tennessee.hyelandproject.com/armenian-american-forum-2025/) or email [hyelandproject@gmail.com](mailto:hyelandproject@gmail.com)

To send Calendar items to the *Mirror-Spectator* email [alin@mirrorspectator.com](mailto:alin@mirrorspectator.com) or [alin.gregorian@gmail.com](mailto:alin.gregorian@gmail.com). You can also visit our website, [www.mirrorspectator.com](http://www.mirrorspectator.com), and find the "calendar" section under the heading "More" or 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.

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SINCE 1932



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# Evaluating Pashinyan's Visit to Washington

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In a previous article, I discussed Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's visit to Washington, highlighting its key goals and motives. I suggested that he faces crucial questions about his political future and US foreign political priorities in the South Caucasus region. Here, I will outline the range of inquiries Pashinyan likely encountered during his visit. Reflecting on the trip, we can draw several important conclusions.

First of all, understanding President Donald Trump's foreign policy requires more than just analyzing his previous presidency or his often contradictory statements. For instance, his claims about ending the Ukrainian war quickly or annexing Greenland, as well as his unconditional support for Israel versus his aspiration to bring peace, highlight this complexity. It remains uncertain whether he will pursue peace between Iran and Israel or maintain unwavering support for Israel, and whether he will seek peace through negotiations or impose it by force. Similarly, his comments on reducing aid to Ukraine and the "aid for resources" concept — suggesting a trade of minerals for support — illustrate the need for more clarity. Experts will need more time, and foreign leaders will need direct communication with Trump's team to fully grasp his foreign policy priorities.

One constant is the "America First" slogan, and other nations will need to adapt to this stance, as Panama, El Salvador, and Colombia have done. Hence, Pashinyan's urgency to travel to Washington is understandable, as the US and its rules are changing. Among other concerns Pashinyan needed to gauge Trump's policies towards Iran and Russia to assess his diplomatic flexibility with these countries. Strained Armenian-Russian relations and stagnant Armenian-Iranian ties reflect the Armenian authorities' efforts to demonstrate loyalty to the West.

Consequently, Pashinyan is now in a challenging position: if loyalty is unnecessary, for instance, amid possible positive changes in Russian-American relations, what course should he take? As we see now, this important question remains open. Washington's position on the "Crossroads of Peace" concept remains unclear, including its willingness to support its implementation. It seems there was no one in Washington knowledgeable enough to explain the US stance regarding the Strategic Partnership Charter. No one from the Trump team was available to clarify the administration's position either.

Anyway, given these issues and his need to assess his political future and support from DC, Pashinyan needed to swiftly contact the Trump administration for answers to his critical questions. Although he was not invited to Trump's inauguration, despite Armenia signing a strategic partnership charter with the US just days earlier, Pashinyan aimed to visit Washington as soon as possible to engage with US political leaders. A timely opportunity arose to attend the International Religious Freedom Summit and the National Prayer Event.

Considering the above circumstances, it's reasonable to argue that Pashinyan's visit primarily aimed at something other than the aforementioned religious events. His lack of interest in faith and religion is well-documented, and his accompanying MP, Arsen Torosyan, is known for his negative views on the church and Christianity in general. This reinforces the notion that the religious events were merely a pretext for his urgent trip to Washington.

In the US, even foreign political leaders on personal visits typically receive a brief meet-and-greet with high-ranking officials. Pashinyan too was granted a high-level meeting in line with diplomatic protocols. He briefly met Vice President J. D. Vance. However, due to the US constitutional structure, the vice president doesn't make independent political decisions but primarily handles tasks assigned by the president. Thus, it can be concluded that Pashinyan failed to meet any significant political decision-maker during his visit to the US.

Pashinyan's visit to Washington, aimed at securing political support and answers to crucial questions, was largely unproductive for this reason. Additionally, he did not engage with high-ranking members of

Congress, such as the Speaker of the House or the Senate leaders, despite visiting Capitol Hill. His visit can be seen as a false start, primarily due to its timing; the Trump administration was still determining its foreign policy priorities.

The lack of meetings with senior officials may have signaled that US representatives had little to convey to Pashinyan at this stage. However, it's important to note that Washington is still establishing its priorities, and Armenia is not a top concern. This could be one reason that Washington has not yet engaged with Armenia and Pashinyan needs to wait.

