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Armenian Patriarchate Warns of Israeli Threat To Seize Properties in East Jerusalem

JERUSALEM (Palestine Chronicle) — The Armenian Patriarchate in East Jerusalem warned on Wednesday, February 19, that Israel intended to confiscate its properties there, claiming that it has accrued debts since 1994.

“The hearing for the administrative petition filed by the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem is set for Monday, February 24, 2025,” the Patriarchate said in a statement this week.

It explained that the petition was filed “as an attempt to stop the foreclosure process against real estate properties that the Patriarchate has owned for centuries, so as to collect *armona* (Municipal Tax) debts that have allegedly accrued since 1994.”



Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem

“If, God forbidding, the Patriarchate’s petition is denied, the Jerusalem Municipality will seize real estate properties belonging to the Patriarchate and put them up for auction in order to collect allegedly disputed debts that have never been proven in judicial proceedings, and through customary practices heretofore, have never been enforced,” the statement noted.

The statement further noted that the petition was aimed “at the actions of the collection officer,” an employee of the Jerusalem Municipality “who has ‘determined’ that the Patriarchate owes an astronomical debt, without regard for the statute of limitations, and without providing clear identification of the basis for the alleged debt.”

Furthermore, “a significant portion” of the alleged debt relates to a property that is actually leased to the municipality itself, said the statement.

“The same municipal employee refuses to review the validity of the debt he himself determined, citing formal-procedural grounds that the deadline for objection has passed,” added the religious authority.

This is so, even though the Patriarchate demonstrated that “the claims were not properly delivered” to it within the required time frame.

“In other words, the municipal employee acts as the plaintiff, the judge, and the executor, all in one, serving the interests of his employer — the Municipality,” said the statement.

The foreclosure proceedings were temporarily suspended upon the filing of the petition. However, the Patriarchate warned that should the petition be denied, the Municipality will be permitted to “immediately resume” the seizure of specific properties.

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Ruben Vardanyan Again on Hunger Strike in Azeri Jail

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Ruben Vardanyan, an Armenian businessman and philanthropist jailed in Azerbaijan, has launched another hunger strike to protest against his ongoing trial described by him as a “judicial farce.”

“This is my response to the blatant violations of Azerbaijani procedural law and international law,” he said in a statement circulated via his family on Wednesday, February 19. “What is happening in the courtroom cannot be called a trial — this is a political show, in which my right to a fair hearing is being deliberately disregarded.”

“This so-called ‘trial’ is not just against me,” added Vardanyan. “It is an attempt to criminalize all Armenians — all those who supported and demonstrated compassion towards Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and its people, all those who showed compassion. This is an attack on an entire nation. I refuse to participate in this farce.”

An Azerbaijani military court began the two separate trials of Vardanyan and 15 Karabakh Armenians on January 17. The defendants include three former Karabakh presidents — Arayik Harutyunyan, Bako Sahakyan and Arkady Ghukasyan. Like Vardanyan, they 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. They are facing a long list of charges, including genocide and war crimes.



Armenian businessman and philanthropist Ruben Vardanyan stands trial in Baku (Facebook photo)

Vardanyan, who held the second-highest post in Karabakh’s leadership from November 2022 to February 2023, said he is tried for “exercising my rights to freedom of opinion and expression and political participation under international law, which have been aimed at protecting the rights of the Christian Armenian population of Artsakh.”

The tycoon went on to decry “egregious due process abuses” which he said were committed by Azerbaijani authorities before and during his trial. In particular, he said neither he nor his local lawyer, Avram Berman, has been given full access to 422 volumes of the criminal case against him.

“Furthermore, my international legal team has been barred from communicating or visiting me and has not had access to any of the case

materials,” he said, adding that he has also not been allowed to call in witnesses or file complaints.

Vardanyan also called on the international community to pay more “attention” to the trials of the Armenian prisoners. “Silence in the face of such violations paves the way for future tragedies, fueling hostility and a new wave of hatred,” he said.

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Yerevan Criticizes Azeri Trials of Karabakh Leaders

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan on Monday, February 24, criticized for the first time the trials of former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh jailed in Azerbaijan.

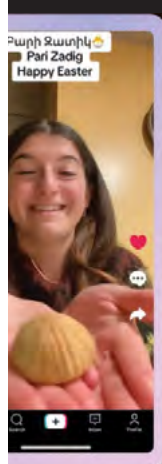
Mirzoyan also complained that Baku is reluctant to recognize Armenia’s territorial integrity when he spoke during a session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

“One year ago, in my statement I made extensive references to the challenges that Armenia was facing,” he said. “Unfortunately, most of those challenges still remain unresolved despite the tremendous efforts of my country. Statements coming from our eastern neighbor continue to question

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How Gen Z Is Using TikTok to Save Western Armenian

By Ella Chakarian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator



Anelga Hajjar started posting videos on TikTok feeling the way most people do — like she was just talking into the void. In Chicago, where she works as an actor and writer, Hajjar, 23, said the majority of Armenians around her speak Eastern Armenian. She said she struggles to find other Western Armenian speakers herself. So, she turned to social media.

“I just wanted to have a space where I myself could speak Armenian, because there’s no one here I can speak Armenian [with],” said Hajjar.

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Over \$5 Million to Be Invested to Complete Cascade Complex

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — A consortium of four companies, represented by GTB Development LLC, will implement the “Cascade Cultural Hub” project, the Yerevan City Hall reported on February 24.

A total of more than \$5 million will be invested to complete the construction of the Cascade complex based on the project presented by renowned French architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte.

A concert hall for about 1,000 people, a new museum of contemporary art, studios, entertainment and recreation areas will be created. All newly-constructed buildings, which will be equipped with the necessary technical means and infrastructure, will be transferred to the city of Yerevan as community property.

The investing company will also be allowed to build a multifunctional complex on the right of the Cascade, the design of which will be drawn up and architectural solutions will be provided by Jean-Michel Wilmotte.

The project is planned to be completed in five years.

Ambassador Briefs Greek Lawmaker on Regional Developments

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenia’s Ambassador to Greece Tigran Mkrtchyan met with Dora Bakoyannis, Chairperson of the Standing Committee on National Defense and Foreign Relations of the Greek Parliament, on February 25.

Mkrtchyan touched upon Armenia-Greece and Armenia-European Union relations, and presented the latest developments in this direction. He presented the latest developments in the South Caucasus region, in particular, the Armenia-Azerbaijan and Armenia-Turkey negotiation processes. It was noted that the basis for the signing of a peace treaty should be the recognition of each other’s territorial integrity, based on the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration. Ambassador Mkrtchyan voiced concern over the mock trials against Armenian prisoners of war and civilians held in Baku.

Bakoyannis welcomed Armenia’s intention to normalize relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, noting, in particular, that the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border will contribute to the establishment of a more constructive atmosphere in the region. She noted that the application of international law is experiencing a crisis, but Greece’s position is clear — conflicts should be resolved place in accordance with the norms of international law.

The sides referred to the importance of high-level contacts between the Republic of Armenia and Greece, and highlighted the active cooperation between the two parliaments. Mkrtchyan extended an invitation to Bakoyannis to visit Armenia.

Russian Police ‘Broke into’ Armenian Police Station to Extradite Russian National

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Members of the Russian police “broke into” a police station in Yerevan this month to “persuade” a Russian national to surrender. The incident was related to a criminal investigation back in Russia.

On Wednesday, February 19, the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly — Vanadzor reported that the incident took place on February 13, as Roman Shklover, a Russian national they legally represent, was summoned to a police station in Yerevan.

According to the organization, Shklover was summoned by the Protection Division of Yerevan Metro on the same day. He went there with the assembly’s lawyer, Samson Galstyan, and he was informed that a criminal case had been launched against him in Russia. In the meantime, the organization reported that Russian law enforcement representatives, whom they believe to have been members of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), “broke into” the police department to speak with Shklover.

“In the presence of the [Armenian] police, they tried to persuade R. Shklover to voluntarily go with them and surrender to the Russian Federation, promising that “everything will be fine with him” read the assembly’s statement about the incident.

They also noted that their lawyer “did not allow such an illegal act,” and Shklover himself “refused to cooperate with the FSB employees.”

“It turns out that Russian security officers have free access to and from the Police Departments of the Republic of Armenia,

are able to meet with Russian citizens in the departments without hindrance, and “urge” them to voluntarily surrender to Russia,” the civil rights group concluded.

They condemned the actions of the Russian side and demanded that Armenia “take immediate measures not only to stop such illegal actions but also to initiate criminal prosecution against those who committed such illegal actions.”

