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## Pashinyan Promotes New Ideology to Guide Armenia's Geopolitical Transformation

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is pushing for an ideological transformation to establish what he calls “real Armenia.” To succeed, he will have to win a three-front fight to overcome opposition from Azerbaijan, Russia and a powerful bloc of domestic critics.

Having returned from a foreign tour that took him to Washington and Paris, Pashinyan answered questions in parliament on February 12 about his “Real Armenia” vision. The tenets of the ideology are still being fleshed out, he explained. But the broad outline is the promotion of a Westernized, democratized nation that has drawn a line on the past and is firmly fixed on forging a prosperous future.

The prime minister stated that a written platform for the Real Armenia concept would be finalized and published soon. Once published, he added, the government would launch an effort to sell the vision to the electorate. “From that point,” Pashinyan stated, referring to publication of the platform, “we must begin the formation and formulation of a consensus around the concept of ‘real Armenia.’”

Pashinyan told MPs that he has received assurances of support from US and French officials for what he is trying to accomplish, describing an impromptu meeting with US Vice President JD Vance in Washington in early February as “very important and very productive.”

Parliament took immediate action on



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan with US Vice President J. D. Vance in Washington (ARMENPRESS PHOTO)

the real Armenia vision February 12, approving in its first reading a bill authorizing the government to seek European Union membership, a process that could take decades to accomplish.

The prime minister's efforts to achieve an identity makeover for Armenia is rooted in the country's decisive defeat to Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War in late 2023. The military disaster prompted the collapse of the country's traditional strategic partnership with Russia, which many Armenians believe failed to fulfill security commitments to defend Armenian sovereignty. Since then, Pashinyan has sought to strengthen ties to US and Eu-

ropean political, economic and security institutions, while striving to conclude a peace deal with Azerbaijan. Peace, Pashinyan holds, is a prerequisite for the formation of a prosperous domestic economy. The real Armenia concept seeks to tie all its policy goals together. see TRANSFORMATION, page 2

## Pashinyan Admits Receiving New Karabakh Peace Plan in 2019

By Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Contradicting his earlier claims, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on February 13 acknowledged that international mediators presented Armenia and Azerbaijan with an updated plan to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict one year after he came to power in 2018.

Armenian opposition leaders have claimed for years that Pashinyan's failure to accept it paved the way for the disastrous 2020 war in Karabakh and Azerbaijan's subsequent recapture of the region.

The proposed peace deal was based on the so-called Madrid Principles of a Karabakh settlement originally drafted by the US, Russian and French mediators in 2007. It upheld the Karabakh Armenians' right to self-determination while calling for their withdrawal from Azerbaijani districts around Karabakh occupied in the early 1990s. Karabakh's internationally recognized status would be determined through a future referendum. see PEACE PLAN, page 3

## Armenia Vows to ‘Refute’ Azerbaijan’s Arbitration Accusation of Environmental Damage in Nagorno-Karabakh

By Arshaluys Barseghyan and Aytan Farhadova

Armenia has vowed to “refute” a Permanent Court of Arbitration claim filed against the country by Azerbaijan over alleged environmental destruction it caused in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In a post on the platform formerly known as Twitter on Friday, February 14, Armenia's international legal affairs representative, Yeghishe Kirakosyan, called Azerbaijan's claims “baseless,” criticizing its “preposterous demand for compensation in the arbitration under the 1979 Bern Convention.”



Yeghishe Kirakosyan

The statement was in response to a claim filed by Azerbaijan at the Permanent Court of Arbitration on February 12, accusing Armenia of committing multiple violations of its legal obligations under the convention — including the destruction of habitats and species — in Nagorno-Karabakh.

“This includes widespread deforestation, environmentally unsustainable logging, mining, and construction of hydropower plants [...] which negatively affected the hundreds of wildlife species and their habitats native to that territory,” read the statement about the filing of the claim.

Kirakosyan's office vowed on 12 February to “vigorously defend its position in these proceedings” and to refute Azerbaijan's “baseless claims as well as its demand for compensation.”

“Contrary to what Azerbaijan suggests, reports by the United Nations Environment Programme and other independent bodies, in fact, make clear that it is Azerbaijan that has engaged in environmental damage in recent years,” read the office's statement.

It also noted that since joining the Bern Convention, Armenia “has remained committed to upholding its commitment to the conservation of the region's wildlife and preservation of the environment.”

This claim against Armenia is the latest in a series of legal spats between the two countries in international courts as they push through protracted peace negotiations.

In November 2024, the chair of an Azerbaijani pro-government think tank, Farid Shafiyev, said that three sticking points remain in the peace treaty negotiations: Armenia's constitution, the expansion of “diplomatic and legal warfare,” and the presence of the EU Monitoring Mission in Armenia.

Armenia has previously suggested that both countries could reciprocally drop cases against each other in case of a peace deal.

However, in an interview with RFE/RL, political columnist Rauf Mirgadirov suggested that this legal challenge likely had no serious consequences on the peace talks.

“In general, I consider this a completely normal process regarding the demand for compensation. But their preparation and presentation have no direct relation to the peace talks. The issue of compensation is already being discussed in the peace talks,” he said. see ARBITRATION, page 5

## Peyote Beats Plays The Long Game to The Grammys

By Aram Arkun  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Music producer Armen Zabounian, known to most of the world as Peyote Beats, worked hard over a decade before receiving global acclaim for his work as producer of the track *Boiled Peanuts* on the album “Alligator Bites Never Heal” by Doechii. Break out star Doechii's album won the Grammy Award for Best Rap Album on February 2. Almost two weeks later, the elated Peyote declared, “It's surreal, still.” see PEYOTE, page 14



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Germany Continues Supporting Armenia's Peace Efforts



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East Watertown Intersection to Be Named for Arshile Gorky



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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

## Priest Injured in Church Explosion

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Father Gevorg Ter-Barseghyan, who was injured in an explosion at the Holy Mother of God Church in Martuni, Armenia, has been moved from the intensive care unit to a ward. His health is showing signs of improvement, Hovhannes Hovhannisyanyan, Director of the National Center for Burns and Dermatology, told Panorama.am on February 17.

The explosion took place at the parish house adjacent to the church on Saturday, February 15, damaging its front door and window. Ter-Barseghyan was injured in the blast and was initially taken to the Martuni Medical Center.

“The burns cover a large surface area, but they are not deep and we’ve recorded positive dynamics. He has been moved to a ward and continues his treatment,” Hovhannisyanyan said, adding the duration of the recovery process remains uncertain.

“Father Gevorg’s life is out of danger,” the specialist added.

## van’t Schip Named New Armenia Soccer Coach

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Dutch manager John van ‘t Schip, 61, is the new head coach of Armenia’s national football team. Former Netherlands player Aron Winter will be the assistant coach, the Football Federation of Armenia (FFA) reported.

FFA President Armen Melikbekyan introduced van ‘t Schip to the members of FFA Executive Committee this week. His candidacy was approved in the new role by FFA ExCo members.

The Dutch manager will start his job on March 1.

## Armenia, UAE to Launch Joint Space Projects

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenia’s Minister of High-Tech Industry, Mkhitar Hayrapetyan, met with the Director-General of the UAE Space Agency, Salem Al Qubaisi, in Abu Dhabi on February 18, to discuss potential collaboration in the space sector.

They explored opportunities for cooperation and agreed to launch joint programs aimed at advancing space technologies and fostering scientific and technological progress.

Hayrapetyan outlined Armenia’s vision for space sector development and the steps being taken to achieve it. In turn, Salem Al Qubaisi provided an overview of the UAE Space Agency’s establishment and progress, highlighting existing achievements and upcoming major projects.

The discussion placed special emphasis on scientific research, the development of industry startups, and experimental technologies, as well as continued collaboration within the framework of the Artemis Accords — an initiative focused on the peaceful use of space and innovative solutions to global challenges facing humanity.

# Armenia: Refugee Children Missing Out on Education – UNICEF Report

An update issued by UNICEF highlights concern about access to education in Armenia for refugee children from Nagorno Karabakh.

The UN agency’s latest Armenia Humanitarian Situation Report notes that out of the more than 115,000 individuals who became refugees after Azerbaijani forces reconquered Karabakh in the fall of 2023, about 36,000 are children. Today, UNICEF estimates that many are falling through the educational cracks, as 16,232 refugee children were registered as enrolled in schools and another 1,617 high school-aged children in vocational programs.

UN observers “have welcomed the efforts made by the Government of Armenia, including the initiation of the project on inclusion of refugee children in the educational process by enhancing their resilience,” the UNICEF report states. But UNICEF voiced concern “about the deteriorating levels of school enrolment and attendance, especially in upper secondary education of refugee children and reduced learning outcomes such as the lack of minimum proficiency in reading faced by some children at the end of primary school.”

The report also notes that most children need mental health services. Since the start of the refugee crisis, 34,712 “children, adolescents and caregivers” have received mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) support, according to UNICEF.

“To address the evolving needs of refugee and host community children, UNICEF regularly adjusted the scope and focus of MHPSS services,” the report states. “While general residual MHPSS needs remain, the demand has grown for specialized services (such as PTSD treatment and individual psychotherapeutic support) for both children and parents.”

Overall, roughly 76 percent of refugees are now residing in the Armenian capital or its vicinity, where they can “live in better conditions in Yerevan than in rural communities.”

(This article originally appeared on the site [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org) on February 11.)



Some of the young refugee children from Artsakh in Armenia

## Kocharyan Says OSCE Minsk Group Ought to Be Preserved

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group should be preserved, former President Robert Kocharyan said during a press conference on February 17.

The Pashinyan administration earlier had said it is considering the dissolution of the OSCE Minsk Group.

The OSCE MG was created in 1992 to spearhead the OSCE’s efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. PM Nikol Pashinyan earlier said he has a constructive approach regarding the idea of dissolving the format. “We understand the stance that if there is no conflict what’s the meaning of the existence of a format dealing with the conflict resolution. But we also want to be convinced that Azerbaijan is approaching this issue in this same logic and for instance, that its motive under developing the narrative of the so-called Western Azerbaijan isn’t about engaging in aggressive policy against the territory of the Republic of Armenia,” Pashinyan told Armenpress.

Asked at the press conference to comment, Kocharyan said, “The Minsk group ought to be preserved at all cost, because if

the Minsk Group gets dissolved now it will be extremely difficult to have that kind of an international format again.”

A dissolution of the group can be considered only after creating a new, functioning negotiations format, Kocharyan said.

Kocharyan, the leader of the opposition Hayastan bloc, covered a wide range of other issues during the press conference.

Asked about the EU integration process, Kocharyan said he doesn’t see an accession prospect for Armenia.

He added the EU is experiencing a serious crisis: a crisis of leadership, a crisis of meaning, and an economic crisis. “The European project itself is in a crisis today,” he said. At the same time, Kocharyan said the EU will not collapse “but will have to subject itself to very serious reforms”. “And first of all, all EU accession processes will be frozen, I have no doubt.”

Elaborating on the EU process in Armenia, Kocharyan said, “You are heading somewhere you are not awaited at all, you are going somewhere that is very problematic in itself. And the United States has acknowledged the fact [the EU] it is problematic. And there’s simply no prospect for entering it, zero.”

## Pashinyan Promotes New Ideology to Guide Armenia’s Geopolitical Transformation

TRANSFORMATION, from page 1

Pashinyan may have the backing of the United States and France, as well as many MPs, but how far he gets in pursuit of the real Armenia project is uncertain given the scope of opposition he faces from three directions.

Russia, Armenia’s main trade partner at present, is firmly opposed to the country’s efforts to move into the Western geopolitical camp, especially its pursuit of EU accession.

“We consider the West’s line in the South Caucasus to be absolutely destructive, because it is not aimed at stabilizing the situation in this strategically important region for Russia, but at trying to ‘contribute’ to inflicting a strategic defeat on us from this flank,” Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin said in an interview published February 10 by the Russian outlet *Izvestia*.

Armenia remains a member of the Russia-dominated trade group, the Eurasian Economic Union, giving the Kremlin economic leverage over Yerevan. Following

the Armenian parliament’s EU accession vote, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov responded by noting that Russian officials “proceed from the fact that Armenia continues to receive dividends from membership in the EAEU in the processes of Eurasian economic integration, and these dividends are more than obvious.”

Elsewhere, the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process that had until recently seemed tantalizingly close to reaching the finish line, now is moving in the wrong direction. Both sides have traded accusations of late that the other intends to restart armed conflict. And on February 13, Baku filed a new lawsuit in the International Court of Arbitration in the Hague, seeking to hold Armenia responsible for causing environmental damage in Karabakh. The issue of handling international court cases involving Armenia and Azerbaijan has been one of the points holding up finalization of a peace treaty.

Perhaps the most determined opposition to the real Armenia vision is coming from critics within Armenia and among Dias-

pora groups. A major source of discontent within these constituencies is Pashinyan’s willingness to recognize Azerbaijan’s lasting sovereignty over Karabakh.

“Pashinyan is trying to deprive Armenians of the right to even dream of restoring ‘historic Armenia’ someday in the future,” stated a commentary published in late January by the *Armenian Weekly*, which is operated by Armenian Revolutionary Federation. “He naively thinks that by announcing that Armenia does not have any territorial demands against its neighboring countries, he will convince Azerbaijan to sign a meaningless peace treaty with Armenia.”

Pashinyan seems clear-eyed about the daunting obstacles standing in his way. In parliament, he said it will be up to Armenian voters to decide whether the “real Armenia” blueprint is fully implemented. “This ideology must be tested in the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2026,” Pashinyan told MPs.

(This article originally appeared on [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org) on February 13.)



## ARMENIA

# 2024–2025 Young Aurora Finalists Announced

WASHINGTON — The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, in partnership with United World Colleges International (UWC), Teach for All and the African Leadership Academy, has announced the three finalists for the 2024–2025 Young Aurora competition: UWC Adriatic (Italy), UWC Dilijan (Armenia), and UWC Mahindra College (India). Launched in 2017, this annual competition empowers young change-makers to develop innovative solutions for humanitarian challenges impacting their local communities. The winner will be announced in March.

Each year, student teams taking part in Young Aurora submit proposals for projects that respond to local humanitarian challenges and compete for a \$10,000 grant to bring their ideas to life. Young Aurora's three finalists present their ideas to a panel of distinguished humanitarians, entrepreneurs, and global leaders, who provide personalized feedback and support to help students refine their proposals.

Previous winning projects have included Enlightenment (2023–2024) from UWC Changshu China, which aims to empower rural youth from underprivileged backgrounds by providing them with resources and support to pursue their aspirations; Combili (2022–2023) by UWC Dilijan, which addresses the lack of effective and sustainable bio-waste disposal systems in Yerevan and other cities by creating small 'urban garden' models run by local children; Seed of Hope (2021) by Waterford Kamhlaba UWC of Southern Africa, designed to empower young people at Malindza refugee camp in Eswatini through the creation of a youth hub; and Beehive Divide (2020) by a team of students from UWC East Africa, who constructed a beehive fence to address the human-elephant conflict in Sanya Hoyee village, Tanzania.

First-time panelist Robert Bob Okello, the Founder and CEO of Ugandan education technology company Maarifasasa Limited, reflected on his experience with Young Aurora: "Judging the Young Aurora submissions was an incredibly humbling and inspiring experience. The quality of the projects and the thoughtfulness behind each proposal reflect the power of young minds to drive positive change in the world. It's heartening to see such innovative and sustainable approaches to tackling real-world challenges, and I have no doubt that these students will continue to make a profound difference in their communities and beyond."