Ultimately, Pashinyan returned from Washington without the answers he sought, highlighting significant miscalculations in Armenia's approach to its relations with the United States.



# The Next Dictator the World Must Confront

By Berge Jololian

Ilham Aliyev is a name that should strike fear into the hearts of journalists, opposition figures, and anyone who still believes in minor inconveniences like free speech and democracy. Continuing the proud tradition of nepotism-fueled authoritarianism, Aliyev proves that dictatorship is a family business, much like Assad's, except with a discount dictator flair.

Much like his idol Vladimir Putin (because what's a modern autocrat without a role model?), Aliyev has mastered the art of rigging elections, silencing critics, and striking convenient deals with fellow strongmen. If Putin is the blockbuster villain of global politics, then Aliyev is the straight-to-DVD knockoff — lacking originality but still managing to wreak havoc. And let's not forget his big brother in dictatorship, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who provides backing, military aid, and diplomatic cover whenever Aliyev needs a helping hand. They practice the same brand of strongman rule — consolidating power, crushing dissent and re-writing history while pretending democracy is alive and well.

Aliyev's regime doesn't just stop at jailing critics — it takes things up a notch

with police brutality, forced confessions and extrajudicial punishment. International watchdogs have repeatedly pointed out Azerbaijan's widespread use of torture, which the government insists is merely an "enhanced hospitality program" for dissidents. Even Azerbaijan's state-controlled institutions, not exactly known for self-reflection, admitted that at least 452 individuals were subjected to physical abuse in 2022 alone. That's a level of self-awareness you don't often see from a dictatorship.

Criticism is met not with rebuttals, but with arrests, exile, or worse. Gubad Ibadoghlu, an academic and economist, learned this the hard way when he was thrown into prison on charges even Azerbaijan's state media struggled to justify. Human rights advocate Anar Mammadli has been trapped in a revolving door of arrests and releases for years, simply for daring to speak out. Aliyev's approach to dissent is simple: if you can't convince them, jail them.

Azerbaijan is a paradise — if your idea of paradise includes state-controlled news, arbitrary arrests of journalists, and a total ban on independent reporting. The country proudly ranks near the bottom of the global Press Freedom Index, proving that Aliyev

is deeply committed to making sure no one tells the truth about his rule. In 2014, he forcibly shut down the offices of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, presumably because their commitment to facts was getting in the way of his government's carefully curated fantasy world.

Like any self-respecting dictator, Aliyev understands that power is best enjoyed when paired with a generous helping of corruption. His family controls everything from oil and gas to banking, telecommunications, and construction. Who needs transparency when you can just funnel millions into offshore accounts and bribe European politicians? (Looking at you, 2017 "Laundromat" scandal!) In the same year, Transparency International gave Azerbaijan a corruption score of just 30 out of 100, putting it in an elite club of countries where money disappears faster than civil liberties.

Aliyev has built a cozy alliance with some of the world's most notorious leaders, forming a club of mutual support and shared authoritarian best practices. Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and even Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu are among his go-to partners. Erdogan, in particular, serves as Aliyev's political mentor, see DICTATORS, page 20



## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Erdogan is Said to Be the Descendant Of a Greek Pro-Armenian Anarchist

Over the years, many articles have appeared in the Turkish press claiming that various high-ranking Turkish officials are of Armenian or Kurdish origin.

These officials have often vehemently denied the claim, but sometimes have ignored it in order to avoid drawing more attention to it. For example, several years ago, when it was claimed that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is of Armenian origin, he simply replied: “I regret that they are calling me Armenian.” Given the prevalent racism in Turkey, calling someone an Armenian is considered an insult.

Former Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz was reported to be of Armenian origin, as well as Devlet Bahçeli, the chairman of the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), a radical ultra-nationalist party. I recently found a YouTube video in which Isa Ilyasoglu, who served in Turkey’s National Intelligence Organization (MIT), claimed that Bahçeli is of Armenian origin on his mother’s side. Ilyasoglu reported that during the Genocide, a 16-year-old Armenian girl was kidnapped and raped by the Governor of Adana. That girl later became the grandmother of Bahçeli who, contrary to what is indicated on his I.D. card, is not from Osmaniye, but from Halfeti, a town in the region of Urfa. As a child his family moved to the town of Bahçe in Adana, where he acquired his last name, Bahçeli.