On Thursday, the Ministry of Internal Affairs dismissed the group’s report, stating that Shklover was summoned by the Armenian police because he was wanted in Russia. They confirmed that Russian law enforcement representatives were at the police department in Yerevan pursuant to Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) regulations.

Russians at Risk in Armenia

This recent incident was one of several similar cases that took place in Armenia with the participation of Russian law enforcement or military.

In December 2023, Russia reportedly detained Russian military deserter Dmitry Setrakov in the Armenian city of Gyumri, later transferring him to Rostov-on-Don in Russia, despite the Armenian authorities claiming to have no knowledge of his detention or departure from the country.

Two months later, when asked about Setrakov’s case, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan told France 24 that Setrakov’s abduction “greatly worried” Yerevan.

“[We] are also investigating that case, and if it turns out that everything is as you

say, it will of course also lead to certain consequences, because, of course, we cannot tolerate illegal actions on the territory of our country,” Pashinyan said.

Several months later, in April 2024, another Russian deserter, Anatoly Shchetinin, according to the assembly, was kidnapped by Russian military police based in Gyumri.

However, shortly after Russian state media agency Sputnik published a video with Shchetinin in the territory of the base, in which he said: “No one detained me, no one held me by force. Everything was done of my own free will.”

The practice of enhanced interrogation techniques by Russian law enforcement to extract forced confessions, including torture and threats of violence, have been widely documented.

In March 2024, the assembly also received alerts from Russian citizens who “had escaped political persecution and sought refuge in Armenia.” They cited the Russian nationals as saying that they noticed people in Russian military uniforms near their places of residence, “who overtly follow them and seek information as to who resides in apartments they oversee.”

At the time, the assembly claimed that the Russian police used “an unregistered passenger car with an Armenian license plate, which is intended exclusively for operational intelligence operations.”

(This story originally appeared on the website www.oc-media.org on February 20.)



Iceland’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Katrín Gunnarsdóttir, left, with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan

Armenia, Iceland FMs Meet in Geneva

GENEVA (Armenpress) — During his working visit to Geneva, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan met on February 25 with Iceland’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Katrín Gunnarsdóttir.

According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry, the parties discussed prospects for expanding bilateral dialogue and cooperation between Armenia and Iceland in various formats and platforms. The meeting also focused on possible upcoming visits.

Mirzoyan emphasized: “The active dynamics of deepening cooperation with the Nordic-Baltic countries testify to the importance we attach to cooperation in this

format, and we are ready to make the most of existing opportunities through joint efforts, both in the context of bilateral sectoral cooperation and regional cooperation.”

Mirzoyan briefed Gunnarsdóttir on the efforts being made to deepen the Armenia-EU partnership, emphasizing the importance of exchanging experience with Iceland, as a close partner of the EU, and strengthening capacities in specific areas.

Global and regional developments were also discussed at the meeting.

Mirzoyan presented the security situation in the South Caucasus and Armenia’s efforts to establish sustainable peace.

Vardanyan Again On Hunger Strike In Azeri Jail

HUNGER STRIKE, from page 1

Vardanyan went on hunger strike for the first time last April to demand the immediate release of himself and the other former Karabakh Armenian leaders. He ended it after Azerbaijani authorities allowed him to talk to his wife, Veronika Zonabend, by phone.

Vardanyan was reportedly put in a punishment cell in an Azerbaijani prison during the three-week hunger strike. In a subsequent appeal sent to the UN Committee against Torture, his family and American lawyer, Jared Genser, said he was denied water, forced to stand for many hours and subjected to sleep deprivation. Baku denied the claims.

In contrast with an outpouring of support for the captives voiced by prominent public figures in Armenia and its worldwide Diaspora, the Armenian government has pointedly declined to condemn their 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. Genser similarly complained late last month that the Armenian government is doing little to try to secure the release of his client and the other former Karabakh leaders.



ARMENIA

Oligarch Roman Trotsenko, Son Hit By UK Sanctions

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The UK on Monday, February 24, announced its largest package of sanctions against Russia since the early days of the war in Ukraine in 2022, targeting 67 individuals and dozens of vessels.

Under the sanctions, the individuals are banned from entering the UK, their assets within the country are subject to freezing, and British entities are prohibited from providing them with services.

Airline S7 and the founder of the aviation group with the same name, Vladislav Filev, and Eduard Khudainatov, former CEO of Rosneft and owner of Coalstar and Independent Oil and Gas Company (NKK), have been added to the UK sanctions list.

Among the British government's list of wealthy Russians included in the sanctions are billionaire businessman Roman Trotsenko, owner of the Novaport airport network, and his son Gleb. Roman Trotsenko is the de facto owner of the Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine (ZCMC). Although ZCMC previously announced a "change" in its shareholder composition, media outlets, based on a simple online search, revealed that Svetlana Ershova, the individual to whom the shares were transferred, had long been affiliated with Trotsenko's corporations, holding executive positions there.

Trotsenko is also the founder and former majority shareholder of the Aeon Corporation, which operates in Russia's extractives, transport and chemicals sectors.

The government also sanctioned a further 40 vessels Britain said were being used to help Russia evade sanctions by transporting its oil.

Source Panorama.am

Yerevan to Host Tourism Exhibition in April

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The ITF Armenia 2025 International Tourism Exhibition will take place at the Karen Demirchyan Sports and Concerts Complex April 4-6. The event is organized by the Tourism Committee and the Armenian Tourism Federation.

Tourism Committee Chairperson Lusine Gevorgyan described the event as "unprecedented" at a press conference on Tuesday, February 25.

"Travel agencies, hotels and airlines will all come together under one roof," Gevorgyan stated.

Representatives from government agencies and private companies from around the world are expected to attend the event. According to Gevorgyan, the event serves as a key platform for international cooperation, allowing global companies to present themselves in Armenia while providing Armenian businesses with opportunities to expand into international markets.

Armenian Tourism Federation President Mekhak Apresyan underscored the importance of the exhibition in fostering international cooperation and promoting the growth of domestic tourism.

"ITF Armenia 2025 will go beyond a traditional exhibition, serving as a dynamic platform where industry stakeholders can unite, establish a shared vision and engage in effective cooperation," Apresyan noted.

Heavy Metals Researcher Receives Grant to Study Contamination as a Result of Mining

YEREVAN — For the fourth time in a row, Armine Grigoryan has received Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR)'s Yervant Terzian Armenian National Science and Education Fund (ANSEF) grant to continue her research on heavy metals and their impact on human health and the environment.

With her latest ANSEF grant in 2024, Armine and her three female colleagues are studying the role of bacterial exopolysaccharides in heavy metal removal and bioremediation. Heavy metal contamination is a major public health risk, especially in developing countries like Armenia, with well-documented toxic effects.

To isolate heavy metal resistant bacterial strains, Grigoryan's team has visited various mining sites across Armenia, including the abandoned Kavart mine, the Akhtala tailings dump, the Kajaran copper-molybdenum plant, the Artsvanik tailings dump, Shamlugh, and Drmbon in Nagorno-Karabakh before the second Artsakh war.

"We created a large microbial collection, which became the foundation of this ANSEF research," Armine explains. "Among these bacteria, we focused on those producing extracellular polysaccharides, or exopolysaccharides. One possible mechanism of bacterial metal resistance is the production of this polysaccharide, which forms a protective mucus-like coat. As the coat dries, metals stick to it, preventing them from penetrating the bacterial cells and causing toxicity. By extracting this coat and creating membranes from it, we can develop natural filters that capture heavy metals from mining

waste, helping to clean the environment."

Grigoryan's path in science began in the mid 2000s when she studied biology at Yerevan State University. Her thesis research project focused on waste pollution in Lake Sevan. Today, with more than 20 active mining sites in Armenia, she is deeply concerned about the open tailings dumps that endanger nearby communities. "Numerous studies have confirmed high cancer rates in these areas, with mining and tailing dumps being the primary cause," she said.

While her current research is focused on fundamental science, she hopes it will one day have practical applications. "Science is beautiful in its discoveries," she says. "I briefly worked in applied medicine during COVID-19, training staff in Nagorno-Karabakh on PCR testing. But I realized that research is my true calling."

Balancing science and motherhood has been a new challenge for Armine. "I spend my days in the lab, experimenting from morning to night. If an experiment fails, I start over — it's part of the process. But when my one-year-old cries and I don't know what to do, I feel lost. Sometimes, I even cry too," she laughs.