The 2024–2025 finalists were selected from 19 submissions across UWC schools and colleges, as well as the African Leadership Academy. Their proposals offer innovative solutions to local challenges identified by students, including support for migrant children in building community and confidence, enhancing home insulation and rural and underserved communities, and mitigating health risks associated with traditional cookstoves.

As the teams approach the competition's finale next month, they are diligently refining their presentations, with the aim of securing funds from Aurora that will allow them to bring their impactful initiatives to life.

## Dandelion Project — UWC Adriatic

Dandelion addresses the emotional and social needs of migrant children in elementary schools by providing tools for adaptation and integration. The project consists of picture books and interactive workshops designed with input from professionals in developmental psychology. These resources help children explore key topics independently, build confidence, and foster a sense of belonging while embracing their



From left, Teams from UWC Adriatic, UWC Dilijan, and UWC Mahindra College

identities. Initially launching in Trieste, Italy—a major migration hub where thousands of children struggle with identity and belonging—the project aims to provide essential mental health support and promote social inclusion.

Rawane, a member of the Dandelion Project, drew inspiration from a personal experience: "Migration goes far beyond the concept of a story or an experience for me; it's part of my DNA. Growing up in Morocco, I experienced what it feels like to move from an underprivileged area to the economic pulse of the nation. When I think of migrant children, I see emotional struggles that often go unnoticed, and that's where Dandelion comes in, offering the support needed to help them find a sense of belonging."

## TakToon Project — UWC Dilijan

TakToon, derived from the Armenian words for "warm" and "house," focuses on creating cost efficient insulation solutions for rural Armenian homes. By repurposing plastic and metallic waste for insulation,

the project not only helps vulnerable communities retain warmth but also promotes sustainable recycling practices. Addressing the urgent need for better insulation in aging homes, TakToon reduces both environmental impact and financial burdens on families. Through community education, this initiative fosters energy efficiency and improves living conditions.

Andrea from the TakToon Project notes: "In my first three months in Armenia, I experienced firsthand the harshness of the local temperatures. The difference between me and the local people made me reflect on how even small, often underestimated things can lead to enormous change. We don't want to bring unaffordable thermal insulation to the market; instead, we aim to create insulation that anyone can afford and improve the conditions of their home."

## The Chulha Project — UWC Mahindra College

The Chulha Project tackles the harmful effects of traditional mud cookstoves, known as chulhas, which produce toxic

smoke linked to serious health risks and contribute to deforestation through excessive firewood consumption. By introducing locally manufactured rocket stoves with J-shaped combustion chambers that reduce emissions by up to 86 percent and lower firewood usage by 50 percent, the project aims to protect women and children, who are most affected by indoor air pollution. Initially targeting 50 households in Maharashtra's Mulshi Valley, this scalable initiative intends to empower communities through training programs, sustainable stove production, and peer-driven advocacy for clean cooking solutions.

Leila, a Chulha Project team member, explains: "As the UWC Mahindra College community, we are tightly connected with villages around the college. I believe in our project, because this is a serious issue that hasn't been tackled before, and it would be a huge achievement for me if a problem that affects the health of these families was eradicated—I would love to give back to these villages as much as I can."

## Pashinyan Admits Receiving New Karabakh Peace Plan in 2019

PEACE PLAN, from page 1

The 2019 plan is understood to have been the last version of the Madrid Principles. Pashinyan denied its existence in December 2019.

Pashinyan admitted receiving it in June 2019 during his government's question-and-answer session in the Armenian parliament on February 13. He played down that fact, though.

"What was put on the table [at that time] was the result of negotiations that took place before me," Pashinyan said, answering a question from Agnesa Khamoyan of the opposition Hayastan alliance.

"You deceived Armenia's citizens by declaring that there is no document on the negotiating table," charged Khamoyan.

Pashinyan denied lying to Armenians, saying that "there was always a document on the negotiating table."

"Whether the document on the negotiating table was new or old, you hid it from Armenia's citizens," insisted the opposition lawmaker.

Pashinyan did not clarify whether he rejected the 2019 plan and, if so, why.

The Armenian premier has repeatedly criticized the Madrid Principles since the 2020 war. In particular, he claimed in 2021

that the US, Russian and French co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group sought a "surrender of lands" to Azerbaijan and offered the Armenian side nothing in return.

The then Russian co-chair of the group, Igor Popov, bluntly denied that in written comments posted on the Russian Foreign Ministry's website. He said Yerevan and

publicized the secretly recorded audio of a 2019 meeting during which Pashinyan said he opposes the plan because it would not immediately formalize Karabakh's secession from Azerbaijan. Pashinyan can also be heard saying that he is ready to "play the fool or look a bit insane" in order to avoid such a settlement.

In December 2024, Pashinyan doubled down on his strong criticism of the peace proposals jointly made by the United States, Russia and France, saying that they were all about "returning Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan."

Sargsyan and the two other former Armenian presidents — Levon Ter-Petrosian Robert Kocharyan — responded by accusing Pashinyan of continuing to distort

the history of the Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiation process. Ter-Petrosian also challenged the prime minister to publicize all peace plans put forward by the mediators from 1994 onwards along with Yerevan's official responses to them.

Pashinyan claimed he is ready to do that but that his administration has still not managed to find those documents. (This article originally appeared in OC-Media on February 17.)



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (R) meets with the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group in Yerevan, February 20, 2019.

Baku intensively negotiated on the proposed peace formula until Pashinyan's government "came up with new approaches" in 2018.

Popov argued that under the 2019 peace plan, Karabakh would have an internationally recognized interim status and retain control of two of the seven surrounding Azerbaijani districts pending the future referendum on its status.

In 2021, former President Serzh Sargsyan

## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL

Cybercriminals Arrested  
In Almaty, Yerevan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Police officers from Kazakhstan and Armenia detained a group of cybercriminals on February 18, [Sputnik Kazakhstan](#) reported, citing the country's Interior Ministry.

The operation involved specialists from the Cybercrime Counteraction Department of Kazakhstan's Interior Ministry and the General Department for Investigation of Particularly Important Cases of Armenia's Investigative Committee.

Authorities identified and apprehended the organizers and members of a transnational criminal group engaged in online fraud targeting citizens of Kazakhstan and European countries. The criminals lured victims into investing in allegedly large investment companies.

During their search, law enforcement officers seized more than 70 computers, approximately one kilogram of gold, five vehicles, \$30,000 in cash and a cold wallet containing cryptocurrency.

As part of the special operation, 41 members of the criminal group, including citizens of Armenia, Georgia, Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, were detained.

Minister of Territorial  
Administration Meets  
With EU Ambassador

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures Davit Khudatyan met with Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Armenia Ambassador Vassilis Maragos, on February 18.

Khudatyan lauded Maragos's work in all areas of cooperation with the ministry as part of the rich agenda between Armenia and the EU, the ministry said in a readout.

The course of implementation of several EU-funded projects carried out in collaboration with the ministry was discussed. The energy, road and water sectors were also discussed.

Historical Armenian Site  
Goes on Sale in Turkey

ISTANBUL (PanARMENIAN.Net) — A parcel of land that once belonged to an Armenian church has been put up for sale in Halfeti, Şanlıurfa, Turkey. On February 5, a real estate listing was posted online, stating that the property of the Armenian church and priest's house was available for 2.81 million Turkish lira (approximately \$77,500).

According to the listing, the land measures 904 square meters and has a building ownership certificate, as reported by Ermenihaber.

A Turkish resident living nearby mentioned that the area was once inhabited by Armenians, and the village had an Armenian church and a priest's house. He stated that Armenians left the village around 120 years ago, after which part of the church was converted into a mosque.

Another Azeri Accusation Against  
Ruben Vardanyan Revealed

By Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The long list of accusations leveled by Azerbaijan against Armenian businessman and philanthropist Ruben Vardanyan includes a plot to assassinate Azerbaijani diplomats serving abroad.

Azerbaijani government-controlled media outlets revealed the extraordinary charge in their coverage of February 13<sup>th</sup>'s court hearing in Vardanyan's ongoing trial in Baku. They reported no evidence in support of it. They cited an Azerbaijani prosecutor as comparing the alleged plot to the assassinations by Armenian activists of masterminds and perpetrators of the 1915 Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey.

Mesrop Arakelyan, a leader of an Armenian opposition party linked to Vardanyan, said on Friday, February 14, that this accusation is just as "laughable" as the others.

"It is obvious that all of Azerbaijan's accusations are from the genre of fantasy," Arakelian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

Vardanyan, who held the second-highest post in Nagorno-Karabakh's leadership from November 2022 to February 2023,

was arrested at an Azerbaijani checkpoint in the Lachin corridor in September 2023 as he fled the region along with tens of thousands of its ordinary residents displaced by an Azerbaijani offensive. He was initially charged with "financing terrorism," illegally entering Karabakh and supplying its armed forces with military equipment.

Vardanyan said last month he is now facing as many as 42 charges. In a statement circulated via his Yerevan-based family, he rejected them as politically motivated and accused Azerbaijani authorities of attributing false testimony to him.

An Azerbaijani military court began the simultaneous trials of Vardanyan and 15 Karabakh Armenians on January 17. The defendants include three former Karabakh presidents -- Arayik Harutyunyan, Bako Sahakian and Arkadi Ghukasyan. They too were captured by Azerbaijan during or shortly after its September 2023 military offensive that forced Karabakh's entire population to flee to Armenia and restored Azerbaijani control over the region.

In contrast with an outpouring of support for the captives voiced by prominent public figures in Armenia and its worldwide Diaspora, the Armenian government pointedly declined to condemn the trials. Prime

Minister Nikol Pashinyan claimed later in January that an explicit condemnation would only harm them. Pashinyan's critics insisted that he is simply afraid of angering Baku.

Vardanyan's American lawyer, Jared Genser, said, meanwhile, that the Armenian government is doing little to try to secure the release of his client and the other former Karabakh leaders.

"It doesn't seem from what I've heard that bringing Ruben or others home is an especially high priority [for Pashinyan's government,]" Genser told the Armenian Report.

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

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

Police Storm City Hall, Detain 127 as Turkey  
Removes Another Kurdish Mayor from Office

STOCKHOLM (Stockholm Center for Freedom) — The Turkish government on February 15 removed a Kurdish mayor from office in the eastern province of Van following a terrorism conviction, appointing the governor as trustee in his place, after which police stormed city hall at dawn, using tear gas and rubber bullets against protesters and detaining 127 people, Turkish Minute reported.

The Interior Ministry announced the decision early Saturday, stating that Van Province Governor Ozan Balci had been appointed as a trustee to run the municipality instead of Van Mayor Abdullah Zeydan, due to a court ruling sentencing the latter to more than three years in prison on charges of aiding a terrorist organization.

Zeydan, a member of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party), had won the March 31, 2024, local elections with 55 percent of the vote, defeating the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) candidate Abdulahat Arvas, who received 27 percent.

At 4 a.m. local time on Saturday, police raided Van city hall following the appointment of Balci to replace Zeydan. Officers used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse protesters gathered outside the building. A total of 127 people, including six journalists, were detained during the operation.

The DEM Party, which has 57 seats in the 600-seat parliament, called the government's move a "blatant usurpation of the people's will."

Since the March 2024 local elections, eight mayors from the DEM Party and two from the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) have been removed from office in Turkey over terrorism-related allegations. Additionally, another CHP mayor was arrested on charges of manipulating public tenders.

Zeydan, previously a member of parliament for Hakkari, was first arrested in 2016 during a wave of detentions targeting lawmakers from the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the predecessor of the DEM Party. Prosecutors accused him of aiding a terrorist organization and making statements praising the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), citing his participation in a 2015 protest in Hakkari's Yüksekova district. He was sentenced to eight years in prison but was released in 2022 after serving more than five years.

Following his election as mayor in 2024, Turkish authorities initially revoked his eligibility and awarded the mayorship to the AKP's Arvas. This move led to widespread protests, after which the Supreme Election Council (YSK) reversed the decision and reinstated Zeydan as mayor.

The new legal action against Zeydan resulted in a renewed push by the government to remove him from office. The Interior Ministry cited the court ruling as justification, stating that Zeydan's conviction rendered him ineligible to serve.

Zeydan protested the decision, calling it a "theft of the people's will" and declaring that "the coup plotters will lose, the people will win." His party condemned the appointment of a state official as mayor, urging civil society groups and opposition parties to take a stand against what they see as an anti-democratic crackdown.

The CHP also denounced the move, with İstanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu linking it to the AKP government's frustration over losing key municipalities in the 2024 elections. "This is a blow to the Kurdish people's right to vote and contradicts the so-called reconciliation efforts being proposed by the government," İmamoğlu said.

What İmamoğlu was referring to as reconciliation efforts are renewed discussions

about a potential peace between the Turkish government and the PKK, with imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan playing a key role in negotiations after years of isolation. While President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has called this a "historic window of opportunity," ongoing crackdowns on Kurdish politicians, including trustee appointments in pro-Kurdish municipalities, raise questions about the government's commitment to political reconciliation.

The removal of Zeydan as Van's mayor is part of a broader pattern of government-appointed trustees replacing elected opposition officials in Turkey, a practice that has drawn international condemnation.

The European Parliament on Thursday, February 13, passed a resolution condemning these dismissals and calling for sanctions, including asset freezes and travel bans, on Turkish officials responsible for removing opposition mayors and undermining local democracy.

Lawmakers in Strasbourg described the trustee appointments as a clear violation of democratic principles and urged judicial reforms to abolish the practice.

Since the 2016 coup attempt, more than 100 municipalities — predominantly those governed by pro-Kurdish parties — have been placed under trustee control, with critics arguing that the government is using terrorism-related charges as a pretext to suppress political opposition. The European Union is facing growing pressure to take diplomatic and economic measures against Turkish authorities to uphold democratic norms and protect electoral integrity.

The repeated appointment of trustees in Kurdish-majority regions has also drawn criticism from human rights organizations, which argue that it undermines democracy and disenfranchises Kurdish voters.



## INTERNATIONAL

# Senior Armenian Lawmaker Praises Ukrainian Colleagues

By Gayane Saribekian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Amid Armenia's lingering tensions with Russia, a senior lawmaker representing Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's party has visited Ukraine and praised his Ukrainian colleagues for their work in the face of "difficult conditions."

Sargis Khandanyan, the chairman of the Armenian parliament's committee on foreign relations, traveled to Kyiv earlier this week to attend a meeting of the leadership of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly. He became the first member of the National Assembly to visit the country since its 2022 invasion by Russia.

The parliament's press office reported on Friday that Khandanyan also held a separate meeting with Ukrainian parliament speaker Ruslan Stefanchuk.

"On behalf of the National Assembly of

Armenia, Sargis Khandanyan expressed support for his colleagues in the Supreme Rada of Ukraine for their courageous activities in difficult conditions for the country and emphasized the importance of working together on interparliamentary platforms," it said in a statement.

The two opposition groups represented in the Armenian parliament are unlikely to endorse that statement, having repeatedly criticized Pashinyan's policy on Russia as reckless. They may also criticize Khandanyan for visiting, together with other members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Bureau, the nearby town of Bucha and laying flowers at a memorial to local residents killed shortly after the Russian invasion.