It is widely acknowledged that a large percentage of today’s Turks are descendants of Armenians, Greeks or Kurds, many of whom were Islamized and Turkified, particularly during the 1915 Genocide, when young Armenian children were abducted and adopted by Turkish families. Most of these children were too young to remember their ethnic origin. The Turkified and Islamized Armenians are often referred to as “Hidden Armenians.”

However, over the years, many Turks have come forward stating that they have just discovered their Armenian origin. Some of them have even asked to be baptized in the Armenian Church and revert to Christianity.

In 2018, the Turkish government unexpectedly launched a website that revealed the ancestry of all Turkish citizens. Within days, millions of Turks rushed to find out their ethnic origin. As a result, the website crashed and shortly thereafter, it was shut down. Subsequently, the website was reinstated with “enhanced privacy measures.” There were several reports of Muslim Turks being shocked upon finding out that they had Armenian blood. One report claimed that an anti-Armenian Turkish fanatic, upon finding out that he was of Armenian origin, committed suicide.

There is also a large group of Armenians in Turkey, known as Hemshens,

who live in the Black Sea region. They were forcefully Islamized. Some of them have retained their Armenian traditions and native Armenian language which has a distinct dialect.

In the YouTube video I recently found, the Turkish intelligence officer Ilyasoglu made sensational revelations about Turkish President Erdogan’s ethnic origin. I am not sure how true his report is, but given Ilyasoglu’s intelligence background, I could not ignore his claim.

Ilyasoglu lived in England from 1995 to 1996 and moved to Germany in 2000. In 2005, he ran for the Turkish Parliament, but later withdrew his candidacy. He is currently the chairman of the Resurrection Party which has the slogan, “one government, one nation, one flag and one religion — Turk.” He now lives in Germany. It is widely known that the Turkish government has many intelligence officers in Germany to spy on millions of Turks who live there, particularly Kurds and Erdogan’s political opponents.

Erdogan’s I.D. card shows that he was born in Rize which is in the Greek Pontus region of Turkey. Ilyasoglu said in his video that “Erdogan’s father was a Greek man from Pontus. His mother was a Spanish Jew who came to Pontus via Georgia.” Ilyasoglu added: “If Erdogan dares, let him dispute it.”

“The brother of one of Tayyip (Erdogan’s) grandparents was a Greek priest who, on the coast of the Black Sea, tried to establish the Pontus Greek Republic after the Russian-Turkish war.

“His grandfather and his brother, who was a priest, were arrested, tried by the ‘Giresun Independence Court,’ sentenced to death in Giresun and hanged.” Ilyasoglu explained that he is from Giresun: “This is written in the memoirs of Judge Ali Kilic.”

“In fact, Erdogan’s maternal great-grandfather, Tayyoub, was an anarchist, who after entering Turkish villages and committing murders, engaged in looting. Then, during the 1922 Marash Armenian rebellion, with his group, he sided with the Armenians, attacked Turkish soldiers and was killed in the Taurus Mountains.” Ilyasoglu added: “Let Tayyip Erdogan look for his maternal great-grandfather’s remains in the Taurus Mountains. In other words, his mother’s grandfather has no grave.”

The above cited video is dated October 28, 2023. There are no reports in the Turkish media that Ilyasoglu was criticized or prosecuted for his sensational revelations about Erdogan, even though he has visited Turkey several times. Since the Turkish media is under the total control of Erdogan, no Turkish newspaper would dare to publish anything that may be upsetting to the President. It is not known why the Turkish government has not prosecuted Ilyasoglu for claiming that Erdogan’s forefathers are Greek. The reason could mean either that Ilyasoglu is telling the truth about Erdogan’s ancestry or that the President is reluctant to draw more attention to the claims in the video.

According to a Turkish proverb, “spoiled wine becomes bitter vinegar.” This can mean that some Islamized and Turkified Armenians become fervent enemies of Armenians. This is similar to the expression, “more Catholic than the Pope.”

## Trump Vowed to Protect Armenia’s Christians. He Can Start Here.

By David Ignatius

With so much suffering in the world, individual cases can get lost. But I want to explain the plight of a man named Ruben Vardanyan, who is a political prisoner on trial in Azerbaijan and is facing a life sentence — and whose case deserves greater attention.