Becoming a successful scientist in Armenia takes dedication, hard work, and support. "ANSEF has been crucial for researchers like us," she says. "The increased grant funding allows us to do more. It may seem like a small amount, but it lays the groundwork for bigger research and long-term goals."



Armine Grigoryan and her three female colleagues are studying the role of bacterial exopolysaccharides in heavy metal removal and bioremediation

Armenian Official Complains about Azeri Statements on Peace Deal

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A senior Armenian lawmaker complained on Tuesday, February 25, that Azerbaijan is making it harder for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's administration to enact a new Armenian constitution by continuing to publicly demand such a change.

Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Elnur Mammadov reiterated on Monday that an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace deal is conditional on a change of Armenia's constitution which Baku says lays claim to Nagorno-Karabakh.

"We are waiting for Armenia to overcome the main obstacle in the settlement process by legally abandoning territorial claims to Azerbaijan through constitutional changes," he told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Arman Yeghoyan, the chairman of the Armenian parliament committee on Euro-

pean integration affiliated with Pashinyan's Civil Contract party, criticized Mammadov's remarks.

"I regard that statement as an obstacle to the constitutional reforms in Armenia," said Yeghoyan. "With such statements, Azerbaijan's representatives, being well aware of the reaction they will generate in Armenia, want to scuttle the constitutional reforms in Armenia."

Baku specifically wants Yerevan to remove a constitutional preamble that mentions Armenia's 1990 declaration of independence, which in turn cites a 1989 unification act adopted by the legislative bodies of Soviet Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. The only legal way to do that is to adopt a new constitution.

Kristine Vartanian, a parliament deputy from the opposition Hayastan alliance, insisted on Tuesday that the Azerbaijani demands are the reason why Pashinyan wants

to change the Armenian constitution in the first place.

"Azerbaijan wants not only a deal with Nikol Pashinyan and Civil Contract but a deal with all Armenians that would be formalized by a referendum," she said.

Pashinyan and his political team deny planning the constitutional referendum at the behest of Baku. But the prime minister said in February 2024 that peace with Azerbaijan will be impossible as long as the 1990 declaration is referenced in the current constitution.

Pashinyan again made a case for a new constitution in an hour-long video address to the nation aired last week. His justice minister, Srubhi Galyan, said the next day that a government panel headed by her will "do everything" to draft it before the country's next general elections expected in June 2026. Galyan did not rule out that the preamble will be excluded from the draft.

INTERNATIONAL

Armenian, Iranian FMs Meet in Geneva

GENEVA (Panorama.am/Armenpress) — Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan had a meeting with his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi in Geneva on February 24. The meeting took place within the framework of the high-level segment of the UN Human Rights Council, the Armenian Foreign Ministry reported.

The two ministers discussed issues on the bilateral cooperation agenda. The readiness to take further practical steps towards the continuous development of cooperation between the two countries was emphasized, and ongoing efforts and upcoming programs in various sectoral directions were touched upon.

The meeting also touched upon opportunities for cooperation in different formats.

Mirzoyan and Araghchi exchanged views on regional developments. They touched upon efforts to ensure stability and lasting peace in the South Caucasus.

Araghchi reaffirmed Tehran's readiness to support peace efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

"We strive for peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan and are ready to support this process," Araghchi said at a press conference following his meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Mirzoyan, ICRC Chief Meet in Geneva

GENEVA (Panorama.am) — On February 24, during his working visit to Geneva, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan met with Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The issues of cooperation between Armenia and the ICRC were touched upon, the Armenian Foreign Ministry reported.

Mirzoyan and Egger discussed humanitarian issues. Mirzoyan raised the issue of the release of Armenian prisoners of war and civilians illegally detained in Azerbaijan, the ongoing sham trials, expressing concern over the health condition of mentioned individuals and the possible pressure exerted on them.

Among other agenda items, the discussion touched upon the undertaken and necessary additional efforts towards clarifying the fate of missing persons. Mirzoyan emphasized Armenia's readiness and steps taken to address the issue, taking into account the sensitivity of the matter for the families of missing persons.

He noted that resolving humanitarian issues could be a significant factor in achieving a comprehensive settlement and establishing lasting peace.

During the meeting, Mirzoyan presented the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including work on the text of the peace treaty, emphasizing the importance of both sides demonstrating political will for its conclusion.

Yerevan Criticizes Azeri Trials Of Karabakh Leaders

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the territorial integrity of Armenia, despite the recognition of each other's territorial integrity based on the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration."

"Moreover, as we speak, the mock trials against 23 Armenian individuals, who are arbitrarily detained, are taking place in Azerbaijan with disregard of human rights standards for due process," added Mirzoyan.

An Azerbaijani military court began the separate trials of Ruben Vardanyan, an Armenian billionaire and philanthropist, and 15 Karabakh Armenians on January 17. The defendants facing a long list of accusations include three former Karabakh presidents — Arayik Harutyunyan, Bako Sahakyan and Arkady Ghukasyan. They were all 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 their trials. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan claimed later that explicit condemnation would only harm them. Critics say that he is simply afraid of angering Baku.

Pashinyan said on January 25 that the Azerbaijani authorities could use "banned psychotropic drugs" to extract false testimony from defendants and use it for "escalations in the region." Baku dismissed the claim as "baseless and ludicrous."

Pashinyan and members of his government and political team have since declined to say what Yerevan is doing to secure the release of the Armenian captives. The issue does not seem to be on the agenda of Armenian-Azerbaijani talks on a bilateral peace treaty.



Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan speaks during a session of the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva, February 24, 2025

Mirzoyan indicated that Yerevan is still awaiting Baku's positive response to its "several constructive proposals" regarding the treaty as well as Armenian-Azerbaijani transport links and a "mutual arms control and verification mechanism."

Addressing the UN body, Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Elnur Mammadov repeated his country's main precondition for signing the peace deal: a change of Armenia's constitution which Baku says lays claim to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Justice Minister Srubhi Galyan refused to say on Thursday what the Armenian government is doing to try to secure the release of eight former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh standing trial in Azerbaijan.

"Steps cannot fail to be taken, but I don't think it is appropriate to talk about those steps on any platform," Galyan told

journalists. "This is a very sensitive issue, and we can't make many comments on it for the simple reason that such comments might damage the people who are in that situation now."

Critics 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 also circulated by his family.

Azerbaijan Suspends BBC

By Liam Scott

LONDON (BBC News) — Azerbaijan's government has ordered the suspension of the Azerbaijani operation of BBC News in the capital, Baku, the British news agency confirmed Thursday, February 20.

In a statement, the BBC said it had made the "reluctant decision" to close its office in the country after receiving a verbal instruction from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"We deeply regret this restrictive move against press freedom, which will hinder our ability to report to and from Azerbaijan for our audiences inside and outside the country," a BBC spokesperson said in a statement.

The suspension comes after Azerbaijani state-run media last week reported that the Azerbaijani government wanted to reduce the number of BBC staff working in the country to one.

The BBC said it has received nothing in writing about the suspension from the Azerbaijani government. While the news agency seeks clarification, its team of journalists in the country have stopped their journalistic activities, according to the BBC.

A spokesperson from Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry told VOA in an emailed response that the BBC's statement about press freedom was "regrettable and unacceptable." The government's response arrived after publication.

Aykhana Hajizada, the spokesperson, said the ministry told the BBC that "Azerbaijan's position and decisions on media outlets of all foreign countries are always based on the principle of reciprocity."

Hajizada added that the government's decision "is not related to the correspondent activities of the BBC" and that "it is planned" to issue an accreditation for one correspondent.

The BBC has operated in Azerbaijan since 1994. The news agency says its Azerbaijani service reached an average of one million people each week in the country of 10.6 million.

The BBC says it will continue its news services in the Azerbaijani language.

The BBC suspension marks the continuation of a harsh crackdown on independent media that the Azerbaijani government has engaged in for years.

The British rights group Global Witness

expressed concern about the BBC's suspension.

"Global Witness extends full solidarity with the BBC's journalists in Baku, as well as all imprisoned journalists in Azerbaijan," Dominic Kavakeb, co-director of campaigns at Global Witness, said in a statement.

Azerbaijan is among the worst jailers of journalists in the world. As of last week, at least 23 journalists were jailed in the former Soviet country in retaliation for their work, according to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

Many of the journalists jailed in Azerbaijan are accused of foreign currency smuggling, which media watchdogs have rejected as a sham charge.

Among those jailed is Farid Mehralizada, an economist and journalist with the Azerbaijani Service of VOA's sister outlet Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Jailed since May 2024, Mehralizada faces charges of conspiring to smuggle foreign currency and "illegal entrepreneurship, money laundering, tax evasion and document forgery." He and his employer reject the charges, which carry a combined sentence of up to 12 years behind bars.