Bucha has been a stop for international visitors to Ukraine because of atrocities committed against its civilian residents in February and March 2022. Moscow denies accusations of executions, rapes and tor-

ture by Russian troops that occupied the town for 33 days.

Armenia's ambassador to Ukraine and a local government official from Yerevan visited Bucha and made pro-Ukrainian statements there last May. The Russian Foreign Ministry protested against the "overtly unfriendly step on the part of official Yerevan."

Pashinyan criticized Russia's military campaign in Ukraine during a February 2024 visit to Germany, underscoring Yerevan's deepening rift with Moscow. A key member of his political team, parliament speaker Alen Simonian, said afterwards that Armenia "firmly supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine." Moscow condemned Simonian's statement, demanding an explanation from the Armenian parliament.

Pashinyan embarked on the apparent rapprochement with Ukraine in 2023 despite Kyiv's strong support for Azerbaijan

in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Hakob Badalyan, an Armenian political analyst, pointed to that support when he questioned the wisdom of Khandanyan's trip to Ukraine. He downplayed the fact that Stefanchuk voiced, according to the Armenian parliament, "unconditional support" for Armenia's territorial integrity.

"Does Ukraine think that Azerbaijan occupied Armenian territory?" Badalyan told RFE/RL's Armenian Service. "Ukraine has a very close relationship with Azerbaijan. Ukraine welcomed the results of the Azerbaijani aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh. So when Armenian delegations participate in such meetings, hail Ukraine's courage and so on, this really causes bewilderment."

"The question is not Ukraine," he said. "The question is whether Armenia's objective interests and goals are part of the picture and how productively they are served."

## Nubar Afeyan Joins Pashinyan at Munich Conference

MUNICH, Germany — On February 14, Dr. Nubar Afeyan participated along with Nikol Pashinyan in the Armenian Practical Policy Research Institute (APRI Armenia) and Observer RE foundation's breakfast table entitled "Minilateralism and Transition from Global Alliances to Target Partners," organized jointly by the two foundations, during the security Conference here.

Earlier, Afeyan attended the annual Munich Security Conference.

The event discussed changes in the security environment in the modern world, the effectiveness of large formal alliances, and small-scale cooperation. It continued in a closed format.

In his speech, Pashinyan outlined Armenia's consistent policy of strengthening ballooned and ballooning foreign policy,

that the construction of flexible but predictable and reliable partnerships is of special importance for Armenia's security and sustainable development.

Pashinyan stated that Armenia's foreign policy is intended to strengthen the

security and economic development of the country through constructive cooperation with international partners. Pashinyan also reflected on the key priorities of the government— steps to establish regional peace and the Crossroads of Peace Project.



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz

### Germany Ready to Continue Supporting Armenia's Peace Efforts

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz within the framework of the Munich Security Conference, on February 15.

Prime Minister Pashinyan wished good health to those injured in the recent incident in Munich.

During the meeting, the parties discussed the agenda of Armenia-Germany bilateral relations and the prospects for deepening multi-sectoral cooperation.

Pashinyan stressed the importance of the expansion of bilateral ties and the activation of trade and economic ties.

The interlocutors also touched upon issues of regional security and stability.

Prime Minister Pashinyan presented the Armenian Government's efforts to establish peace in the region, in that context providing details of the "Crossroads of Peace" initiative based on the principles of sovereignty, jurisdiction, equality and reciprocity, as well as developments in the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process.

Chancellor Scholz, in turn, noted that Germany is ready to continue supporting Armenia's democratic reform agenda, as well as the steps towards establishing peace.

At the end of the meeting, the parties reaffirmed their readiness to deepen cooperation and emphasized the importance of continuing bilateral political dialogue.



Dr. Nubar Afeyan and Pashinyan entering the Munich Security Conference.



Dr. Nubar Afeyan at the breakfast session

### Armenia Vows to 'Refute' Azerbaijan's Arbitration Accusation Of Environmental Damage in Karabakh

ARBITRATION, from page 1

Mirgadirov added that he believed that such claims can be resolved peacefully, either through a court verdict or the mutual renunciation of claims.

On February 10, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan published an article reiterating previous calls for the signing of a peace treaty based on already agreed upon articles, which he said was "sufficiently weighty and mature for signing."

Earlier in February, Pashinyan also said that his government was not against dropping legal cases against Azerbaijan, "but

our proposal is not only to call back these complaints, but also not raise these issues in bilateral relations."

"Otherwise, a strange situation may arise when, for example, an issue is called back from an international institution, but one of the parties tries to put this issue on the table in bilateral relations and one of the parties could use this issue to provoke an escalation. In that case, it will no longer be possible to transfer this issue to international institutions," Pashinyan said.

(This article originally appeared on OC Media on February 17.)



# Community News

## From AUA to Harvard Law School on Full Scholarship

By Alin K. Gregorian  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Harvard Law School is one of the world's most selective law schools, with an acceptance rate of around 7.5 percent. Those odds did not deter Anahit Melkonyan, a student then at the American University of Armenia (AUA). In fact, not only was she accepted, but with a full scholarship.

Melkonyan, 23, started in September and is acclimating well to life in Cambridge.

In an interview, Melkonyan, speaking flawless English, spoke about her journey from Yerevan to Cambridge and many of her stops in between.

While this is her first time in Massachusetts, she had been to the US before. In 2021, she was an exchange student for a semester at Old Dominion University in Virginia, through



Anahit Melkonyan

the State Department's Global Undergraduate Exchange Program, the undergraduate version of the Fulbright Scholarship. She was one of three Armenian students selected.

"It was life changing. My roommate was Polish. I visited Poland and she visited Armenia. We developed bonds way after our studies finished," Melkonyan said.

At AUA, she majored in business with a minor in philosophy, politics and economics. Once she finished her exchange program and returned to Armenia, she started working at the Central Bank of Armenia in addition to attending classes. She served as part of the financial sector regulations team with a focus on insurance.

"We were reviewing the laws written by the government or we were suggesting laws and regulations for the market. Since I was an econ major, I was doing impact analysis. I was trying to calculate the effect on the economy on any of these laws," she explained. "This forced me — encouraged me — to go to law school, because I knew I could do all this data-driven analysis and I wanted them not to just be on paper. I wanted the law education to empower me to turn them into actual laws and policy."

see MELKONIAN, page 7



Rep. Judy Chu (D-Ca), with State Sen. Sasha Renée Pérez (with scarf) and others tour the burned out Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School.

## Rep. Chu and State Sen. Pérez Reaffirm Support for Rebuilding Sahag Mesrob School After Eaton Fire

ALTADENA, Calif. — Last week, at an event organized by the Armenian National Committee of America - Western Region (ANCA-WR), Rep. Judy Chu (CA-28) and State Sen. Sasha Renée Pérez (CA-25) stood in unity with the Armenian-American community to reaffirm their unwavering commitment to rebuilding the Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School after it suffered severe damage in last month's devastating Eaton Fire. Recognizing the school's historical and cultural significance, the two elected officials pledged their full support to ensure its swift restoration, emphasizing the vital role it plays in preserving Armenian heritage and providing quality education to the community and future generations. Aida Dimedjian from the ANCA National board and Oshin Harootonian Chairman of Western Region Board accompanied by board member Lara Yeretsian were present, along with Armenian Assembly of America's Talin Yacoubian and AGBU Western Region Chair Kev Zoryan.

Chu highlighted her efforts to secure federal support for disaster recovery, stating, "I am trying to ensure that we have a disaster aid bill that will help meaningfully with the recovery. This nation has provided disaster aid to every major disaster throughout its history without conditions, and that's precisely what I'm pushing for."

Pérez echoed these sentiments and reaffirmed her commitment to advocating for the school at the state level, stating, "This has been an eye opening experience here today, to see how much of an important pillar this establishment is for the Armenian-American community that's been around for more than 45 years. In Sacramento, some of the discussions I am having — as both state senator and Chair of the Senate Education Committee — are about how to rebuild these schools as fast as possible, since most of these have to go through a different process since they are charter schools and non-profit institutions."

Oshin Harootonian, Chair of the Armenian National Committee of America - Western Region (ANCA-WR), recently met with California Governor Gavin Newsom to discuss the urgent need for state assistance in rebuilding Sahag-see REBUILD, page 10



Rep. Judy Chu, at left, with State Sen. Sasha Renée Pérez

## Greg Vartan Launches Congressional Campaign

*Poised to Become the Only Armenian-American in Congress*

SUMMIT, N.J. — Last week, Greg Vartan launched his campaign for New Jersey's 7th Congressional District with a standing-room-only crowd at Pizza Vita in Summit. If elected, Vartan — a former Summit Council President and EMT — would be the only Armenian-American in Congress, providing the representation the community has lacked at a critical moment for Armenia and Artsakh.

"The Armenian-American community has always fought for justice, security, and recognition, but we lack representation in Washington," said Vartan. "I will work across the aisle to protect Armenia and Artsakh, strengthen U.S.-Armenia partnerships, secure justice for the Arme-



Greg Vartan

nian Genocide, and ensure the United States stands firm against threats to our homeland."

Vartan's campaign launch was attended by local leaders who emphasized the high stakes of the 2026 election. He pointed out the urgency of dealing with the administration's dangerous and illegal actions first, criticizing incumbent Tom Kean Jr. for his inaccessibility to constituents and unwillingness to stand up to his party leadership.

"As Armenian-Americans, we know the cost of silence," Vartan added. "I will be a relentless advocate — not just for our community, but for all who believe in freedom, democracy, and human rights."

Vartan said he is running for Congress because he sees rising costs and extremism in Washington threatening the way of life in his district. He believes the American dream — including the promise of homeownership — should be within reach for more families. With the country and democracy at a turning point, Vartan says Congress needs leaders who prioritize their constituents over themselves. He pledges to protect what makes local neighborhoods great places to live — proximity to good jobs and vibrant communities

see CAMPAIGN, page 7



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# From AUA to Harvard Law School on Full Scholarship

MELKONIAN, from page 6

Her undergraduate years coincided with the terrible Karabakh war. When the war happened, she and a few classmates studying data science at AUA, through the university's EPIC (Entrepreneurship and Product Innovation Center) created a start-up called Grandma to detect hate speech in response to the relentless Azerbaijani social media attacks on Armenia, Armenians and Karabakh (Artsakh). "We participated in a United Nations office on drugs and crime incubation as well. We were the winners from Armenia. We were also the speakers on the UN convection for crime and criminal justice," she noted.

Her next trip to the US, in 2023, taught her a lot but also changed her. "We visited Silicon Valley [in California] with AUA professors and visited successful startups. It was an interesting journey and taught me to dream big."

Part of that dreaming big was where to apply for law school, and she decided to give Harvard a try.

Certainly getting into Harvard Law School is one battle, but paying for it is another. This year, the cost of attending, including tuition plus housing and incidentals, adds up to around \$118,000, eye-watering for most US residents, much less for those from Armenia.

The application is need blind, she said. So, she took her LSATs and submitted the scores, as well as recommendation letters from her professors at AUA and Old Dominion.

The scholarship made her feel "relieved." She added, "I was lucky that previously the scholarship was limited to a certain amount but when I applied they had instituted this new program called 'Opportunity Scholarship.' It just shows how education is an equalizer in society, how you can come from different backgrounds and can attend Harvard."



Anahit Melkonyan at Harvard Law School

First year of law school is general, but in second and third year, students can choose specialization.

She is considering concentrating on constitutional law. "The program I am in, JD, teaches US law. I want to study the US constitution and learn all the benefits it provides to Americans and if I have a chance to help countries like Armenia to rewrite the laws in a way that would give them the opportunity.

"I plan to work for some years in the US and then in Armenia. I want to contribute to my university, if I could have a teaching position," she said. During her undergraduate years, she was a teaching associate teaching business math.

"I hope to have that opportunity again after to share my knowledge," she added.

"I studied at AUA, which has West-

ern-style education. I wouldn't say I had difficulty when I started. I was already informed. We have a lot of Armenians at Harvard. The Armenian community is huge in Boston, at the University and other programs and it also helped to adjust."

She added, "I want to acknowledge the importance of the Armenian community. It didn't take me much time or effort to discover many connections and friendships among Armenians in Boston. I got involved with the Armenian Law School Association of Harvard, through which we

had a chance to invite Armen Tatoyan to Harvard Law School and raise issues and awareness among the university members. Additionally, I was lucky to be selected as one of the scholars of the Armenian Bar Association of the United States, further connecting me with the diaspora. I try to get involved as much as possible, integrating the community in my daily or weekly habits, such as my visits to the Holy Trinity Armenian Church."

And just how is the workload? When asked if there was a lot to read, she replied with a laugh, "Yes, lots."

She is living with a roommate and is happy with her situation.

"When I came to Boston, I thought I would not meet many Armenians. I was initially in Watertown. I went to the bank to open an account and I could hear Armenian and asked the lady to open the account and the lady asked 'Hay es' and I saw there were Armenians all over," she said with amazement. "They are reaching out. I am very well connected with everyone. A lot of Armenian shops and restaurants."

Melkonyan is a third-generation Yerevan native. "All my origins are from Yerevan," she said.

She added, "I am a first-generation student. Neither of my parents attended college."

Her father is a warehouse manager while her mother does not work outside the home. She has one sister, aged 10.

She and her family, in the meantime, miss each other. "It's hard for them but they are very proud," she concluded.

## Greg Vartan Launches Congressional Campaign

CAMPAIGN, from page 6

— while ensuring affordability for families.

Vartan says he will stand up to Donald Trump, his own party, or anyone who

where his family has lived for four generations. Inspired by the strong sense of community around him, he began volunteering at a young age. In high school, he joined Summit's First Aid Squad, serving for 12



Greg Vartan at a recent fundraiser

threatens the people of the district. He plans to focus on lowering costs and taxes, protecting fundamental freedoms, and improving healthcare, education, and transportation.

With New Jersey's 7th District expected to be one of the most competitive races in the country, Vartan's deep roots and record of public service make him a strong contender to flip the seat — and give Armenian-Americans a powerful voice in Washington.

Vartan is a lifelong resident of Summit,

years, and later became the youngest president of the Summit Common Council.

Vartan's parents worked hard to provide for their family. His father is employed by Guardian Life, and his mother is the secretary at Jefferson Elementary School, which Vartan, his siblings, parents and grandfather all attended. Vartan was the first in his family to graduate from college, where he met his wife, Megan, who now works for the Community Food Bank of New Jersey.

For more information, visit [www.greg-vartan.com](http://www.greg-vartan.com).



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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Oscar Tatosian and Talin Yacoubian Elected as New Assembly Co-Chairs at Florida Gathering

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) hosted a special event that included a briefing for Assembly Members and guests on Saturday, February 1, 2025, in Naples, Florida. The Assembly's National Board Meeting took place in conjunction with the special event, where Oscar Tatosian and Talin Yacoubian were elected as the Assembly's new Co-Chairs. Tatosian and Yacoubian previously served as Co-Chairs-elect in 2024.

Longtime Assembly Board Members Tatosian, president of Oscar Isberian Rugs, and Yacoubian, a partner and founding member of Yacoubian & Power LLP, expressed their commitment to the organization and the Armenian people throughout the weekend. Their professional experiences and personal involvement in the Armenian diaspora and homeland positions them to successfully lead the Assembly towards the future.