Vardanyan’s crime, if you can call it that, is that he championed Armenian resistance in Nagorno-Karabakh, a remote region in the Caucasus that is legally part of Azerbaijan but whose population was once largely Armenian and self-governing. Not anymore: The region’s 120,000 Armenians fled in September 2023 when Azerbaijani troops invaded. Vardanyan was arrested as he tried to cross the border into Armenia.

Vardanyan is an unlikely martyr. He is a businessman who made money as an investment banker in the wild early days of post-Soviet Russia — and then began giving it away to good causes. In 2014, he founded an international school in Dilijan, Armenia, to connect his small and fragile country with the world. And in 2015, he co-founded a human rights group called the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, whose supporters include such luminaries as George Clooney, former U.N. high commissioner Mary Robinson and several Nobel laureates.

Aurora’s motto is “Gratitude in action.” Vardanyan’s idea was to honor people around the world who are selflessly helping others in our time — just as decent people had saved his great-grandfather Hamayak Vardanyan during the Armenian Genocide in 1915. Rather than looking back in anger on that terrible event, Vardanyan wanted to look forward in hope, by celebrating what’s best in the human spirit.

I should make clear that I’m not a neutral observer of Vardanyan’s case. He has been my friend for a decade, and

I’ve served as unpaid master of ceremonies for Aurora’s annual awards ceremony since 2016. It’s personal: My father’s family is Armenian and, by helping Aurora, I wanted to share my own gratitude for those who saved my ancestors in Ottoman times.

To give you a sense of Aurora’s work, here’s a quick sketch of the people it has honored since 2016: a Tutsi woman in Burundi who rescued Hutu victims there; an American physician in the Nuba mountains in Sudan who treated patients in that remote killing ground; a Rohingya Muslim lawyer who protected his people during the slaughter in Myanmar; a Yazidi activist who rescued kinsmen being murdered by the Islamic State; two Somali women who saved victims of sexual violence in Mogadishu, and a woman activist and a doctor, both Congolese, who saved rape victims.

I can remember each of these people as they took the stage at the Aurora awards ceremony. They were often awkward, with little experience speaking in public, unaccustomed to taking credit for their work. Each year, I would come away from these ceremonies grateful for the enduring, inexplicable goodness in the human spirit that produces heroes like these. Vardanyan and the other two Aurora co-founders, the late Carnegie Corp. president Vartan Gregorian and Moderna co-founder Noubar Afeyan, were always humble in the presence of these humanitarians.

Vardanyan’s trial began a week ago in Baku. Azerbaijan has brought 46 charges against him, ranging from terrorism to organized crime. But his troubles really stem from his decision to move to Karabakh in 2022 and become a senior minister in the breakaway government there, as well as an outspoken defender of the Armenian population. Throwing himself into this vortex was dangerous. But Vardanyan told his daughter that he couldn’t live with himself if he didn’t try to help fellow Armenians who have suffered so many tragedies in their history. It was gratitude in action.

Disaster followed. Azerbaijan imposed a blockade in December 2022, starving Karabakh of medicine, fuel and other essentials. Armenians tried to protect their homes, families and churches. But when Azerbaijan’s military invaded in September 2023 they fled, leaving the region ethnically “cleansed.” Vardanyan has been in an Azerbaijani

prison cell ever since, along with three former presidents of Karabakh.

“Ruben was obsessed about saving Karabakh’s Armenian character, and he paid with his freedom for that dedication,” says his friend Vahan Zanoian, an Armenian American energy consultant who now lives in Armenia. Ten days before Azerbaijan’s invasion, Zanoian phoned and urged Vardanyan to leave. He refused. Zanoian texted him again as troops entered Karabakh’s capital. By then, it was too late.

An Amnesty International official said last month that Vardanyan’s case “has raised serious allegations of human rights violations which include ill-treatment in detention, being coerced to sign falsified case materials and denied the opportunity to prepare his defense.” The statement by Marie Struthers, the group’s director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, urged: “The international community must closely monitor this high-profile case, to ensure Ruben Vardanyan’s fair trial rights and justice.”

Jared Genser, a prominent American human rights lawyer who is representing Vardanyan, hasn’t been allowed to visit his client in prison. “This is a political show trial,” he told me. “It’s a result of his advocacy for the political rights of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.”