On the World Press Freedom Index, Azerbaijan ranks 164 out of 180 countries, where 180 shows the worst environment for media freedom.



INTERNATIONAL

Russia Detains 2 Armenian Nationals over Assassination of Armenian-Russian Militia Leader in Moscow

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

MOSCOW (OC-Media) — The Russian state-run media outlet RT reported on February 21 that two Armenian citizens have been detained in Russia in connection with the murder of Arbat battalion founder Armen Sargsyan. RT reported investigators believe Ukraine's military intelligence agency (HUR) could be behind the assassination.

RT reported that two individuals, identified only as 44-year-old Arman P and 61-year-old Hrachya P, were detained in Moscow "almost two weeks ago" as part of the investigation into the "murder" of Sargsyan.

According to RT, the Russian authorities were considering two possible reasons for the killing, with the first suggesting that the fatal explosion "could have been organized by Sargsyan's business competitors."

"However, the priority version of the investigation is that the [military intelligence agency] of Ukraine could be behind

Sargsyan's murder, since his battalion 'Arbat' became part of the Russian Defense Ministry in 2023" and was participating in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The source also reportedly stated that Russian intelligence "received information that the HUR had been developing an operation to eliminate Sargsyan for more than three months, and had been keeping him under surveillance since the beginning of 2025."

RT also noted that Sargsyan's "personal data" was posted on the Ukrainian website Myrotvorets "for many years." Myrotvorets is a Ukrainian platform that publishes information about "pro-Russian terrorists, separatists, mercenaries, war criminals, and murderers."

Sargsyan, who was born in Armenia but grew up in Ukraine, founded the pro-Russian paramilitary group Arbat, which fought alongside Russian troops during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. He and his bodyguard were killed on February 3 after being

injured in an explosion at a Moscow apartment complex earlier in the day.

The Russian Investigative Committee said it had [launched an inquiry](#) into the explosion under several criminal articles, including murder.

While not explicitly saying that Ukraine was responsible, a source in law enforcement told TASS shortly after that Sargsyan's death was believed to be an assassination.

A Suicide Bombing?

On February 4, TASS wrote that the explosion may have been the result of a suicide bombing. In the February 21 article, RT's source "close to the investigation" stated that the body of a suspected bomber was found at the site of the explosion.

RT also cited other news reports suggesting that the bomber was 58-year-old Paruyr M.

"However, it is still unclear whether he was the bomber or just happened to be at the site of the explosion," RT's source said.

Paruyr, as well as Hrachya and Arman,



Armen Sargsyan (Tass photo)

were reportedly from the Armenian town of Vaghharshapat, though they lived in Russia. Russian state media suggested they had met at a friend's birthday party "several months" before the explosion. RT cited the Armenian Embassy in Moscow as saying they had not been informed that any Armenian citizens had been detained as a part of the investigation.

Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov Visits Iran

By Golnaz Esfandiari

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, after a meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, said Tehran would not bow to pressure from the United States, a day after Washington imposed new sanctions on Iran's oil industry.

Lavrov's one-day trip to Tehran on February 25 comes a week after the first high-level talks between Moscow and Washington in three years.

The talks in Saudi Arabia on February 18 have raised hopes of a reset between Russia and the United States after tensions soared following the Kremlin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Analysts said the meeting in Tehran could be the Kremlin checking in to make sure Iran's stance on key issues is in line with Moscow — especially regarding relations with Washington — or that Lavrov

could be delivering a message from the Saudi Arabian talks.

The potential rapprochement has fueled concerns in Iran that Moscow could abandon Tehran, an ally, to revive relations with Washington. Others in the Islamic republic hope Moscow can mediate an end to the standoff between Iran and the United States.

"They tend to send some diplomats to Iran at least assuage concerns because as you know there is a long-standing apprehension in Iran that the Russians may potentially sell out Iran to the United States," Nicole Grajewski, a fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Nuclear Policy Program, told Radio Farda.

Lavrov's visit came a day after Washington imposed a new round of sanctions targeting Iran's oil industry, the main source of the country's income.

Earlier this month, Trump restored his "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran,

saying Tehran was "too close" to weaponizing its nuclear program.

In 2018, during his first term in office, Trump pulled the United States out of an agreement between Tehran and world powers that placed limits on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions. Since then, the Is-



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi (left) and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, arrive for their a press conference in Tehran on February 25

lamic republic has ramped up its uranium enrichment, raising fears that it is close to developing a nuclear warhead.

"There is no possibility of direct negotiations with the U.S. as long as maximum

pressure is being applied in this way," Araqchi said at a joint news conference with Lavrov

Lavrov said diplomatic measures were still on the table for resolving issues around Iran's nuclear program.

The prospect of improved relations between Washington and Moscow have raised concern among some in Tehran who feel it could impact Iran.

Iran's conservative daily *Jomhuri Eslami* on February 25 warned of a "grand bargain" between Washington and Moscow that could result in Russia "turning a blind eye" to any potential U.S. military action against Iran.

The daily *Etemad* suggested this week that Lavrov could carry a message from Washington that includes proposals for reducing tensions between Iran and the United States and paving the way for a new round of talks between the two countries.

The daily also said the aim of Lavrov's trip to Iran could be to become acquainted with Tehran's positions before a potential meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin in the future.

"What Putin is pursuing is not a deal regarding Iran but merely the national interests of Russia," Hossein Shalevarzi, a former head of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, said on X last week.

Despite deep mistrust, Tehran and Moscow have grown closer and enhanced military cooperation since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and Moscow was hit by a slew of Western sanctions.

Iran has provided Russia with cheap but deadly drones that have been used against Ukraine, though both Tehran and Moscow deny it.

"The aim of the trip is to put pressure on Tehran to be in line with Moscow," Damon Golriz, a lecturer at the Hague University of Applied Sciences, told Radio Farda.

Other Iranian observers say a potential U.S.-Russia reset could be an opportunity for Tehran.

Tehran-based analyst Abdolreza Farajirad said in an interview with *Etemad* that Lavrov's trip to Iran comes amid "a deadlock" between Tehran and Washington and a worsening economy that has turned into a major challenge for the Islamic republic.

"If Russia can act as a mediator between Tehran and Washington, it can be considered a positive development," Farajirad said.

Israeli Threaten to Seize Properties in East Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, from page 1

'Dangerous Legal Precedent'

"It will also establish a dangerous legal precedent that could legitimize the expropriation of property rights and the involuntary liquidation of assets belonging to the Christian religious institutions and communities in Israel," said the statement.

"This would result in far greater harm to the property owners than the amount of the alleged disputed debts," it added.

"To the best of our knowledge, the Armenian Patriarchate is the only Christian community chosen — and perhaps targeted — to face such unprecedented and irreversible measures due to the alleged Arnona debt," the statement continued.

It said that the conduct of the municipality was "especially inappropriate" considering the municipality itself "owing the Patriarchate millions of shekels in overdue rental fees."

"Filing against the Armenian Patriarchate in the execution office, forcing it to pay the alleged Arnona debt, and, even more

so, proceeding with the foreclosure of its properties, could jeopardize" the authority's "long-standing mission in the Holy Land, which has been active since the 7th century," the statement noted.

It could also "threaten the continued existence of the Armenian community in the Holy Land, which dates back to the 4th century."

It said the municipality's action was "a clear attempt" to "undermine" the Patriarchate by "singling it out with economic pressure, with the aim of diminishing its presence in the Holy Land."

The Patriarchate called upon Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Interior Minister Moshe Arbel, and the head of the governmental committee, Tzachi Hanegbi, "to intervene decisively and immediately freeze all actions taken by the Municipality."

"We also urge them to resume the meetings of this governmental committee in order to find an amicable resolution to this issue, solely through negotiation within the

framework established by the committee," the statement concluded.

Outcry from Churches

In a statement on Wednesday, the Patriarchs and Heads of Local Churches of Jerusalem issued a statement affirming its "steadfast solidarity" with the Armenian Patriarchate "in its pursuit of justice against an unjust foreclosure order."

"This reckless move jeopardizes the Orthodox Armenian Patriarchate and sets a perilous precedent that could imperil Christian institutions throughout the Holy Land," the statement added.

The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) also condemned the municipality's action saying that "Israel is set to tax, seize and auction off properties that have been owned for centuries" by the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem.

"This illegal action represents a direct threat to the survival of the Armenian Christian Quarter and all the diverse faith-based communities" of the holy city, it added.