Yacoubian served as the co-chair of the Armenian Genocide Centennial Commemorative Committee in 2015, where she spearheaded a peaceful march numbering 160,000 in Los Angeles. She is a Board of Trustee Member of the Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center and served as the AGBU Western District Chair from 2015-2020. Yacoubian also teaches Legal Writing and Advocacy at USC Gould School of Law.

Tatosian's service to the community includes as Chair of the Eastern Diocese's Diocesan Council, Member of the Eastern Diocese's Board of Trustees, Board Mem-

ber of St. Nersess Seminary, and Board Member of Fund For Armenian Relief, in addition to his service in his hometown of Chicago as President of the Auxiliary Guild Board of The Lyric Opera of Chicago and Member of the Auxiliary Board of The Art Institute of Chicago.

In addition to the election of Yacoubian and Tatosian during the Assembly's National Board Meeting, the following officers were elected: Bianka Kadian-Dodov as treasurer, Lisa Kalustian as secretary, and Valina Agbabian as assistant secretary.

Board President Carolyn Mugar was named president emeritus, and former Assembly Co-Chairs Van Krikorian and Anthony Barsamian were named chair emeritus and immediate past co-chair, respectively.

A discussion featuring Ambassador Edward Djerejian commenced the weekend, as he shared reflections on his career as an American diplomat with Armenian origins. As a child of Armenian Genocide survivor parents, Ambassador Djerejian discussed feeling a sense of responsibility that led him to join the U.S. Foreign Service, where he served under eight Presidents, spanning from John F. Kennedy to Bill Clinton, followed by his service as U.S. Ambassador to Syria and Israel. He reflected on Armenia's current state and political realities, noting that Armenia must improve relations with its neighbors and regional players, as well as the U.S., while protecting its identity, religion, culture, and democracy. Ambassador Djerejian, who is currently Senior Fellow at



New Assembly Co-Chairs Talin Yacoubian and Oscar Tatosian

Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, also elaborated on the new U.S. government and Congressional leadership, and its potential impact on Armenian issues.

The briefing portion was led by Assembly Congressional Relations Director Mariam Khaloyan and Assembly Director of Research and Analysis Robert Avetisyan, who spoke about the Assembly's 2025 priorities, programs and activities - particularly advocacy and education - the importance of activism, and the methods in which to

participate, including the Assembly's upcoming Advocacy Summit from March 31, 2025 through April 2, 2025, and the Assembly's flagship Terjenian-Thomas Internship Program in Washington, D.C., and Summer Internship Program in Yerevan.

The Armenia Tree Project's Tom Garabedian presented the organization's highlights, as well a brief report of activities and achievements.

Tatosian expressed how he was inspired by the "depth of commitment" of the participants during the briefing session, as "individuals of various generations expressed their interest in supporting Armenia and its development."

"I'm personally excited for the upcoming year ahead, working together with individuals and organizations to further the mission and support Armenia," he said.

The evening's program included remarks by Krikorian and Barsamian, and Tatosian and Yacoubian. The special event concluded with a dinner and an evening of Armenian music with the Mal Barsamian Band.

"In Naples, Florida, I had the privilege of witnessing a passionate gathering of Armenian Americans, united by a shared commitment to strengthening our diaspora, enhancing Armenian-American relations, and advancing the Armenian cause," said Yacoubian. "Their enthusiasm and dedication to coalesce around the Armenian Assembly's efforts reaffirmed the power of unity in shaping a stronger, more connected Armenian future. This gathering was more than just a meeting — it was a testament to the enduring spirit of our people and the collective will to preserve, promote, and elevate the Armenian identity on a global stage."



(l-r) Former Assembly Co-Chair Van Krikorian, Assembly Board Member Annie Totah, former Assembly Co-Chair Anthony Barsamian, Assembly Co-Chairs Talin Yacoubian and Oscar Tatosian, Assembly Board Members Lisa Kalustian, Valina Agbabian, Herman Purutyan, and Lu Ann Ohanian



Ambassador Edward Djerejian



Assembly Congressional Director Mariam Khaloyan and Assembly Director of Research and Analysis Robert Avetisyan







## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Hagopian Family Part of Detroit Community

OAK PARK, Mich. — The Hagopian Family of Companies encompasses Hagopian & Sons, Inc., Hagopian World of Rugs, Inc., Hagopian Cleaning Services, Inc. and the Ghiordes Knot in the Michigan Design Center. Their name has long been associated in this area with carpet cleaning (call The Purple Truck) and fine Oriental and area rugs.

Hagopian has been a “brick and mortar” merchant in the metro Detroit area for 86 years with a presence in several communities. They continue a legacy

of community involvement and giving started by the founder and their grandfather, Haroutun Hagopian, and support numerous local charitable and cultural organizations. Their philanthropic efforts in the community are well known. Hagopian World of Rugs is a major benefactor to the Detroit Institute of Art, a benefactor to WTVS, Detroit Public TV, and has worked with the Founders Society to raise moneys to support the arts.

Now third-generation owners Suzanne Hagopian, her sister Angela Hagopian Snow, and her brother Edmond Hagopian

continue to support and promote the cultural arts and educational endeavors. Projects include hosting for the last 25+ years the Detroit Chamber Winds Night Notes concerts in the Birmingham showroom (6 concerts per year), bringing fine musicians and performers to a local venue at a nominal cost to the public. Attendance at these concerts averages 100+ and the concerts have been an unmitigated success. All proceeds from these events support the programs of Detroit Chamber Winds.



From left, Angela Hagopian Snow, Edmond Hagopian and Suzanne Hagopian

The Hagopian commitment to education continues with their long-term collaboration with the prestigious College for Creative Studies on an annual student rug design competition. The competition started by their father, Edgar Hagopian, was designed to encourage and motivate students and encourage interest in textile design. In 2025 Hagopian World of Rugs will sponsor their 36th annual competition, making it the longest corporate collaboration on record with the College. For the competition three designs (1st, 2nd, 3rd) are chosen each year by a panel of judges

## Seminary Announces the Launch of its New Microsite, St. Nersess Online

ARMONK, N.Y. — St. Nersess Armenian Seminary has launched a new microsite, [online.stnersess.edu](http://online.stnersess.edu), which includes the new St. Nersess Preaching Program. It has been designed to enrich and deepen the experience of preaching preparation and delivery for clergy of the Eastern and Western Dioceses of the Armenian Church in America.

Over the next four years, modern preaching tools paired with traditional Armenian homiletic methods will be added to the website. Clergy will also have the option to experience a preaching module in person by attending workshops and seminars in either the Eastern or Western Dioceses. This opportunity will be available until 2028 when all modules will be completed, and the program will be fully online.

Also available on the microsite is a new platform called Karoz — a growing online treasury of homilies selected from among the writings of classical and medieval Armenian fathers. Many of these are appearing here for the first time since they were originally written. All are in English translation, with the option to access the sermons in classical Armenian. The inaugural offering includes five homilies for the Lenten season, and new seasonal homilies will be added regularly.

Clergy of the Eastern and Western Dioceses will be able to register at no cost with a special code they will receive to access the preaching modules and Karoz collection (a \$500 program). They can choose one of two pathways: to complete optional assignments and commence a full, non-degree preaching certification process, or to follow the program in a more informal manner, without the goal of certification.

St. Nersess Armenian Seminary has long dreamed of extending its reach beyond its campus. Funded by the Lilly Endowment’s Compelling Preaching Grant, St. Nersess Online offers learning opportunities to a wider audience, on more topics and in more formats than the seminary can possibly create in person. All clergy are warmly invited to make use of the St. Nersess Online resources for spiritual nourishment and life-long learning.

es from the local design community and winners are awarded scholarships. The first place design is produced as a rug and displayed at the annual Student Exhibition. A similar competition was started in 2015 with the Henry Ford Academy for middle and high school students and has proven to be a mutually rewarding collaboration.

Over the years Hagopian has hosted lectures on the history of rugs and their use

as a design element for local university interior design classes. The showroom has also been host to a long list of local and renowned authors for book signings open to the public. Long known as a friend to the cultural community, Hagopian World of Rugs has loaned rugs for local theatre and musical productions including for Michelle Obama’s book tour appearance at LCA in metro Detroit.

In the 2024 donors list of the **Sponsor A Teacher Program** published in the February 8 issue, the correct contribution should read as follows:  
Dr. Charles and Manoushag Garabedian of Shrewsbury, MA, \$480.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS



Round table meeting at AGBU Western Region with Governor Gavin Newsom

## AGBU Welcomes Governor Gavin Newsom to its Pasadena Center to Discuss Wildfire Recovery Efforts

LOS ANGELES — On February 11, California Gov. Gavin Newsom, First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom and members of their team met with leadership from the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Western Region and the Sahag Mesrob Armenian Christian School (SMACS), along with other Armenian community figures. The purpose was to discuss the state of California's support for the ongoing recovery from the devastating Los Angeles wildfires of this past January.

Representing AGBU were Director of AGBU Western Region Gohar Stambolyan, Chair of AGBU Western Region Kevork Zoryan, and Board Member of AGBU Manogian-Demirdjian School Serge Sinanian. His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian of the Western Diocese was also in attendance to reinforce the importance of preserving access to quality Armenian education for future generations.

Stambolyan welcomed the Governor and his team with expressions of appreciation, saying that the visit was a testament the power of community and collective resilience.

“At AGBU, community and togetherness are at the heart of everything we do, and we remain dedicated to our ongoing humanitarian efforts to ensure that every child has access to education and stability in times of uncertainty,” she stated.

It was also an opportunity for AGBU to highlight its swift and decisive response in facilitating the temporary transfer of students from SMACS to AGBU Pasadena Center, thus ensuring educational continuity despite the loss of the SMACS campus during the Eaton wildfire. At the same time, the Governor was briefed on the broader work of AGBU and its involvement in humanitarian initiatives in times of crisis, as part of its century-old mission to uplift Armenian lives worldwide.

In turn, Newsom engaged directly with the faculty and community members, listened to their stories, and ad-



Representatives and leaders of the local Armenian community with California Governor Gavin Newsom and First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom.

ressed their concerns. He also touched upon initiatives undertaken by the state designed to ease the burdens of impacted communities. Accelerating rebuilding efforts, alleviating onerous paperwork and cutting red tape, offering financial and tax relief, and preventing price gouging were some of the various actions already in place.

AGBU Western Region Chair, Kevork Zoryan assured

the Governor that AGBU remains committed to working with state and local officials to ensure a sustainable path forward for Sahag Mesrob Armenian Christian School, as well as the broader community. “AGBU is truly grateful to Governor Newsom and his team for their engagement and willingness to support our community during this critical time,” he said.

### *Rep. Chu and State Sen. Pérez Reaffirm Support for Rebuilding Sahag Mesrob School After Eaton Fire*

REBUILD, from page 6

Mesrob, highlighting the importance of swift action to support the students and families affected by the fire.

“We deeply appreciate the leadership of Congresswoman Chu and Senator Pérez in standing with our community, and we look forward to working together to rebuild stronger than ever,” said Harootyan. “Their support reinforces the conversations we had with Governor Newsom just days ago and strengthens our push for immediate state assistance in this critical effort.”

Both Chu and Pérez committed to taking further action by returning to their respective offices to do whatever is necessary to initiate the cleanup process and accelerate

rebuilding efforts. They pledged to work with local, state, and federal agencies to secure the necessary support and resources to ensure that Sahag-Mesrob can once again serve its students and the broader Armenian-American community.

Vache Euredjian, Vice-Chair of the school board, stressed the importance of working with all levels of government to rebuild Sahag-Mesrob and bring its students back to their cherished home.

“At this point, the board of Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School, needs local, state, county and federal support to be able to reconstruct this historic establishment, and be able to serve the Armenian-American com-

munity once more with the education we’ve been providing for more than 45 years,” said Euredjian.

For decades, Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Christian School has been a cornerstone of the Armenian-American community in Southern California, serving as an educational institution dedicated to fostering academic excellence while strengthening cultural identity. The Eaton Fire left the school’s campus destroyed, displacing students, teachers, and staff and creating uncertainty about its future. However, the Armenian-American community has rallied together with steadfast resolve, and with the backing of leaders like Congresswoman Chu and Senator Pérez, efforts to rebuild the school are gaining momentum.



Tekeyan Cultural Association  
Boston Chapter  
presents

“Remnants”: Armenian Genocide  
April 11 Lecture

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



with author **Elyse Semerdjian**

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

7 p.m. Friday at the Baikar Center

755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, MA

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



# Arts & Culture

## Books

### ‘Take Me Home:’ Nancy Kricorian’s *The Burning Heart Of The World*

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Mountains, create a breeze,  
Find peace for my soul,  
Take me to my home,  
Take me home, take me home.  
Lyoka

Even when the return is to unlivable conditions with no protection from any type of law, displaced people returning home is something to celebrate. The connection one has to one’s roots and the yearning to go back to those roots seems to almost define who we are. Much art has been inspired by the pain of the separation from one’s native land. The narrator in Nigoghos Sarafian’s *The Bois de Vincennes*, “homeless and alone” in an alien land, longs for the beauty and the truth that perhaps only one’s homeland can give. The speaker in Lory Bedikan’s poems knows that Mother’s Aleppo cannot be saved, even though going back to the “once upon a time” seems to be the only way out of the “hell” of their “new world.” It is the uniqueness of this connection that Nancy Kricorian brings to life in her latest novel, *The Burning Heart of The World* (Red Hen Press, 2024).

*The Burning Heart of The World* opens with the grandchildren dozing in their grandmother’s lap in the car on their way to the mountains in Lebanon. As a little girl, *Medzmama* had been driven out of her small Anatolian hometown of Hadjin, a town perched on the Toros mountains of Cilicia, in the Ottoman empire, following the mass deportation orders for Armenians from their millennia-old homes during the 1915-1921 Armenian Genocide. *Medzmama* entertains her grandchildren with stories of *Gar ou chigar* of a girl in Hadjin, named Sosi after the plane trees that were worshipped by Armenians since ancient times. Sosi loved nature. She loved the wildflowers, the trees and the animals of the forest. She especially loved birds which the *Hadjintsis* believed to have magical properties. Indeed, on the deportation route in the Syrian desert Sosi converses with the White Dove her grandma had set free after purchasing it at the market in Hadjin. And just as the bird had prophesied, the little girl survives the Death March and “lives to be an old woman with many grandchildren.”

These stories imbue the novel with the spirit of Armenian folktales which do, in fact, start with *Gar ou Chigar*; there was and there was not. “Through its folktales we can readily recognize the character of a whole nation,” writes Artashes Nazinian, director of the Folklore Section of the see KRICORIAN, page 13



Arshile Gorky painting at his sister Akabi’s house on Dexter Avenue in Watertown, c. 1922. (Unknown photographer. Collection of the Arshile Gorky Foundation).

## East Watertown Intersection To be Named for Armenian Immigrant and Artist Arshile Gorky

By Charlie Breitrose

WATERTOWN (Watertown News) — An intersection in East Watertown will be named in honor of an Armenian artist who made his home in Watertown for several years.

On Tuesday, February 11, the City Council voted to name the intersection of Dexter Avenue and Hazel Street for Arshile Gorky.