Most Americans don’t know much about Armenia, let alone the Karabakh conflict. But here’s a central fact: Armenia was the first nation in the world to adopt Christianity, and it has paid dearly for its faith in a predominantly Muslim region. Vardanyan himself is a faithful Armenian Orthodox Christian, but he has always been ecumenical in spirit. Indeed, many of the humanitarians who received the Aurora prize have been Muslims.

As Vardanyan’s trial moves forward, perhaps he will have a friend in Washington. President Donald Trump said in a Truth Social post on Oct. 23: “When I am President, I will protect persecuted Christians, I will work to stop the violence and ethnic cleansing, and we will restore PEACE between Armenia and Azerbaijan.”

Here’s your chance to deliver on that promise, Mr. President, by helping a decent man escape persecution.

(David Ignatius is a columnist for the *Washington Post*. His column appeared in that newspaper on February 10.)

## Traditional Armenian Music Is A Hit in South America

YEREVAN - The Armenian traditional music group Arsen Petrosyan Trio, comprising Arsen Petrosyan on duduk, Astghik Snetsunts on kanun and Chilean César Veas on bass duduk, visited South America in late January as part of a festival of world music in Chile and Colombia as well as one in Spain.

The concerts during January were on January 18 at the Centro Cultural del Bosque, January 19 at the GAM theater, January 22 at the Las Condes Cultural Center, January 25 at Espacio Matta in La Granja, January 26 at La Jardinera in Pucón (Southern Chile), 31st in Bogotá, Colombia and on February 2 in Madrid, Spain.

The tour was the result of the connec-

tion made by the Chilean musician of the trio, César Veas, who currently lives in Armenia, with the production of the Músicas del Mundo festival. The artistic director of the festival, who is a duduk lover, witnessed an Armenian music concert organized by Veas at the Armenian Collective in Chile in 2023. The director showed his interest in presenting a project with Armenian musicians in an upcoming festival that was finally able to take place at the beginning of this year with the Arsen Petrosyan trio.

The reception of the audience in each concert was very warm, respectful and full of emotion with music that in their words touched the soul. I



The Arsen Petrosyan Trio in concert

## The Next Dictator the World Must Confront

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military supplier, and international apologist. When Aliyev needs to invade or ethnically cleanse, Erdogan is there to cheer him on and provide drone support. Over \$7 billion in Russian weapons, double that amount from Erdogan, and more arms from Israel than Russia ever sent — because even dictators need variety.

These alliances have given Aliyev the confidence to unleash military aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh, where his idea of diplomacy involved starving 120,000 Armenians before launching a full-scale attack. Having successfully ethnically cleansed Nagorno-Karabakh, he is now setting his sights on Armenia itself. He even borrowed a page from Putin's playbook, referring to Armenia as a "fascist state" in need of eradication. It's almost cute how dictators think reusing old propaganda makes it more believable.

The world has a long history of ignoring autocrats until it's too late. Remember when the international community shrugged off Putin's invasion of Crimea in 2014, only for him to go full-scale in 2022? Well, history is repeating itself, and Aliyev is more than happy to play the role of the next dictator the world fails to stop in time. If there's one lesson history has taught us, it's that ignoring autocrats never ends well. Maybe, just maybe, this time the world should pay attention before another nation is wiped off the map.

For Armenians worldwide, now is the time for unity and unwavering support for the Armenian government as it navigates an unforgiving geopolitical landscape. The forces aligned against Armenia — Aliyev, Erdogan and Putin — seek not just territory but the erasure of a nation, a history, and a people. We must rally together, stand firm, and strengthen our diplomatic and military resilience to counter their aggression.

As Paruyr Sevak once wrote, "We are few, but we are called Armenians, we shall not be broken." And Yeghishe Charents reminded us, "O Armenian people, your only salvation is in your collective strength." It is time to heed their words. The struggle for Armenia's survival is not just the burden of those within its borders - it is the duty of Armenians everywhere. Let us unite, resist, and ensure that the Armenian nation endures against the tide of dictatorship and oppression.

(Berge Jololian resides in Yerevan, Armenia, and is a specialist in security and cybersecurity with a Master's degree in Information Technology. He has a keen interest in the geopolitics and international dynamics of the southern Caucasus and the broader region.)



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