Community News

‘Preserved with Compassion: Collections of Hope’ By Dr. Talin Suciyan

FRESNO — Dr. Talar Suciyan will give a presentation on “Preserved with Compassion: Collections of Hope” at 7:00PM on Friday, February 28, 2025, in the Smittcamp Alumni House (2625 E. Matoian Way), on the Fresno State campus.

Suciyan was appointed as Kazan Visiting Professor in Armenian Studies for the Spring 2025 semester and this is the second in a three-part lecture series concentrating on the family archives of Armenian Genocide survivors.

This talk will present one of the largest known collections of postcards of Ottoman Armenian villages and towns, dated both before and after 1915. In the absence of visual material from the old country, this collection provides a vivid picture of the towns and villages, architectural monuments and social environment of the time. They belong to the archive of the Fenerci family, an Armenian family living in Montreal. Me-



Dr. Talin Suciyan

ticulously categorized and carefully preserved, the collection itself is one of the most important acts of memory preservation. The lecture will present the postcards and associated documents along with the logic of their categorization to trace the mental steps of the collection’s creator.

After graduating from the University of Istanbul, Suciyan continued her studies in Germany, where she obtained her Ph.D. Based in Munich, she has been teaching and researching at the Institute for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Munich for over 15 years. She is the author of *Outcasting Armenians: Tanzimat of the Provinces* (Syracuse University Press, 2023) and *The Armenians in Modern Turkey: Post-Genocide Society, History and Politics* (I. B. Tauris, 2016).

Her latest book, *Armenians in Turkey after the Second World War: An Archival Reader of USSR Consular Documents*, was just published by I. B. Tauris, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, as part of the series “Armenians in the Modern and Early Modern World” edited by Bedross Der Matossian (University of Nebraska, Lincoln).

The lecture is free and open to the public.



Maral Boyadjian urgently needs a bone marrow donor match for a transplant that can save her life.

200 Join ABMDR For Chance To Save the Lives of Maral Boyadjian and other patients

LOS ANGELES — Recently, the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR) held two donor recruitment drives in the Los Angeles area, to find donor matches for patients in the US and abroad who urgently need bone marrow stem cell transplantation for a chance to survive their diseases.

On February 3, ABMDR held a recruitment drive at St. Leon Cathedral, in Burbank. The organization held a second recruitment on February 6, at the Armenian Brotherhood Bible Church, in Pasadena, for Maral Boyadjian as well as all ABMDR patients. The Pasadena event was organized jointly by Boyadjian’s family and ABMDR.

Boyadjian, who is the principal of Sahag-Mesrob School, is suffering from Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML), a type of blood cancer. Her only chance for survival, like all ABMDR patients, is to receive a bone marrow stem cell transplant, which would be possible only if she is matched with a compatible stem cell donor.

At the recruitment drive in Burbank, 24 supporters signed up as potential bone marrow stem cell donors. At the Pasadena event, 176 supporters joined the ranks of ABMDR.

“Becoming a donor is a simple, safe, and painless process, and promises the deeply rewarding chance of saving someone’s life,” said ABMDR president Dr. Frieda Jordan and continued, “I’d like to thank everyone, including our new donors, our volunteers, St. Leon Cathedral and Arch. Hovnan Derderian, as well as the Armenian Brotherhood Bible Church, for enabling us to hold such vitally important community events.”

Jordan further stated that anyone between the ages of 18 and 50 and in good general health can join ABMDR to become a donor and save a life.

For more information, call (323) 663-3609 or visit abmdr.am.



A scene from the Pasadena recruitment

NAASR to Host Webinar on ‘Genetic Insights Into the Origins of Armenians’

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will host a webinar titled “Genetic Insights into the Origins of Armenians” with Dr. Anahit Hovhannisyanyan of Trinity College, Dublin, and Dr. Levon Yepiskoposyan of the Institute of Molecular Biology, National Academy of Sciences, Republic of Armenia, on Sunday, March 2, 2025, at 12:00 p.m. (Eastern) / 9:00 a.m. (Pacific). The program is co-sponsored by the Ararat-Eskijian Museum.

This webinar can be viewed live via Zoom (Registration: <https://bit.ly/3QtZQ3z>) and YouTube (www.youtube.com/c/ArmenianStudies).

This talk will cover a recent study published in the *American Journal of Human Genetics* (“Demographic history and Genetic Variation of the Armenian Population”), of which the two speakers are among the co-authors, that conducted the first whole-genome analysis of Armenians to explore their genetic history and variation. It revealed that Armenians across different regions are genetically similar, while the Sasun population, previously thought to have Assyrian ancestry, instead developed a slightly distinct genetic profile due to a historical decrease in population size.

The study also tested the long-debated theory, originally proposed by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, that Armenians originated from the Balkans but found no genetic evidence to support this claim. Instead, the findings uncovered genetic input from a Levantine source in the region after the Early Bronze Age.

Dr. Anahit Hovhannisyanyan is a Marie Curie Fellow at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, and a visiting post-doc at the University of Cambridge, UK. Her research focuses on evolutionary and population genomics. In particular, she is interested in studying the evolutionary processes that have shaped the genetic composition and diversity of Armenian population, leveraging genomic data from both modern and ancient samples.

Dr. Levon Yepiskoposyan is the head of the Laboratory of Evolutionary Genomics at the Institute of Molecular Biology within the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia. His research focuses on the genetic history of the Armenian population, and the reconstruction of palaeobiodiversity in the Lesser Caucasus through zooarchaeological and paleobotanical materials. He leads the Yeghegis-1 rock shelter field team in the Vayots Dzor region and has previously served as the Rector of Artsakh State University. He is the author of over 100 articles published in peer-reviewed journals and books, and he has authored, co-authored, or edited five books.

For more information about this program, contact NAASR at hq@naasr.org.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Bar Association Participates in International Religious Freedom Summit in DC

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Bar Association participated in the 2025 International Religious Freedom Summit, held February 3-5, in the nation's capital. This annual event draws more than 90 organizations from more than 30 faith traditions, dedicated to protecting the fundamental right to religious freedom. It serves as a platform for global leaders and advocates to discuss and address the urgent challenges of religious persecution and restrictions worldwide.

On the second day of the summit, Vice President JD Vance was the plenary speaker.

For the fourth consecutive year, the Armenian Bar Association joined a broad-based assembly of Armenian clergy, historians and journalists to present a unified message on matters impacting Armenians globally. The focus at this year's summit was on the illegal detention of Armenian hostages and political prisoners in Azerbaijan, the widespread destruction of religious and cultural sites in Artsakh, and the continuing threats to those that remain.

Sonya Nersessian, former chair of the Armenian Bar and chief organizer of the association's delegation, was a panelist at the summit. She addressed the legal frameworks and international mechanisms that could be employed to protect and promote Armenian cultural identity — encompassing language, religious practices, and historical sites — within the context of Azerbaijani law and inter-



The Armenian Bar Association delegation to the International Religious Freedom Summit with Archbishop Viken Aykazian

national human rights standards, particularly in the Artsakh region.

The Armenian Bar Association's input at the 2025 summit reaffirms its commit-

ment to human rights, the protection of religious freedoms and the preservation of cultural heritage. Throughout the event, the association engaged in discussions

on safeguarding sacred sites, supporting religious minorities and finding solutions to end the suffering of those unjustly detained in Azerbaijani prisons.

Joe Manganiello to Join Armenian Assembly Spring Advocacy Summit in DC

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) announced this week that actor and director Joe Manganiello will join the Assembly and its advocates from across the country for the Assembly's Spring 2025 Advocacy Summit in Washington, DC, from March 31 through April 2.



Joe Manganiello

To connect more closely with his Armenian heritage, Manganiello traveled to Armenia in 2024 touring the country for ten days and planted a tree at the Tsitsernakaberd Armenian Genocide Memorial in honor of his grandmother, and great-grandmother Terviz "Rose" Darakjian. He was received by the president of Armenia, Vahagn Khachaturyan, and other officials who were pleased to welcome the famed actor to his ancestral homeland.

In memory of his great-grandmother and grandmother, he had the Orthodox Armenian words for angel tattooed on his left forearm, and, luck, which also means fate, on his right. The words were drawn for him by famed Armenian calligrapher Ruben Malayan. "The script is the way my great-grandmother who escaped the genocide would've read it," he told Julie Jordan in an exclusive interview with *PEOPLE*.

"As a descendant of an Armenian Genocide survivor, I am fully aware of the background to our experience as Armenian Americans and the importance to the Armenian people of keeping its culture alive and thriving. I look forward to the Assembly's Advocacy Summit, as together

we will continue to raise awareness about the existential threats facing the Armenian people," said Manganiello.