The City of Watertown’s website includes the following details of his life: “After surviving the 1915 Armenian genocide and its aftermath, Gorky arrived in Watertown in February 1920 as part of a third wave of Armenians immigrants arriving in the United States to escape persecution. He lived in Watertown with his sisters until late 1924 to early 1925, when he moved to New York City. Gorky’s impact on art history and his continued influence on contemporary art cannot be overstated. Watertown has long been a haven for Armenian immigrants and the East End of Watertown, where Gorky lived, is proud to be the home of several Armenian art and cultural organizations.”

The request to name the intersection for Gorky came from members of a working group for the “100 Years of Arshile Gorky” celebration. The Working Group includes Watertown’s Public Arts & Culture Planner Liz Helfer, resident Jack Dargon, and representatives of the Armenian Museum of America, the Mosesian Center for the Arts and the Historical Society of Watertown.

The proposal first went to the Council’s Committee on Public Works on February 3, which voted 3-0 in support of naming the intersection for Gorky.

During the committee meeting, Helfer said the proposal is to mark the intersection with a pole and plaque similar to those used to name an intersection for a veteran. Gorky would also be honored with two plaques placed near the homes where he and his family lived while they were in Watertown (86 Dexter Ave. and 14 Coolidge Hill Road), Helfer told the Public Works Committee.

When the proposal first came to the Council in October 2024, the location of the plaque was at Artsakh Street and Elton Avenue, but after receiving feedback from the Armenian community it was changed to Dexter and Hazel, which they said was more appropriate, according to the committee report.

Members of the Public Works Committee had some concerns that the request did not align with the City’s Naming Policy for Squares and Intersections for Non-Veterans. The Committee report notes that were other concerns, but the Public Works Committee ultimately supported the proposal.

“In addition there was concern that Mr. Gorky’s stay in Watertown was very short and there are other luminaries who have connections with Watertown. However, Mr. Gorky’s national reputation in the arts community qualified him for an intersection in his name,” the report reads.

The City Council voted unanimously on February 11 to name the section of Dexter Avenue and Hazel Street for Arshile Gorky.

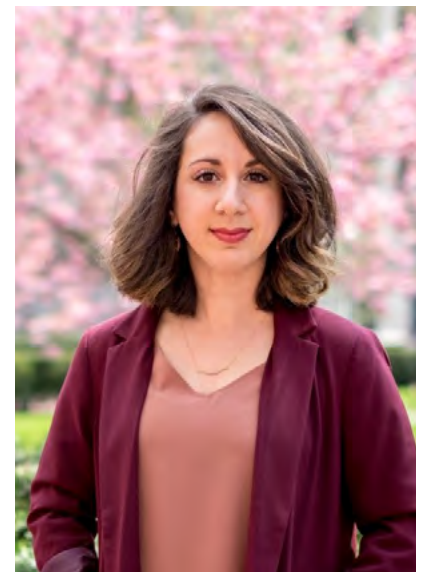
The 100 Years of Arshile Gorky celebration includes a mural on the Watertown-Cambridge Greenway, an exhibition and movie screening at the Mosesian Center for the Arts, a curated collection on Gorky at the Watertown Library, a guided walk, and a self-guided tour.



Arshile Gorky

## New Single *Groung* Out from Kronos Quartet’s Album ‘Witness’ of Works by Mary Kouyoumdjian

NEW YORK — On February 14, Phenotypic Recordings announced a new single, *Groung*, from Kronos Quartet’s new portrait album featuring the works of Pulitzer Prize-nominated Armenian-American composer and documentarian Mary Kouyoumdjian — “Witness” — out Friday, March 14, 2025. The works featured on Kouyoumdjian’s first portrait album exem-



Mary Kouyoumdjian

plify her use of the arts as an amplifier of expression, often integrating testimonies from resilient individuals and field recordings of place to invite empathy. Kouyoumdjian’s work seeks to humanize complex experiences around social and political conflict. A vinyl version of the release will be available in spring 2025.

Armenian-Canadian filmmaker (and Kouyoumdjian’s frequent collaborator) Atom Egoyan contributes the liner notes introduction, writing, “This collection is an open letter to the tragic hymn of transmitted trauma and the possibility of art and magnificently gifted artists to help create new life.” Cover artwork and design have been contributed by Armenian-Canadian photographer Osheen Haruthoonyan, who merges movement with themes of cultural heritage and renewal.

Phenotypic Recordings will donate all streaming proceeds from the album to Kooyrigs and the Lebanese Red Cross to support the Armenian and Lebanese communities.

The Kronos Quartet also announced their annual Kronos Festival in San Francisco, on April 25-27, at SF JAZZ. With five events over three days and nights, this year’s festival is themed around Terry Riley’s *Good Medicine*, providing the healing music the world needs. The festival will include a performance featuring a Mary Kouyoumdjian work from “Witness.”

The Kronos Quartet, who have “broken the boundaries of what string quartets do,” (*New York Times*), discovered Mary Kouyoumdjian’s talent early in her career when David Harrington heard an early folk recording of the Armenian song *Groung* and

see GROUNG, page 13



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## ‘Take Me Home:’ Nancy Kricorian’s *The Burning Heart of The World*

KRICORIAN, from page 12

Armenian Academy of Sciences, in his Foreword to Leon Surmelian’s *Apples of Immortality: Folktales of Armenia*. Kricorian further invokes the magic and the spirit of the tales by ending her novel with the old Armenian legend, “Three apples fell from heaven, one for the storyteller, one for the listener, and one for the person who understands this tale.”

To tell her own story of displacement and exile Kricorian juxtaposes the 1970’s 15-year Civil War in Lebanon and the 2001 9/11 Twin Towers explosion in New York City. Questions such as, “Who are the terrorists?” “Why do they hate us?” prompt the reader to evaluate the desperation that leads to crazy acts of violence and to wars. The beautifully crafted 160 pages — in a 187-page novel — of the chapters “New York City” and “Beirut” describe the disruption caused to the lives of the characters by the bombings and the rocket attacks. Yet, the ten pages on “Hadjin” that conclude the novel provide something that goes deeper than the surface narrative.

In the “spare economical style” of our folktales, Surmelian might say, Kricorian evokes the tragedy and the loss of *Hadjini Joghovourtin Badmoutiouné*. She also captures the spirit of goodness of a whole culture with her colors and vivid images. Sossi’s mother, known for her fine breads and pastries, bakes Hadjin’s traditional sweet bread for Easter, “using butter, white flour,

yeast, and sour cherry seeds she ground with a brass mortar and pestle.”

Kricorian’s, “As the spring progressed, different wildflowers appeared, starting with the blue and white glory-of-the-snow, followed by the purple crocus, the carpet of scarlet poppies, the star-like blossoms of the asphodel, bright yellow buttercups, tiny forget-me-nots, and many more,” tells us why Hadjin will “always remain our beloved homeland.”

The whole notion of home is complicated. When exile has become “closer to a norm,” to borrow the words of the late Edward Said, writers creating in exile sometimes see the crossing of borders and living across boundaries as an advantage as it helps them gain a new perspective with which to rediscover the world they left behind. The idea of cosmic alienation, on the other hand, makes the very concept of “home” irrelevant. As William Saroyan, Peter Najarian and numerous others have iterated, the world may just be “one large foster home” and one may always be “far from home.” Nonetheless, in its simplest basic sense of physical separation from one’s homeland, exile remains a condition to be shunned. When confronted with the option of going from “this madhouse,” Lebanon, to America, in other words, when confronted with the option of being displaced once again, “Exile is a burning shirt I will never wear again,” Grandma tells her granddaughter Vera who “do[es]’nt want to

go” to America either.

The connection one has to one’s native land impacts one’s well-being as it implies something more than just the immediate concerns of day to day survival. Arguably, *Medzmama* could have lived a peaceful life in Hadjin, happy forever after, while the life of her granddaughter Vera in a future of permanent exile remains, at best, unpredictable.

Kricorian understands the craziness of uprooting people and of scattering them around the world. She also understands the spirit of the grandmother which believes in the magic of the birds of the desert that protect and watch over her and her family in all calamities. Even on the deportation route, in her burning heart, Sossi could be fascinated by the beauty of the gray Wallcreeper, her favorite, hopping and fluttering across the rocks and the cliffs on the side of the road.

All of Kricorian’s novels — in addition to *Burning Heart*, *Zabelle*, *All the Light There Was* and *Dreams of Bread and Fire* — explore the post-genocide Armenian di-



aspora experience and the connection one has to one’s culture and history.

The book is available at Red Hen Press, Bookshop.org and Barnes & Noble.

## New Single *Groung* Out from Kronos Quartet’s Album ‘Witness’ of Works by Mary Kouyoumdjian

GROUND, from page 12

was overwhelmed by the voice of Zabelle Panosian singing this plaintive call for a lost home.

Performing an arrangement written specially for the Kronos Quartet, *Groung* [Crane] is based on a recording of the Armenian folk song of the same name, which became an anthem for the Armenian diaspora. Of the track, Kouyoumdjian shares: “I still remember meeting with David Harrington for the first time, when he excitedly handed me his Discman and headphones, which had been carrying a recording of the Armenian folk song *Groung* [Crane]. I was deeply familiar with composer Komitas Vardapet’s version of *Groung*, which had become an anthem for the Armenian diaspora, but this version that David had shared was entirely new to me. It was a recording from 1917 performed by Zabelle Panosian (1891-1986), a relatively unknown singer who had moved to Harlem, NY from her village of Bardizag, now a part of Western Turkey. In this song, the singer calls out to a crane, pleading for news from their homeland. Panosian’s voice seems to carry the burden of her entire homeland with a heart-achingly beautiful interpretation of the melody, and in my own arrangement, the ensemble is asked to emulate her unique interpretation of the song. At the time Panosian recorded this piece in the United States, her family and the Armenians were going through genocide in Ottoman Turkey, and I find the timing of her recording to bring even more meaning to the music.

*Bombs of Beirut* is dedicated to Kouyoumdjian’s family. The audio playback includes recorded interviews with family and friends who shared their various experiences living in a time of war; it also presents sound documentation of bombings and attacks on civilians, tape-recorded on an apartment balcony between 1976–1978. Kouyoumdjian says, “Inspired by loved ones who grew up during the Lebanese

Civil War, it is my hope that *Bombs of Beirut* provides a sonic picture of what day-to-day life is like in a turbulent Middle East — not filtered through the news and media, but through the real words of real people.” *Bombs of Beirut* was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet as part of Kronos: Under 30 Project.

*I Haven’t the Words* is a sonic journal entry from May 31, 2020, made while isolated in the early months of the pandemic, shortly after the murder of George Floyd, and “during a time in which the world seemed



Kronos Quartet

to spin towards its darkest corners.” Kouyoumdjian adds, “This is an arrangement made for the Kronos Quartet, transcribed from that particular morning’s improvisation at the piano and my own mental processing of the unspeakable.”

“Silent Cranes,” a music-documentary work marking the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, is also inspired by the Armenian folk song *Groung*, in which the singer calls out to the migratory bird, begging for word from their homeland, only to

have the crane respond with silence and fly away. The first, second, and fourth movement titles quote directly from the folk song lyrics. *Silent Cranes* includes testimonies by genocide survivors, recordings from the genocide era of Armenian folk songs, and a poem from investigative journalist David Barsamian (*Alternative Radio*) in response to the question: Why is it important to talk about the Armenian Genocide 100 years later? Kouyoumdjian says, “Those who were lost during the genocide are cranes in their own way, unable to speak of the horrors

she uses a sonic palette that draws on her heritage, interest in music as documentary, and background in experimental composition to progressively blend the old with the new. A strong believer in freedom of speech and the arts as an amplifier of expression, her compositional work often integrates recorded testimonies with resilient individuals and field recordings of place to invite empathy by humanizing complex experiences around social and political conflict. A finalist for the 2024 Pulitzer Prize in Music, Kouyoumdjian has received commissions for the New York Philharmonic, Kronos Quartet, Carnegie Hall, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Beth Morrison Projects, Alarm Will Sound, Bang on a Can, Brooklyn Youth Chorus, and Roomful of Teeth among others. Her work has been featured internationally at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MASS MoCA, the Barbican Centre, Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), Millennium Park, Benaroya Hall, Prototype Festival, Cabrillo Festival, Big Ears Festival, Cal Performances, Tribeca Film Festival, and PBS. Kouyoumdjian holds a D.M.A. and M.A. in Composition at Columbia University, an M.A. in Scoring for Film & Multimedia from New York University, and a B.A. in Composition from UC San Diego. Kouyoumdjian is a cofounder of the annual new music conference New Music Gathering, is on faculty at the Peabody Institute at Johns Hopkins University and The New School, and is based in Brooklyn, NY. Learn more at [www.marykouyoumdjian.com](http://www.marykouyoumdjian.com).

Mary Kouyoumdjian is a composer and documentarian with projects ranging from concert works to multimedia collaborations and film scores. As a first-generation Armenian-American and having come from a family directly affected by the Lebanese Civil War and Armenian Genocide,

For 50 years, San Francisco’s Kronos Quartet has reimagined what the string quartet experience can be. Kronos has received more than 40 awards, including three Grammys and the Polar Music, Avery Fisher, and Edison Klassiek Oeuvre Prizes. Learn more at [www.kronosquartet.org](http://www.kronosquartet.org).



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Peyote Beats Plays the Long Game to the Grammys

PEYOTE, from page 1

Born in the United States, Zabounian grew up in Palm Springs, Calif. When he was five, he said, his parents started him on piano lessons, and once a year he would play at piano recitals. As proud Armenians, his parents made him learn Aram Khachaturian and Arno Babajanian pieces, and since he was the only Armenian child at these recitals, he would be the only one playing this music, which was new to the audience.

Fast forwarding to freshman year at high school, Zabounian played piano in a jazz class in a band and heard someone play *Hey Joe* by Jimmy Hendrix on the guitar. This captivated Zabounian intensely and two weeks later his father bought him a guitar. He soon started a rock band, and studied every era of rock music, though his band particularly loved the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Rage Against the Machine.

He said as the band performed at house parties and high school events, its members wanted to stand out from the type of rock music famous in the 2000s, and so they also covered rap songs by the stars of the genre, such as Doctor Dre. That is where his love for hip hop was born.

Zabounian recalled that his parents, like many Armenians, especially in the older generations, did not believe that a career in the arts could provide a reliable livelihood. He said, “I wanted to leave Palm Springs, and the only way I could do it was to attend a real university with some kind of major like business or law.” So that is what he did.

After two years at the College of the Desert in Palm Desert, he went to Woodbury University in Burbank and majored in business marketing. He happened to live with roommates from Dubai who also played music, and they would all play together for fun. He said, “I was getting ready at that point, in my late, late teens, my early, early 20s, to kind of stop the music, because that is what you get in your head, that this music stuff isn’t going to bring me any real career.”

Then when he was just playing music with his roommates, he said, “One of them, I remember, just took me aside and reminded me. They were like, ‘yo, you can’t just leave music. That is what you do.’” Zabounian realized that he was right. He said, “My life has been full of signs that I have been able to read luckily — that hey, this is where you belong. That was one of those first moments, I would say.”

Nevertheless, after graduating from Woodbury in 2012, he began working in marketing and ended up running the marketing department for a business while he did music on the side. He started to get involved in music production when he was 22 because, he explained, it was easier than keeping a band together where there might be four people thinking in four different ways.

## Entering Music Scene Full Time

By this point, living in Pasadena, Zabounian had a little music studio, and every day, after work, he would go there and work as long as he needed. Sometimes it was midnight and sometimes as late as 3 a.m. He would then go back home and sleep until 6 or 7 a.m. and get ready for his day job.

This was not an easy schedule and Zabounian eventually understood he could not sustain this level of work. He said, “There was a couple times that I slept at the wheel while I was driving late at night because I wasn’t getting enough sleep.”

After four or five years at the marketing job, Zabounian’s boss, who remains to this day a mentor to him, sat him down and

said that during the time he was working in marketing he could have already started his own label. Since this is what he seemed to want to do, he should leave and focus on his passion.

“When they tell you not to put all your eggs in one basket, that is what I did,” Zabounian said. “You do have to do that for a career like this, my line of work, because there is no half stepping or just one foot in the door...it really just takes all of your energy and commitment.”

It was a scary time for Zabounian because he no longer had a guaranteed paycheck but had to work freelance. For the next four or five years, he was practically living in the music studio, while he applied his marketing tactics to reach the first step in success, producing music for someone fairly well known.

Finally, he said, he got one record around 2015 with two rappers on it. Zabounian leveraged that record to help get even bigger opportunities.

He chose the pseudonym Peyote Beats for himself, and now he said that no one calls him Armen anymore. Peyote is a type of cactus that Native Americans would take as part of their religion. It is hallucinogenic. Zabounian said though he has not tried it himself, “the reason I chose that name is that I needed something that connected me to the desert. That is where I am from. My heart is always in the desert — that is like my theme. So Peyote was the most edgy thing I could choose. It just sounds cool.”

Zabounian said that Jimmy Hendrix remains his biggest influence on how he played the guitar, and as far as production went, Doctor Dre and Kanye West were most important.

## Music Producing 101

A music producer may do everything from providing beats (basically the underlying rhythmic pattern or instrumentals), scheduling, shaping an artist’s music, to recording, mixing and technical work. Zabounian said, “I had to learn to do all of those things, because there was no one else to do it. I had my studio, which was an advantage, because I could tell artists, hey, come to my studio. I can record you there. I can make the beat for you there.”

Through trial and error, he said, he learned how to produce, from making the instrumental to the vocal production, to directing the performers on how to do it — how to sing, how to rap. He added, “Being a multi-instrumentalist also gave me an advantage that other producers did not have.” In sessions with artists, he either shows them a beat that he made or he may make something with them from scratch. He may start playing on the guitar or on the keyboard and see how they react.

Another way is when music labels send briefs which describe the type of sounds they are looking for, sometimes with YouTube links to songs from famous artists as examples. Then Zabounian works with songwriters, and he provides them with a track to which they write.

He said, “I do sometimes write lyrics... There are times that I assist in that as well. It really depends on whom I am working with. If they are open to it, then I will step in.”

When asked whether what he did could be considered composing, he replied, “We don’t use [the word] compose as much, but yes, technically that is what it is. It is composing music in this day.”

## Rap and J-pop Meet Aznavour

Zabounian started working with hip hop music and rap, but, he said, “Now, it is really everything and anything...It is just to the point that whatever room we are in,



Armen Zabounian aka Peyote Beats (photo courtesy Armen Zabounian)

whatever they are asking for, I am able to switch gears to do.” He began producing a lot of J-pop (Japanese pop) and K-pop (Korean pop) music, as well as American pop. He has done country, Mexican traditional home music, Latin, reggae, rhythm and blues.

He listened to Japanese rap and pop when he was much younger and wanted to be a part of that. Around eight years ago, Yuki Chiba, the most famous Japanese rapper came to America and as a result of a connection visited his studio. Two years ago, in 2023, Zabounian went to Japan for the first time and stayed with him. Yuki Chiba had done a record in 2024 with American female rapper Megan Thee Stallion.

“What I am doing in Japan is I am shifting the culture,” he said. Chiba usually did straight rap but together they started doing enka, a traditional 1960s type of Japanese music in which he is singing. People did not know that he could do that. “It is funny that he chose me, an Armenian American, to craft that sound for him. He could have just gone to some Japanese person to do Japanese traditional.”

Zabounian introduced Chiba to Charles Aznavour, which he loved, and then suggested to make songs like those of Aznavour. This led to preparing a whole album’s worth of songs in this style, which Zabounian said will hopefully come out this year.

Working with Chiba allowed Zabounian entry into the rest of Japan’s music scene, including the pop realm. Zabounian said that he goes once a year to Japan to work for a month. He said, “I love Japan. I think it is my favorite country. The people are so respectful and honorable. It is such a clean

country and their culture is very strong.”

Armenian pop is one type of music Zabounian has not yet worked with. He said, “I am open to it now. I just don’t think that Armenia has the artists that are popular worldwide and I wish that would change. Maybe I can discover someone or if I can help make that happen, with my networking and my position, that would be amazing.”

He observed that a lot of Armenian artists straight from Armenia sing in English, and there should be a different approach not just trying to imitate Americans.

He has been to Armenia several times, but has not worked on music there. After the Grammys, Armenians have reached out to him though, and he already is going to meet with an Armenian-American rapper.

## The Grammys and DoeChii

Zabounian has worked with popular artists such as Tyga, NBA Youngboy, French Montana, Jhene Aiko, Pop Smoke (the late rapper Bashar Barakah Jackson), Trippie Redd, Roy Woods, Blxst and 6ix9ine.

A number of the songs he produced received awards. He produced the song *Never Ever Land* on Trippie Redd’s mixtape or album “A Love Letter to You,” and this album in June 2019 received the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA)’s Gold-Certification for combined sales and album-equivalent units of over 500,000 in the United States. In November 2022, the same album reached the platinum level with sales of 1,000,000 units.

Zabounian received the ASCAP Pop Award for producing Tyga, Jhene Aiko and Pop Smoke’s hit *Sunshine*, which became one of the most performed pop songs of

*continued on next page*



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

from previous page

2023. This song reached the #1 billboard position at Rhythmic Radio in 2022 and Zabounian was both a contributing writer as well as a producer for it.

Zabounian said he had wanted to work with the hip-hop music label Top Dawg Entertainment (TDE) for around 12 years, since rapper Kendrick Lamar's debut album came out, but it was too big a firm to easily connect with. Around four or five months ago, however, he saw an email from someone in TDE and looked her up on Instagram. She was Cheyenne Chaves, head of the TDE A&R [Artists and Repertoire] Administration. He wrote to her that he would like to work with TDE, so she invited him to bring in his tracks and beats.

TDE executives picked out some, he related, and a few days after the meeting called Zabounian to ask him to make a specific type of beat. "After the call, I took maybe two hours to make it. I sent it to them, texted it to them, and from there, just a couple of changes back and forth [occurred]," he said.

Then one or two weeks later, the artist DoeChii recorded on it. She created the melody and the lyrics. Zabounian said that he played the keyboard and bass on it and did the drum programming as well. While there might have been some post-production added, he produced all other musical elements.

He said, "I was excited about the record but I didn't expect it to blow up to historic proportions like it has to become one of the most important female hip-hop albums out really. I had no clue." Many celebrities began praising the album after it came out.

"When I had just landed in Japan in November it was about 4 a.m. and I started getting notifications on my phone that the album had been nominated for the best rap album category [of the Grammy Awards], and that was crazy, emotional. I may have shed a tear or two in bed in Japan." Even afterwards, however, he was not sure that she could actually win the award, because the other people in her category were male

rappers that were considered legends, like Eminem, Future & Metro Boomin, J. Cole, Command & Pete Rock.

The album kept on breaking sales records over the next few months, and the song Zabounian produced was performed along with some of the others at festivals and on a few shows like "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" and National Public Radio's Tiny Desk Concert, so he started to think the album had a chance to win. When he walked into the awards ceremony on February 2, it was the first Grammy he had ever attended, and the album won the first award that was announced. Zabounian said he thought, "If I had been fashionably late, even ten minutes, I wouldn't have even seen it. It was so early."

Aside from the fame accompanying the production of a Grammy-winning song, Zabounian said, "There is another amazing part — to see what you created in a dark room being played all of a sudden to the whole world outside."

He said that literally the day after the award, new doors began to open for him, and he expected that this would continue for the rest of the year. However, he said, "I am going back in to work as if I hadn't gotten that award, because I have seen a lot of people win Grammys and then you notice afterwards that they don't really do much. There isn't much coming out from them anymore. Maybe they got comfortable. I can't afford to do that so I will still work the same as before I achieved the Grammy. I am right now taking massive advantage of it and reaching out, and my game is leverage."

When asked which of his songs or work he would consider the best, the industrious musician and producer exclaimed, "Always in my mind I haven't gotten to my best record yet and that's what keeps my chops up. I don't even listen to my songs that I make after they come out. I am not really into it. I am already on the next one. It is always going to be a forever process in my mind to get to my biggest record or my best record."

# 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/>

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### 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.

FRESNO STATE

Armenian Studies Program

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AND TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION METRO LOS ANGELES CHAPTER  
PRESENT

## "DEATH MARCHES PAST THE FRONT DOOR:

CLARA AND FRITZ SIGRIST-HILTY: SWISS EYEWITNESSES  
TO THE ARMENIAN DANTE-INFERNO IN TURKEY (1915-1918)"

BY DR. DORA SAKAYAN

UNDER THE AUSPICES

OF HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP HOVNAN DERDERIAN,  
PRIMATE, WESTERN DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

## ԳԻՆԵՑՈՒ-BOOK LAUNCH

WITH PROF. BARLOW DER MUGRDECHIAN  
ARMENIAN STUDIES PROGRAM, FRESNO STATE

WITH HONORED GUEST HONORABLE FRANCO ZIMMERLI

HONORARY CONSUL OF SWITZERLAND IN LOS ANGELES



*Death Marches Past the Front Door* is the story of Swiss civil engineer Fritz Sigrist and his wife, nurse Clara Hilty. Sigrist was based in Ottoman Turkey in 1915 and he and his wife chronicled the unfolding of the Armenian Genocide.

Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdchian is the Berberian Coordinator of the Armenian Studies Program and Director of the Center for Armenian Studies at Fresno State.



Sunday, April 27, 2025 • 5:00PM

Tekeyan Center • 1901 N. Allen Ave., Altadena, CA

Յայտագիրը Անգլերէնով եւ Հայերէնով

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



## Mary Markarian's Namourah Dessert Infused with Rose Water

Mary Markarian's classic Middle Eastern namourah (or namoura) dessert can best be described as a dense, semolina cake that's been soaked in simple syrup infused with orange or rose blossom water. The recipe is available at the Sadaf Foods website. "The kitchen is the heart of our home, it's where we gather the most to eat, cook, laugh, and make memories. My family is originally from Aleppo, Syria. I come from a long line of amazing home cooks, and enjoy sharing my love of cooking with my Facebook and Instagram family and friends. This recipe



Mary Markarian

has been adopted in many countries. This semolina cake is typically baked and contains yogurt, coconut, and butter, topped with almonds, and then soaked in simple sugar syrup," says Mary. "My recipe comes together in just one bowl – no mixer is required."

"This dessert is so popular it goes by three different names all over the Levant. The Lebanese call this cake namoura, the Palestinians call it harisseh, and the Egyptians call it basbousa. No matter what you call this cake, the flavor is universally delicious. White flour is not commonly used in the Middle East, so farina and semolina are used to make this cake instead. These flours provide a grainier, almost nuttier texture — all the better to absorb the fragrant simple syrup," adds Blanche Shaheen at Feast in the Middle East.

Because semolina is high in gluten (which is what makes it great for pasta), this is a batter you do not want to overmix.

### INGREDIENTS:

4 cups coarse grain semolina or farina  
1 cup sugar  
1 cup plain yogurt  
3 teaspoons baking powder  
3 teaspoons Sadaf Orange Blossom Water or Sadaf Rose Water  
1/2 stick melted butter  
1/2 cup Sadaf Organic Sesame Tahini (to baste the baking dish)  
Slivered or halved raw almonds (for topping)

### Simple Syrup:

2 cups sugar  
1 cup water  
1 teaspoon lemon juice  
1 teaspoon Sadaf Orange Blossom Water

### PREPARATION:

First prepare the simple syrup by dissolving water and sugar in a small pot over medium heat. Bring to a boil for about 10 minutes, stirring. Add the lemon juice and orange blossom water, and stir. Turn heat off and allow to cool to room temperature.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Use a 13-inch circular pan for this recipe, or a square one. Add the tahini and baste the pan to prevent the cake from sticking. In a bowl, combine the semolina, sugar, yogurt, baking powder, orange blossom water, butter, and stir together to combine. You can use a rubber spatula or your hands. The mixture will be pretty dry, not like your average cake batter.

Spread the semolina mixture into the prepared baking dish and flatten with your hands. Let sit for about 20 minutes. Cut into squares or diamond shapes, and top with the almonds, if using. Bake until golden brown, for about 40 minutes. (Do not overbake it – overbaking as with any dessert will dry it out, so keep an eye on it and take it out of the oven as soon as it is golden brown and solid in the middle.)

Remove from the oven, re-score the squares, and pour the cooled syrup over the entire dish. The syrup will be completely absorbed into the cake. Let cool completely and serve.

Serving size: 12-15 pieces

Sadaf Foods has been a family business since 1982 when two brothers immigrated to Los Angeles from Iran. Once settled, they began to long for the comforting and familiar aromas and tastes of home. They found it challenging to locate traditional Middle Eastern ingredients in American supermarkets. To address this, the brothers founded Sadaf, aiming to help the community experience a taste of home in their kitchens. Founded and headquartered in Los Angeles, and trademark registered worldwide, Sadaf started with just three people and 17 products. However, the brothers persisted in sourcing and importing the highest quality ingredients and specialty foods from various Mediterranean cuisines and countries.

"At the heart of Sadaf Foods lies a journey of resilience, culture, and the enduring bonds of family. Born from the dreams of two Iranian brothers who embarked on a new life in Los Angeles, Sadaf Foods has become more than just a brand; it's a vibrant testament to the power of heritage and the universal language of food."

"From its humble beginnings, Sadaf Foods has blossomed into a flourishing enterprise, yet our growth has always been anchored in the values of family, quality, and integrity. Each product on our shelves carries a story of tradition, carefully selected

to ensure authenticity and excellence. Our expansion from a small operation to a brand that serves communities nationwide is a reflection of our commitment to these principles and our dedication to bringing people together through the love of food. Today, Sadaf employs over 100 people, leading numerous divisions that support more than 1000+ Sadaf brand products distributed nationwide. It imports products from over 15 countries worldwide, with the mission to connect cultures through delicious and authentic food."

For Sadaf products, go to: <https://www.sadaf.com/collections/all>

For Sadaf recipes, go to: <https://www.sadaf.com/blogs/recipes>

See: "A Taste of Persia: The markets of Pico-Robertson bring the flavor of home to LA's Persian Jewish community—including those who've never been to Iran": <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/taste-of-persia>

See: "12 Essential Middle Eastern Ingredients and Where to Buy Them Online": <https://www.bonappetit.com/gallery/middle-eastern-ingredients>

Courtesy <https://www.sadaf.com/>

### Contact:

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Shop by category: <https://www.sadaf.com/pages/products>

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"Sadaf Foods has successfully bridged the gap between traditional Persian cuisine and the modern American kitchen. By offering a comprehensive range of cooking essentials, ready-to-eat meals, and snacks, Sadaf has made it incredibly easy for anyone to explore and enjoy the rich flavors of Persian cooking. Whether you're a seasoned chef or a curious foodie, we invite you to discover the joy of Persian culinary delights, bringing the essence of rich culinary tradition to your home. Sadaf's quality spices are sourced from all over the world in order to find and bring you bright, aromatic, and authentic flavors. Enjoy the unique flavors of the world to create delicious and authentic foods and meals for you and your family."