Manganiello is one of today's leading Hollywood movie and television industry figures. As the host of NBC's "Deal or No Deal Island," he is familiar to millions of television viewers. Manganiello began his professional film career playing Flash Thompson in Sam Raimi's "Spider-Man." His breakout role was as werewolf Alcide Herveaux in five seasons of the HBO series "True Blood." Manganiello is also known for his roles in films such as "Magic Mike," "Magic Mike XXL," "Pee-wee's Big Holiday," "What to Expect When You're Expecting," "Sabotage" and "Rampage."

Born in Pittsburgh to Susan (Brachanow) and Charles John Manganiello, he was raised in Mount Lebanon. In high school he began writing and directing films with his friends and as a result, became interested in acting. He studied acting at the Carnegie Mellon School of Drama, after which he moved to Los Angeles. His younger brother, Nicholas, is also his producing partner.

"We are honored that Joe Manganiello will be joining this year's Advocacy Summit," stated Assembly Co-Chairs Oscar Tatosian and Talin Yacoubian. "His passion and commitment to his Armenian roots speak volumes. We look forward to a very productive and successful Summit."

The Spring 2025 Advocacy Summit, as in previous years, will include informative briefings and panel discussions, as well as meetings with Members of Congress, culminating with the Capitol Hill Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Maine 'Office of New Americans' Director Faces Backlash, Calls For Resignation Over Anti-Armenian Social Media Posts

By Edward Tomic

PORTLAND (Maine Wire) — Several members of Maine's Armenian community are calling for the resignation of the director of the Maine Office of New Americans (ONA) due to his history of making anti-Armenian comments on social media.

Tarlan Ahmadov was appointed by Gov. Janet Mills as ONA director in December 2024. Ahmadov previously served as the director of the Division of Programs at Maine Department of Labor's Bureau of Employment Services, and as the state refugee coordinator with Catholic Charities Maine.

ONA, the state migrant resettlement office, was initially put forward in an executive order by Gov. Mills in August 2023. Mills directed the Governor's Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) to develop a plan to create the ONA, as part of a nationwide network of similar state resettlement offices.

Although a standalone bill to create the office sponsored by Ahmadov's longtime friend, Rep. Deqa Dhalac (D-South Portland), failed to pass during the last legislative session, on the final day of the session Democratic lawmakers attached just over \$300,000 to fund the creation of the ONA to the budget, which was passed on a party line vote.

Ahmadov, himself an immigrant to Maine from Azerbaijan, is also the founder of the Azerbaijan Society of Maine, and comments extensively on Azeri geopolitical issues on his X profile, where he posts under the handle "Falcon."

Although Ahmadov did not respond to inquiries from the Maine Wire, he changed the location on his X (formerly Twitter) profile on February 19 to Mainesville, Ohio, before deleting the account altogether.

Among his posts on X are several that are critical of Armenia and use harsh rhetoric against the Armenian people.

In the fall of 2020, shortly after conflict erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Ahmadov made a post referring to Armenia as an "Occupant and Aggressor" with a map showing the Armenian flag covering the western seaboard of the U.S., an area of the country with a large Armenian-American diaspora population.

A similar post made by Ahmadov asks, "Why not to recognize California as independent Armenian Republic? There are a lot Armenians there? [sic]"

In another post made that same year, Ahmadov suggested that celebrity Kim Kardashian is a terrorist for making a donation to an Armenian organization.

Ahmadov also called former New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick "turkophobic" for making a statement in support of Armenia against Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Ahmadov previously attracted criticism in his role as president of the Azerbaijan Society of Maine for drafting a controversial mayoral proclamation for the City of Portland in early 2021 to recognize February 26 as "Khojaly Remembrance Day," referring to the 1992 killing of hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians by Armenian and Soviet forces, and describing the mass-

acre as a genocide.

That proclamation was later rescinded by then-Portland Mayor Kate Snyder after criticism from the city's Armenian-American population, who argued the proclamation was inaccurate and part of a propaganda campaign by Azerbaijan and Turkey.

In contrast to his history of vitriolic social media posts about Armenians, Ahmadov said following his appointment as ONA director that he will "foster welcoming communities across the state."

Ahmadov's appointment was celebrated at the time by representatives of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, Catholic Charities Maine, the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project, the Maine Immigrants Rights Coalition, and a slew of other migrant advocacy nonprofit organizations.

In an email thread on which the Maine Wire was CC'd, Armenian Mainers and representatives of Maine's migrant community called for Ahmadov to resign or be fired in the wake of his comments.

Husein Sahnun emailed statement to GOPIF Director Hannah Pingree, Deputy Director Sarah Curran, and Communications Director Jackie Farwell:

This week, as new Mainers, we came across a troubling video that led us to examine Tarlan Ahmadov's X account. Thanks to the Maine Wire please see attached below for evidence, what we found was shocking — Mr. Ahmadov's posts were filled with hateful rhetoric toward the Armenian community. He has labeled Armenians as "occupiers and aggressors" and even went so far as to call Kim Kardashian's charitable donation to Armenians an act of "terrorism."

Armenians have a long and significant history in Maine. They fled persecution, rebuilt their lives here, and have become vital contributors to both our state and nation. Tarlan Ahmadov's blatant bias and hostility toward members of our communities make it clear that he is unfit for office. His own words speak for themselves.

We call for his immediate resignation. If he remains in office, the credibility of that office within our diverse communities will be irreparably damaged. He does not have our support. Please feel free to share this email with anyone else concerned whose email accounts we could not find on your site.

Ahmudi Aweys email:

I'd like to add this letter to the editor for everyone to see. In that letter, It is shocking that Tarlan Ahmadov had the Portland mayor sign a proclamation accusing Armenians of committing genocide—while completely ignoring the atrocities committed by his own country, Azerbaijan, which has killed many Armenians. This is sickening.

Tarlan is unfit for office and must be held accountable for his hateful words and propaganda. His behavior should be condemned.

Abdi Iftin email:

Truly shocking! The Armenian community deserves respect and recognition for their contribution to the state of Maine. Tarlan expressed the opposite of that.

As of today, I'm withdrawing my support for Tarlan Ahmadov and encouraging others to do the same. His continued time

in office will only bring more harm to our community.

The embattled Ahmadov has built an impressive career working with foreign governments, migrant resettlement agencies, and USAID-funded NGOs, while establishing deep ties to the Maine Democratic Party.



Tarlan Ahmadov

Prior to his immigration to the U.S. in 2003, Ahmadov worked in the education field in Baku, Azerbaijan, and later worked as a consultant to the Azeri Consulate in Tehran, Iran, according to a summary of his biographical information shared by the Maine Department of Labor.

Ahmadov worked with various international NGOs, including the International

Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), a USAID and National Endowment for Democracy cutout that has programs in more than 50 countries globally.

Ahmadov's biography states that he has visited over 45 countries for "business, training, and teaching purposes."

Rep. Deqa Dhalac, sponsor of the bill to create the ONA, was one of three Maine lawmakers — alongside State Sen. Jill Duson (D-Dumberland) and Rep. Mana Abdi (D-Lewiston) — who took a trip with Ahmadov to Azerbaijan last May.

Gerard Kiladjian, president of the Armenian Cultural Association of Maine, sent a letter to Rep. Dhalac and the other state officials who went on the trip to Azerbaijan, expressing concern that the lawmakers had been "exposed to a grossly distorted and self-serving misrepresentation of the realities of the Armenian-Azeri conflict."

"Quite frankly, we are shocked and heartbroken that, to our knowledge, at no point during or after your trip did you acknowledge Azerbaijan's recent ethnic cleansing of Karabakh's indigenous Armenian population, the last remaining 120,000 of whom were harassed, attacked, starved, and ultimately forced off their ancestral lands and into the neighboring Armenian Republic," Kiladjian wrote to the state officials.

The Maine Wire has reached out to Kiladjian for comment on Ahmadov's anti-Armenian social media posts, and whether the Armenian Cultural Association of Maine will call for Ahmadov's resignation.

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OBITUARY

Vaughan H. Totovian

Engineering Standout, Dedicated to Friends, Family

By Stephen Kurkjian

WATERTOWN — Vaughan H. Totovian, a lifelong resident of Watertown who as a civil engineer completed many of the most essential public transportation in Massachusetts history, passed away on February 9 at age 66. He had been suffering from Alzheimer’s Disease for several years.