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## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**  
SINCE 1932



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# A Call to Prime Minister Pashinyan to Clarify His Messages in Zurich and Washington

By Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, C.M.

It is now obvious that a seriously disquieting situation characterized by political vicissitudes prevails throughout the world. Under these conditions, our small Armenia, in addition to its extremely unfavorable geopolitical position, must be able to cope with the additional challenge of introducing new and sometimes difficult changes to its already complex strategic positions.

This much is clear to everyone, and it should especially be clear to every alert Armenian, both in Armenia and in the diaspora.

It is against this backdrop that the two meetings of Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan took place over the past few weeks, first in Zurich and then in Washington, with a small group of respected individuals invited by him and qualified as representatives of the community.

While those present at the Zurich gathering had the opportunity to have a few exchanges with the prime minister, in the case of Washington, the prime minister alone spoke for about 20 minutes. Those present simply listened with exemplary politeness to the prime minister's speech, which was delivered only in Armenian, considering that some of them were only English speakers and naturally could not follow his thoughts. Finally, just as appropriately, this meeting was closed with polite applause, as was the case with the Zurich meeting.

The purpose of this article is to emphasize that in both of these meetings, and especially during his one-sided conversation in Washington, the prime minister wanted to specifically point out that his goal was to keep those present informed that these days, in Armenia, under his own direction and with special importance, an effort is being made to introduce changes in the ideologies of homeland and patriotism.

The prime minister, with long and repeated expressions, and yet not in a clear and explicit language, tried to explain to those present in particular the idea he had recently formulated of the "Real Armenia," which, however, remained vague and subject to all kinds of interpretations. The prime minister also emphasized that a "change of ideology" would take place in Armenia. This time, perhaps wanting to impress those present more vividly, he used the Latin Armenian qualifications "Transformation" and "Isolationism" with an emphasized pronunciation, supposedly to better explain these "new ideologies."

Despite his efforts, however, the uncertainty left by the prime minister's words and the extremely worrying thoughts engendered by that confusion, after these two presentations of Washington and Zurich, understandably created strong negative reactions in the Armenian world.

Dear Mr. Pashinyan, if the purpose of your aforementioned pair of reports was to keep the diaspora informed about the important new positions being promoted in Armenia with your encouragement, we would like to stress that on the contrary, in the case of both speeches, and especially in the case of the one in Washington, the long and repeated phrases you used, not being explicit, have remained incomprehensible even to those who have a sufficient command of the Armenian language, such as, for example, the author of these lines.

What is even more worrying is that due to this lack of explicitness, your listeners have been necessarily led to approximate and assumed conclusions, which are certainly very worrying and completely unacceptable to the broad Armenian majority.

In this present article, our serious concerns include our desire to express our thoughts on the issues you raised in a completely transparent and clear manner, knowing that they also correspond to the thinking of a wide range of deeply alarmed circles.

First of all, it is clear — and this is not new for us — that in any period of history, the "real Armenia" is that region which is clearly defined by its borders on the maps adopted at the international level during that period as "Armenia," where the vast majority of the population of that region is composed of Armenians, and those borders are secured by Armenians and or their true allies, and when the order prevailing in the country is managed by an administrative machinery composed of Armenians. We would like to emphasize that all this is regardless of the coloration or political philosophy of the regime ruling there.

This was our unchanging position during the period of Soviet power, when we did not agree with the ideology followed by that regime, but we tried to ensure that the Armenian diaspora maintained its spiritual connection with the "real Armenia" of those

days and, within the limits of realistic possibilities, assisted it with humane and economically beneficial measures.

This is also our position today, when we are a warm supporter of the democratic conditions prevalent in our country, though we also often criticize disturbing phenomena that occur there.

This clear understanding of ours of the "real Armenia," though, is never a reason to forget or deny our entire history, during the course of which our country was much more extensive and even at certain points stretched from sea to sea. We can gain the goodwill of no one, not friends, and especially not our natural enemies, if we suddenly forget or deny this historical reality and even today's dream. On the contrary, the manifestation of unilateral and permanent political concessions on our part will surely lead to the gradual, *complete collapse and disappearance* of the "real Armenia" itself.

It is with this same resolute thought that we consider Mount Ararat the uncompromising symbol of the Armenian people. The sacred Armenian Mount Ararat, with the indisputable confirmation of the Bible, remains the symbol of Armenia regardless of who owns today the territory where it is located. Just as Jerusalem is the heart of the Christian world, whether it is under the control of the Arabs or the Jews, so too, Mr. Prime Minister, Ararat is forever and ever the inseparable heart and symbol of the Armenian people.

During your aforementioned talks, you made an unexpected allusion to the highly sensitive subject of the Armenian Genocide. The authenticity of the Armenian Genocide, which left its indelible mark on our people, and the indisputable full responsibility of Turkey in its implementation have now been internationally recognized. Not only has it been recognized at the state level by more than twenty important countries, but it has even been recognized by the Turkish judiciary it-

self, in the wake of the First World War. In this presentation, as always, we consider it necessary to remain within the limits of restrained vocabulary in our expression. Therefore, we will suffice by saying that any efforts to find the traces of Armenian responsibility in the terrible crime committed against humanity through the Armenian Genocide, is tantamount to seeking the responsibility for the Jewish genocide or Holocaust in the Jewish people. Therefore, in our case, it should be expected that such an act can only be met with the unforgiving condemnation and condemnation of the Armenians, even prior to it being subjected to the application of severe international sanctions, as is the case of the Jews.

These few key hypersensitive issues mentioned above are sufficient to explain why Prime Minister Pashinyan's sometimes clear but often vague allusions to sensitive issues during his two interviews have deeply upset many knowledgeable circles in both the diaspora and Armenia.

It cannot be denied that, as we mentioned at the beginning of this article, the exceptionally complex challenges facing the international and national arenas of today force the Armenian people to seriously seek and strive to refine the best and most effective nationally acceptable paths for their strategy.

Faithful to his constant stance of being constructive, the author of these lines once again suggests referring to his article recently published in our press, where the creation of a national structure for an Armenian strategy of national survival is proposed, which, although initiated by the current government, would include representatives of all of those structures and intellectuals who are indisputable parts of the intellectual and organizational centers of the Armenian people.

It is through such a serious national structure, Mr. Prime Minister, that subtle old or new ideas and ideologies can be proposed, refined and, if necessary, reformed. Only the thoroughly debated conclusions of such profound discussions are likely to be adopted by the majority of Armenians. If, on the contrary, new proposals are formulated by ignoring such centers of serious thinking, it is very likely, Mr. Prime Minister, that these efforts will remain ignored and in vain.

Considering the upcoming general elections in Armenia, as a constructive step that contributes to the supreme national interests, we call on you once more, Mr. Prime Minister, to take the initiative to create such a platform as a means of exchanging important ideas and formulating practical proposals.

(This article is a translation of the original Armenian published in *Baikar*.)

## IN ANY PERIOD OF HISTORY, THE "REAL ARMENIA" IS THAT REGION WHICH IS CLEARLY DEFINED BY ITS BORDERS ON THE MAPS ADOPTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL DURING THAT PERIOD AS "ARMENIA"

## A Shift in Russian-American Relations Has Begun: What Does It Mean for Armenia?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Days ago, after three years of silence, the US and Russian interacted for the first time at the highest level. This long-awaited event was closely watched by nations affected by the ongoing brutal war between Russia and Ukraine, in which the latter received from the Biden administration.

US President Donald Trump's stance on this issue is multifaceted and requires consideration from various angles. Domestically, he opposes spending billions on Ukraine and prolonging the war. From a foreign policy viewpoint, the main objective of his administration has been to counter China, with a key strategy being to isolate it from Russia or at least make Russia neutral. However, this goal has been complicated by US sanctions against Russia, which have driven the latter to rely more heavily on China for goods, products, technology and resources. Trump announced a likely meeting in Saudi Arabia, an interesting choice given numerous alternatives like India, Hungary, Turkey, the UAE or other countries which enjoy good relations with both Russia and the US.

Such a decision highlights the US goal of countering China, as Saudi Arabia wields considerable influence over Russia and has strong ties with it. Additionally, while Saudi Arabia was a strategic ally of the US and a key opponent of Iran, it recently established diplomatic relations with Iran through China's mediation, underscoring China's rising influence in global affairs, particularly in the Middle East. China's increasing influence in the Middle East, Asia, and Eurasia poses a challenge for Moscow too. While their interests align against Washington's anti-Russian and anti-Chinese stance, it's difficult to believe that Russia does not see China as its primary competitor in Africa and, more critically, in the Middle East and Central Asia, which are vital regions for Russian interests. To reduce Chinese influence over the Saudis, the US might need some support from Russia too.

The phone conversation between the US and Russian presidents lasted approximately 1.5 hours, covering various topics, including trade partnerships between the two countries. For trade to proceed, Washington would need to lift the sanctions imposed by the Biden administration. In fact, Trump is the only US leader with significant influence over both Ukraine and Russia. While his influence on Kyiv is evident, his leverage over Moscow comes in the form of approximately 25,000 sanctions, which he can use as a bargaining tool in negotiating a potential peace treaty with Ukraine. Of course not all of them will be lifted but some significant amount of sanctions might be lifted if the deal is done. For comparison, there are about 8000 sanctions imposed on Iran since the Iranian revolution in 1979.

During the conversation, topics such as the Middle East settlement and the Iranian nuclear program were discussed according to the official statement. This means there is a global understanding between the two on these important issues.

Moreover, the president of Russia invited President Trump to visit Moscow and expressed his willingness to host American officials in Russia to work on areas of mutual interest, including the Ukrainian settlement. President Vladimir Putin and Trump agreed to continue personal contacts, including arranging face-to-face meetings. It cannot be ruled out that the next meeting after Saudi Arabia may take place in Moscow.

The basis for making such an assumption is as follows: Following a 90-minute phone call with Putin, Trump stated on his Truth Social account that they reflected on their nations' shared history and their successful collaboration during World War II, noting the significant losses both Russia and the US endured. He wrote that Putin invited Trump to visit Moscow and offered to host US officials to discuss mutual interests, including the Ukrainian situation. They agreed to maintain personal communication and consider in-person meetings.

Hence, Trump may visit Moscow on May 9 to participate in the celebrations marking the 80th anniversary of the Allies' victory over Nazi Germany in 1945. The last time a US president made such a trip was in 2005 when President George W. Bush visited Moscow to follow the Victory Parade with other world leaders.

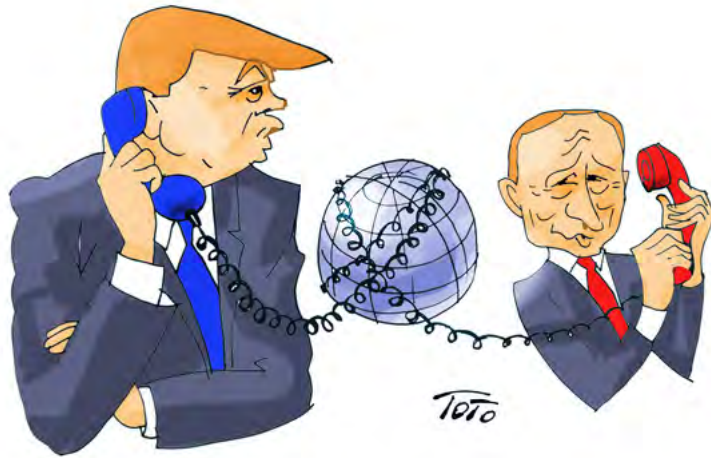
There is a general consensus that normal relations between Moscow and Washington may foster joint agreements in various fields, promoting stability and predictability in global affairs. It seems that President Trump also thinks this way.

A shift in Russian-American relations is significant for Armenia. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government has tried to show allegiance to the West, favoring it over Moscow. However, it appears that Washington also leans towards Moscow.

During his visit to Europe, US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth made notable remarks about President Trump's vision for US foreign policy regarding Europe, Russia, Ukraine, and China. He indicated that returning Ukraine to its pre-2014 borders is "an unrealistic objective" for any peace deal and stated that Trump does not support NATO membership for Ukraine as part of a settlement. Instead, Hegseth proposed that security guarantees for Ukraine should involve capable European and non-European troops. He urged European NATO allies to take primary responsibility for their defense and suggested that reducing American troop numbers in Europe might be part of negotiations with Russia to resolve the Ukraine conflict. Hegseth also denied allegations that the US is betraying Ukraine by initiating negotiations about its future without Kiev's full involvement.

Most importantly, he announced a shift in America's security priorities, emphasizing homeland security over European defense and highlighting the challenge posed by China to the US. This suggests that Washington and the West may lose interest in an anti-Russian stance or changes in foreign policy concerning Russia's neighboring countries or regions. It is likely that Russia and the US will also align their policies and priorities in various regions, including the South Caucasus. This indicates a low interest in Armenia, and the European integration law passed by the Armenian parliament just hours before the Trump-Putin phone call — marking a shift in their relations — may have been poorly timed.

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



## Will Azerbaijan Teach Somalia the Art of Genocide?

By Michael Rubin

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

It has now been almost a year and a half since Azerbaijan invaded Nagorno-Karabakh and expelled its indigenous 120,000 Armenian Christians, a community that had inhabited the region for more than 1,700 years. While US Acting Assistant Secretary of State Yuri Kim had declared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "We will not tolerate any military action. We will not tolerate any attack on the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. That is very clear," the State Department did nothing when, just five days later, President Ilham Aliyev ordered the region's ethnic cleansing. Not only did the United States take no meaningful action, but Mark Libby, the US ambassador to Azerbaijan, subsequently participated in a stage-managed Azerbaijani propaganda visit to Shushi, an ancient Armenian city Azerbaijani forces captured in 2020 and where they subsequently vandalized and destroyed churches and Christian artifacts.

For Azerbaijan, the conquest of Nagorno-Karabakh was a success: The Aliyev dictatorship literally got away with murder and ethnic cleansing; Ilham Aliyev faced no consequence for his unilateralism either diplomatically, militarily, or economically. Quite the contrary, by exposing the United States as a paper tiger and bragging about the advantage of military unilateralism over diplomacy, Aliyev believes he has found a model for other to follow.

Enter Somalia: On February 12, 2025, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and his defense and foreign ministers traveled to Baku. They met their counterparts and signed agreements. The Somali Defense Ministry said a "key agreement in the fields of defense and defense industry cooperation... paves the way for enhanced technical support and military knowledge-sharing to bolster Somalia's defense capabilities."

The danger the agreement represents is the likelihood that Somalia now seeks to replicate the Azerbaijan model to resolve militarily what it cannot achieve diplomatically or morally: Forcing Somaliland back into union with Somalia.

There are certain parallels to modern Armenian and Somali history. Just as Heydar Aliyev and his son Ilham were Soviet elites, so too was Somalia a Soviet ally through the 1960s and most of the 1970s. Both countries then switched sides: Heydar Aliyev went from Azerbaijan KGB chief and Soviet Politburo member to a supposed US ally overnight, an ideological chameleon interested primarily in personal power. So too did Somali dictator Siad Barre, who switched sides in the Cold War in a fit of pique over Soviet refusal to accept his territorial ambitions.