Totovian, the husband of Lily (Tossounian), was a graduate of Watertown High School and Northeastern University where he graduated in 1981 with a degree in civil engineering.

Over the next quarter century following his college graduation, Totovian worked on and completed numerous projects which re-made highway and public transportation history in Greater Boston.

They included the Big Dig, which submerged into a tunnel the overhead main travel route through Boston; the entrance to the Ted Williams Tunnel, which provided a second artery to Logan Airport by extending the Massachusetts Turnpike to East Boston and points north; the Boston Engine terminal in Somerville; commuter rail stations between Canton and Fall River and the easing of monumental Cape Cod traffic jams from the rotary at Sagamore Bridge.

While civil engineering is a collaborative effort with the way forward the result of consensus among numerous professionals, Totovian stood out as an ultimate authority because of his technical expertise and a historic memory, said several co-workers.

“He was simply a genius in reading plans. He saw problems before anyone else did, and solutions as well,” said Richard Ferrante, who worked beside Totovian at L.W. Lochner, between 1993 and 2001. “He was our miracle worker.”

Added Michel Issa, another colleague on the Big Dig project: “In many meetings, Vaughan’s voice was the most insistent that we had a responsibility for the public and ourselves to make sure we’d done everything the right way.”

One such breakthrough he authored solved the problem of how to maintain southbound traffic emerging from the Dewey Square tunnel while rebuilding a mile-long stretch of the Expressway. Totovian’s fix was to reroute the traffic over a short bridge and then onto Harrison Avenue and a road that paralleled the Expressway.

Such extensive projects present a continued sequence of complications, and Vaughan’s co-workers remember his ability to roll with the most serious of them. Vincent Nguyen recalled the time that Totovian realized that the plans that called for a cement pillar upholding a portion of the Expressway would have been erected in the driveway of a gas station, 100 feet away from its intended location.

“Vaughan saw it before any of us did,” Nguyen said. “But that’s the way he worked. He had the greatest confidence in his skills.”

But it was his final project, modernizing the rotary at Sagamore Bridge, that his co-workers gave Vaughan the most satisfaction. With his two brothers, Vaughan had bought a summer home in Falmouth and was experiencing first-hand the mind-numbing ordeal of getting on and off the Cape on summer weekends.

In 2001, he was hired as project lead engineer by the joint venture that the state hired to come up with the fix, and by 2005 the work was completed. The rotary that had stalled traffic for generations was discarded and two highways were able to pass one another on their own roads.

“The design Vaughan’s team worked out for it was perfect,” said Ferrante, Vaughan’s co-worker and friend.

Totovian exhibited such know-how from his youngest years. His wife, Lily, showed me a letter he had written in 1972 at age 14 to then Massachusetts Governor Francis Sargent after noticing from volunteering at Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown that many of the students were fearful in crossing busy intersections along Arsenal



said she started calling him “boy genius” soon after their marriage in 2007 because of the numerous inventive ideas he had when remodeling their Watertown. Or when he would stand back from the highway blueprints he had brought home from work to show her the progress that he and his team of engineers were making on a project.

Vaughan’s technical skills likely would have come from his father, Kayzag Totovian. Raised in Marseille, Kayzag became a builder of racing bikes as a youth. He joined the French Resistance at the outset of World War II, and upon moving to the United States in 1940, joined the US Army Intelligence Service.

And from his mother, Isabelle (Gureghian) Totovian, the first woman to become trustee of St. James Armenian Church, he would have inherited his confident manner and a passion for knowing right from wrong.

And from his brothers, James Totovian, who died in 2018, and Mark Totovian, Vaughan gained an enthusiastic love of sports, whether competing with friends or following Boston’s professional sports teams.

In addition to the friends he made in his profession, Totovian shared his life with a rich circle of friends much built around his association with St. James Armenian Church and its ties to the ACYOA (the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America). It was also through the youth organization that he first became acquainted with Lily Tossounian, who was living with her family in Toronto, and again as adults at a sports weekend.

In his eulogy for Vaughan at St. James Church, Rev. Shnorh Souin, retired pastor at St. Sahag and St. Merob Armenian Church of Providence, reflected on the large number of friends that Vaughan had maintained during his lifetime, and had come to his service.

“Such rich friendships are part of the miracle of the Armenian diaspora here in the new world,” said Souin, a lifelong family friend of Lily’s. “Faith and fellowship brighten our days and ease the pain from such a loss.”

(Stephen Kurkjian, a 40-year veteran reporter for the *Boston Globe*, was Vaughan Totovian’s first cousin.)

street, or in Watertown Square.

As he told Sargent in his letter, Totovian had devised a fix. Set up devices at the busiest intersections that emitted loud buzzes and then metal tracks that would accommodate the tip of a blind person’s cane and allow them to cross safely.

That ability to use his technical skills to overcome everyday adversities was common for Vaughan. When technology first arrived with home products like Atari, Vaughan disassembled the equipment and told the company that its software would never develop beyond kids’ games unless the company figured out how to show images and type on the screen. The Atari executive offered him a job over the phone.

While he let that opportunity go by, Vaughan did get intrigued by developing a handheld device that used electricity to perform simple household chores while the occupant was out of the house. Think of Alexa before the internet. In fact, Vaughan developed the device to turn his television on and off at his Watertown home, open and close the shades and control the thermostat, all through home automation technologies.

Lily, who began dating Vaughan in 2004,

Movie Night
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COMMUNITY NEWS

How Gen Z Is Using TikTok to Save Western Armenian

TIKTOK, from page 1

Hajjar is part of what seems to be a growing movement on social media, one where young Armenians in the diaspora are bringing Western Armenian to the digital sphere. It's an effort to conserve the dialect, which UNESCO has classified as "vulnerable" in its World Atlas of Languages. U.S. Census data from 2023 says that there are 244,896 Armenian speakers in the United States, but doesn't make a dialectal distinction between Eastern or Western Armenian. A reliable number of remaining Western Armenian speakers in the U.S. is unclear.

"My intention was to create a tool of preservation and improve my own Armenian," said Hajjar, whose TikTok account has more than 2,500 followers. "Not only is the language endangered, but the places where it's being spoken have such existential threats posed on them constantly, like in Lebanon and Syria."

While Eastern Armenian is the standardized language in Armenia and Iran, Western Armenian only has a home in nooks of the Armenian diaspora, in remaining households where the language has been passed down from the days of the Ottoman Empire. And it struggles to survive in its displacement. Now, the endurance of the dialect depends on the stretched Western Armenian-speaking communities across the world, from Beirut to Los Angeles.

Not only does this social media effort intend to safeguard a language imbued in collective grief, but it's an attempt at making Western Armenian interactive, accessible and joyful. Since starting her account, Hajjar said she feels more connected to the language, finding herself thinking and reacting in Armenian. The response online has been overwhelming. "Just off the bat, there were many thousands of views on my first few videos," she said.

Hajjar tends to post content about her life, and nothing seems off the table. She makes videos getting ready to go out to friends' birthday parties and speaks candidly about

her dating life. Watching her videos feels like scrolling through a digital diary. While the response has been strikingly encouraging, Hajjar said she receives a fair share of negative comments, too.