Both Azerbaijanis and Somalis have long held irredentist dreams of expanding their country's borders and territories, partly driven by a tendentious reading of history and more recently by their governments' desire to distract the populace from regime corruption and poor financial stewardship. Somalia, though, has never been a single entity as some Somali nationalists claim. The five-pointed star on the Somali flag represents the five historic regions Somalis claim as their own: Djibouti, Ethiopia's Ogaden, Somaliland, the Federal Republic of Somalia, and Kenya's North Eastern's province.

Somalia as maps now depict it did not exist until 1960. As decolonization swept Africa, both the British and the Italians granted independence to portions of Somalia they had colonized. All five members of the UN Security Council recognized the independence of British Somaliland as did 25 other countries. Five days later, however, British Somaliland's leaders decided to merge with the former Italian Somaliland into a single country with Mogadishu as its capital. It was an unhappy marriage that ended in civil war and genocide as Siad Barre sought to eradicate the Isaaq clan that dominated in British Somaliland. The Somali regime killed between 100,000 and 200,000 Isaacs, while Somali and Zimbabwean mercenary pilots pulverized 80 percent of the Somaliland capital Hargeisa.

In 1991, as Somalia collapsed and Siad Barre fled into exile, Somaliland reasserted its independence. This time, the international community did not recognize it. Nevertheless, it remained secure throughout Somalia's period of lawlessness; during COVID, my nine-year-old



## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Armenian Parliament Speaker Prefers That All Artsakh Armenians were Killed

Top Armenian government officials have crossed all red lines. After giving away Artsakh, they are now endangering the existence of the Armenian Republic. This alarming development is the fault of the entire leadership of the ruling Civil Contract Party, starting from Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and ending with his Ministers, the Speaker and majority of the National Assembly.

Pashinyan's agreement to turn over the Republic of Artsakh to Azerbaijan was illegal because he has no jurisdiction over Artsakh. Knowing that, the Prime Minister did not ask for the approval of either the National Assembly or the Constitutional Court before signing the declaration of capitulation. Prior to the 2020 War, Pashinyan himself admitted that he was the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and had nothing to do with Artsakh, while loudly proclaiming, "Artsakh is Armenia. Period." This is one of his scores of contradictory statements.

Most governmental leaders around the world resign immediately after suffering such a devastating loss in war. They acknowledge their failure and yield their seat to someone else who can salvage whatever is left. Pashinyan, a psychologically crushed man, cannot properly rule the country and restore the damage that he himself has brought about.

Pashinyan is stubbornly clinging to power, thus increasing the damage and losses. He has not used the word Artsakh once since the 2020 war. He never mentions Artsakh Armenians' right of return. He has not lifted a finger to secure the release of Artsakh's leaders who are being tried in Baku. He claims that Artsakh Armenians are not citizens of Armenia, even though they possess passports of the Republic of Armenia.

Meanwhile, the Speaker of the National Assembly, Alen Simonyan, who is just as incompetent as the Prime Minister, once again, gave insane answers to a simple question from an Artsakh journalist, last week. The question was: "When will I return to Artsakh?" Simonyan replied: "When it is safe, when we sign a peace treaty. You got out of there, because it was not safe, even though it was possible to stay and fight till the end with the weapons that Armenia had left. You should have fought, Armenia fought." This is the usual tactic of Pashinyan's clan. Put the blame for their own failures on everyone else.

To make matters worse, when the journalist asked Simonyan why he avoids using the name Artsakh, he gave a complete nonsensical denialist answer: "I am a politician, and I oppose any foreign citizen calling one of my cities by a Turkish or Azerbaijani name. I must uphold a politician's ethics." He is shamefully comparing saying Artsakh to a Turk or Azeri calling an Armenian city by a Turkish name!

Only a defeatist high-ranking official would talk like that. He knows very well that Artsakh Armenians fought as much as they could, killing 205 Azeri soldiers and wounding 1004 others within 24-hours on Sept. 19, 2023, but were unable to continue resisting a well-armed enemy which was many times more powerful than them. They had no choice, but to leave. If they had stayed any longer, they would have been all slaughtered by the Azeri troops. Maybe that's the outcome that Simonyan would have preferred.

There is plenty of evidence of Azeri soldiers' brutal behavior during previous battles when they videotaped the cutting off of the head of an elderly civilian man. In another gruesome criminal act, which the Azeri soldiers "proudly" videotaped, they tortured, mutilated, raped and killed Anush Apetyan, a female Armenian soldier, during an attack in September 2022, after cutting off her legs, putting her cut off finger in her mouth, and poking out her eye and replacing it with a stone! These are shocking war crimes!

Simonyan's anti-Artsakh comments generated immediate outrage throughout Armenia and the Diaspora. Several major Armenian and Artsakh organizations issued statements lambasting him.

Instead of lecturing Artsakh Armenians about staying and fighting, Simonyan should look at the self-defeating behavior of his own government which did not lift a finger to come to the rescue of fellow Armenians in Artsakh -- the constitutional obligation of the Armenian government. On the contrary, on Sept. 21, 2023 just as Armenia's Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan was addressing the emergency UN Security Council meeting in New York about Azerbaijan's huge attack on Artsakh, Prime Minister Pashinyan embarrassed his own Foreign Minister in front of the whole world by announcing in a live address in Yerevan: "At this moment, our assessment is that there is no direct threat to the civilian population of Nagorno-Karabakh." Thus, Pashinyan gave a great excuse to Azerbaijan to cover up its massive crime and undermined the claim of international lawyers that Artsakh Armenians were subjected to ethnic cleansing and genocide.

I am certain that the next nationalistic government of Armenia will declare that all of Pashinyan's verbal or signed agreements, commitments and statements violate Armenia's laws. Therefore, they are null and void. Pres. Erdogan of Turkey and Pres. Aliyev of Azerbaijan should not waste their time demanding concessions from Pashinyan, because anything he concedes to them will be reversed by the next Armenian government.

## LETTERS

## 'A Great Leader'

To the Editor:

This is the inscription President Trump wrote last week on a commemorative picture of himself and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel.

It has been known for a long time that Trump admires and has often sided with undemocratic strongmen of countries like China, Russia, North Korea, Turkey or Hungary. He seems to consider himself of the same ilk in character and political stature.

His latest pronouncements on Canada, Greenland, Panama and now Gaza may be indications of a bravado he feels being this world's leader but the attitude he exudes also gives unchallenged country leaders the feeling they can do whatever they please and remain unchallenged by any authority, local, legal, or international.

This situation, therefore, may allow people like Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, a dictator of his country, to easily think he can do whatever he wants and remain unchallenged.

Let us now look at the possible outcomes of what this strongman, this "strong leader", can initiate as it may relate to Armenia.

Let us assume Azerbaijan suddenly attacks and takes over the Zangezur corridor!

Who will react and how when Aliyev enjoys the following status:

Today he supplies 15 percent of the gas the European Union needs and uses. The EU pays lip service to the "rights of the Nagorno-Karabakh refugees" with well-measured statements worth very little in practical applications or benefits. Therefore, in a case of emergency and need by Armenia for EU support it is doubtful that such assistance will be forthcoming. The exception may be France but, in that case, also, help to Armenia will be of limited nature and probably in the form of continuing supply of military equipment and supplies. French assistance is measured and based on the half a million French-Armenians and their votes in French elections.

Aliyev enjoys excellent relations with Russia's Putin as he allows his ports to be used for Russian oil to be transported to other nations thus circumventing Western sanctions. Billions of dollars pass through Azerbaijan and end up in Russian hands.

Why would, therefore, Russia take any active role in defending Armenia in any way in case such an event takes place? Besides, analysts have observed the relationship between Putin and Pashinyan growing from "tolerance" to "open discord" given the latter's open rapprochement to the West.

To make matters worse, Armenia's recent withdrawal from partnerships with Russia such as in the Eurasian Economic Union have not made Pashinyan more of a sympathetic figure to the Russian decision makers. That action added to Pashinyan's move to warming up relations with the European Union and NATO reminds analysts of what is happening to Ukraine. So, for the sake of argument, we can here state that Russia does not look at Armenia's recent moves with a very kind look thus pre-saging a negative reaction in times of emergencies. The three million Armenians now living and working in Russia will not be a consideration for Putin to do what he thinks is best for Russia which, in such an event, would be to close her eyes and pretend they can do nothing for Armenia.

President Trump's admiration for "strong leaders" also applies to his view of President Erdogan of Turkey. The latter, of course, is in a tight relationship with Aliyev, looking at the possibility of Azerbaijan taking over the Zangezur corridor and opening the way for Turkey to the rich and populous markets of Muslim "stans" like the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and the like. So, Armenia's loss of this corridor, very much like in the case of Artsakh's loss, will go through without much ado from world powers and with Erdogan's blessings.

Or maybe a regional power like Iran will come to Armenia's rescue if Aliyev attacks and takes over the Zangezur corridor. Given growing problems facing the Iranian government and its losses in the Middle East with

growing isolation, that regime must navigate international relationships very carefully and would hardly sacrifice anything for little Armenia next door. Besides, Iran has more to gain from her relations with Aliyev than with Armenia.

That leaves the United States as a potential "protector" of Armenia's existence and her rights to the Zangezur corridor. The recent cooperation documents signed by the outgoing Secretary of State Blinken or Pashinyan's presentation to the Atlantic Council in Washington in early February 2025, designated by the Armenian government as "openings" to US help and positive future assistance, reflect the naivete, lack of experience and delusion of Yerevan to the realpolitik of the United States and its current leadership. Despite the conviction of people in Armenia that their 3,000-year-old history and 6,500-year-old wine making are the center of the world's attention and support, if Pashinyan and his Foreign Minister Mirzoyan think they are getting "closer" to American decision makers and interests, they are to be judged nothing but delusional.

Pashinyan has also chosen an Armenian anti-diasporan attitude which has alienated a good percentage of the five to six million Armenians in Western countries. From the beginning of the "new" Armenia, he replaced the indescribable Minister of the Diaspora who ran around the world bestowing titles from Armenia to diasporans who "donated" thousands of dollars through her, amounts which were never accounted for by her, to a novice young man who had no idea what he was doing to finally downgrade the Ministry to the rank of the Office of Diaspora, a division of the Foreign Ministry, and manning it with a person from Glendale, whose activities are also rather unknown to the general diaspora communities.

Pashinyan's recent interview in Switzerland questioning the sources of the Genocide and another interview in Armenia stating as to how an Armenian in Australia is a "true" Armenian whereas only native-born Armenians are the "real" ones, indicate a deeply developed complex of native Armenians towards diasporan Armenians for

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# Will Azerbaijan Teach Somalia the Art of Genocide?

GENOCIDE, from page 18

daughter accompanied me on a trip throughout the country without security. Multi-billion-dollar businesses call Somaliland home. It has become an environmental refuge for endangered species and recently discovered gas.

In some ways, Somaliland is like Artsakh was. While the international community recognized neither, both were democratic. Somaliland has held eight elections, all peaceful, with one election decided by just 80 votes out of almost one half million cast. Despite a lack of recognition, Somaliland even became the first country in the world to secure elections with biometric iris scans. Joseph Stalin as nationality commissar, gerrymandered the Caucasus and attached the Armenian territory to Azerbaijan, albeit

as an autonomous oblast. As such, Azerbaijan never ruled Nagorno-Karabakh directly until its 2023 conquest and ethnic cleansing. Mogadishu's attempt to rule Somaliland is equally alien. Somaliland has now been *de facto* independent for longer than it was part of Somalia, and three-quarters of the Somaliland population was born after Siad Barre's dictatorship.

This has not stopped Somali rulers to try to force Somaliland back into its fold, an outcome Somalilanders reject given Somalia's lack of security, its corruption, and its religious radicalism. Blockades, bribery, and bombs have all failed.

As President Donald Trump's reportedly considers recognizing Somaliland's independence, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Somalia's other irredentists grow desper-

ate. If they can acquire Azerbaijan's Turkish or Israeli drones and other Azerbaijani weaponry, Mogadishu calculates, they can replicate then destruction and ethnic cleansing of Artsakh in Somaliland, but on a larger scale.

As Aliyev observed the discrepancy between the Biden administration's rhetoric and actions, his disdain for the United States grew. Secretary of State Antony Blinken may have believed he could build peace upon moral equivalency, but he is wrong. Not only did his policies enable ethnic cleansing, but other dictators took notice. What happens in the Caucasus does not stay in the Caucasus. Azerbaijan now appears to be taking its policy on the road for profit.

President Donald Trump and Secretary

of State Marco Rubio now must show they are no Biden and Blinken. Not only should they not allow the Artsakh tragedy to replicate along the Gulf of Aden, but they should also ensure Azerbaijan and the Aliyevs cannot profit off evil. It is time sanction Aliyev for his arms dealing, warn Hassan Sheikh Mohamud that following Aliyev's path will likely end with him in prison, exile, or dead, and recognize that aid to Somalia, like Azerbaijan aid under every U.S. administration from George W. Bush to Joe Biden, brings not peace and democracy, but war and dictatorship.

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

## 'A Great Leader'

LETTER, from page 19

having created a better life for themselves in Europe and the Americas than the Armenians who lived and suffered in the Soviet regime and have been "the protectors" of Arminianism.

As for other help in the region, let us not forget that Israel was the major supplier of drones to the Azeris in the recent war and has never recognized the Genocide in fear that it may compete with the Holocaust for world opinion. So, when Armenian-American organizations try to influence the US political process through its representatives in Congress, lobbying efforts are mostly linked to the Greek and Cypriot lobby rather than the Jewish one.

The status of Diasporan Armenian communities around the world today is not helping anyone or any country to feel sympathetic to their causes. The Church is divided in four (two Orthodox, one Catholic and one Protestant). There are numerous political parties and the two major ones

(ARF, RAG) are themselves divided thus neutralizing each other's policies. The only organizations contributing in a positive way are Benevolent and or Humanitarian ones which invest directly and help the Armenian countryside to elevate the natives' standard of living.

So, in conclusion, the strongman of Baku holds most of the cards and is in position to dictate and get what he wants without much resistance from any quarter around the world. China or India is quite far from the Caucasus and not very willing to be involved either. The West will not rush to help Armenia and even neighboring Georgia will remain, as always, aloof to Armenia's present or future.

Be vigilant. Be aware. The strong and "great" leader Aliyev, seen also as such through the eyes of the world's own leader, will come to haunt Armenia sooner than later.

Miran P. Sarkissian  
New York

## Azerbaijani, Turkish Foreign Ministers Meet in Munich

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov met with his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference.

At the meeting, the ministers discussed the political, economic, and transport-related aspects of Azerbaijan-Turkey allied relations, as well as key issues on the regional and international agenda, including the ongoing peace process with Armenia.

They emphasized the need for joint efforts and mutual support in regional and international organizations, including the Organization of Turkic States, the UN, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and other platforms.

Bayramov also provided an overview of the regional situation to his Turkish counterpart.

On January 31, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated that Armenia had made clear proposals to Azerbaijan regarding the unblocking of regional transport routes and was awaiting a response. He suggested that the most cost-effective and feasible option is the Megrhi railway route between Azerbaijan and Nakhijevan, as well as a railway connection from Yeraskh through Nakhijevan to Megrhi and vice versa.



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