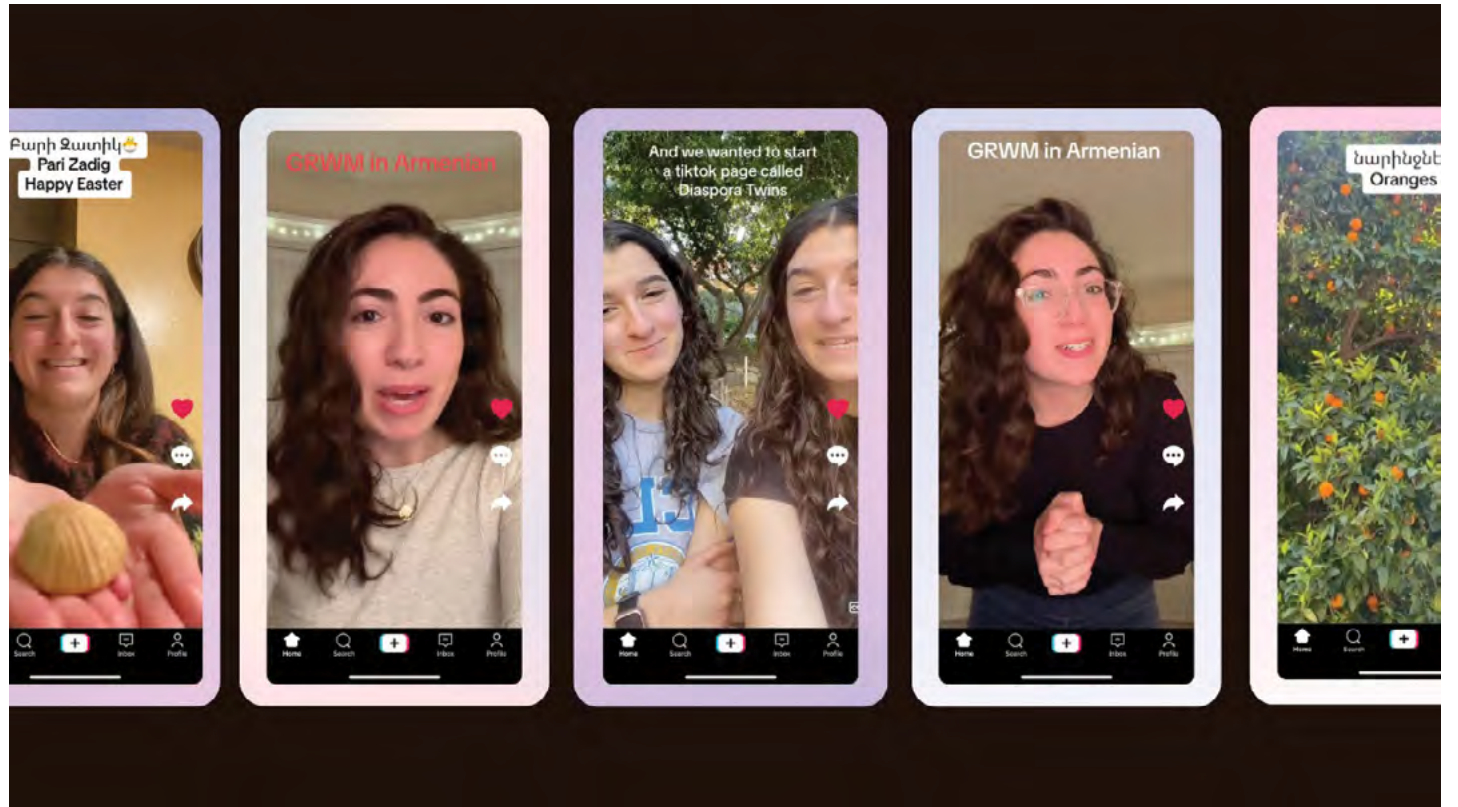
"Sometimes the hate is genuinely poetic," laughed Hajjar. "If my content is in-

4,500 followers and thousands more views and likes.

It started with a simple video of the pair talking to a camera in the botanical gardens at their university in Los Angeles. "Creating a TikTok page was an idea to bring our daily life to all of you while only speak-

didn't really think much about [their] culture," he concluded.

For historian and translator Vartan Matiossian, the future of Western Armenian has been a cause for concern since UNESCO first attributed the dialect "endangered" over a decade ago. For the "stateless lan-



Via TikTok @diasporatwins, @hayerenhayeren123 (Graphic by Ella Chakarian)

spiring you to write hate in Armenian, at least it's in Armenian. At least you're using our mother tongue."

Twin sisters Jenny and Isabelle Kouyoumdjian, 22, are also familiar with the feeling of having strangers from around the world peek into their daily lives, which they document on Instagram and TikTok. The pair started posting videos of themselves speaking Western Armenian as a class project last January. Since then, their accounts have collectively garnered over

ing in Armenian, especially since we feel that there aren't many videos on TikTok in the Armenian language," they explain in the recording. Since then, they've posted videos explaining complex science terms, sharing information about the devastating California wildfires and documenting the U.S. voting process — all in Western Armenian.

"I've heard Western Armenian is a dying language," said Isabelle. "It's not as common to hear, see and be exposed to Western Armenian. When we started our TikTok page, it was like, 'let's boost the Armenian language on social media.'"

For many Armenians in the diaspora, Western Armenian flutters around in daily life, in conversations with their grandparents, at family gatherings, murmurs at Sunday church services and exchanges with community elders. Even in Armenian day schools in the United States, the students tend to switch to English outside of classroom walls. Finding a Western Armenian speaker in an unfamiliar place always feels like a pleasant surprise. The Kouyoumdjians wanted to bring that sense of unexpected camaraderie to the digital sphere.

"Our objective is that you're learning new words from Armenian in a conversational way," said Isabelle, noting that they had never come across content similar to theirs.

Community organizations have taken initiatives to preserve Western Armenian. Online platforms, summer camps and educational programs across the diaspora are key to conserving the unique dialect. While the weight to preserve Western Armenian has historically fallen on institutions, individual efforts like these social media pages are "critical," according to Khatchig Mouradian, a lecturer in Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies at Columbia University.

Mouradian believes that the recent uptick in social media posts in Armenian could be catalyzed by the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh. "I think the last few years have become a huge wake up call to many Armenians who took their identity for granted or

guage" to exist, Matiossian is adamant that it has to be part of daily life, used as a "tool for full expression." He equates the loss of the dialect to the loss of a distinctive understanding of the world.

Whether the dialect will endure or become relegated to an academic study is up to those who make an active effort to weave it into their daily lives. For Western Armenian to survive as something beyond an archival curiosity, it has to be woven into everyday reality, including the digital sphere. The future of the language in part is tied to its ability to survive the digital world, and the emergence of social media pages like Hajjar's and Kouyoumdjians' makes that possible.

In an increasingly digitized world, Matiossian believes that these videos are a "useful" way to become acquainted with the language, but more work will have to go into the multigenerational preservation of the language. "At a certain point, they need to be complemented by the printed letter as a way to enlarge the language field and the understanding of the culture that lies behind it," he said.

For these creators, speaking the language is not just a tool for preservation, but an act of cultivating a sense of belonging. Hajjar said she will continue to post videos to her page, hoping to one day host events with other Western Armenian speakers in her community.

"No language is saved because it's a great language," said Mouradian. "Languages are saved because those who speak them find creative ways of making them current in any particular reality — and social media posts are an important part of our reality today."

(Ella Chakarian is a journalist who has covered culture, geopolitics, conflict and human rights issues. She was formerly a reporting fellow with the Pulitzer Center, and her work has appeared in Bellingcat, Eurasianet, The Progressive and more. She holds an M.S. from Columbia Journalism School and a B.A. in English from UC Berkeley.)



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Youth Protest Outside Azerbaijani Embassy

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Youth Federation-Youth Organization of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (AYF-YOARF) Washington DC “Ani” Chapter, along with community members gathered outside the Azerbaijani Embassy on Saturday, February 22, to protest on the 37th anniversary of the Sumgait massacres and the pogroms in Baku, Kirovabad and Maragha. In addition, they demanded international action to hold Azerbaijan accountable for its ethnic cleansing of Artsakh, along with the release of Armenian prisoners of war.

The protest concluded with a prayer, honoring the lives lost and for the freedom of Armenian prisoners of war.





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Arts & Culture

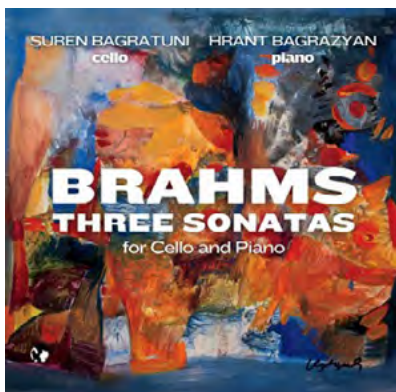
New Release of Brahms Sonatas Performed by Bagratuni and Bagrazyan

By Isoa Chapman

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

DURHAM, N.C. — “Brahms Three Sonatas for Cello and Piano” was issued this year by Blue Griffin Recordings. This recent recording of the Brahms Sonatas for Cello and Piano is a stellar addition to an ever-expanding list. Both musicians featured here have won international recognition, the cellist Suren Bagratuni at the prestigious 1986 Tchaikovsky Competition where he was awarded the Silver Medal, while his younger colleague, the pianist Hrant Bagrazyan is a first prize winner of the San Jose International Piano Competition, amongst others.

From the outset of the E minor, *Op. 38 sonata*, Bagratuni reaches into the



darkest, richest sonorities of the cello favoring long arching lines over intimate moments. His colleague, Bagrazyan, provides structural clarity and momentum and ultimately the result is a more expansive take on these works. Bagratuni's nuanced use of vibrato in the opening speaks to a mood of brooding intimacy without over-sentimentalizing. The Menuetto of the second movement is performed with wonderful poise and elegance by the duo, as Brahms revamps the early dance form. Brahms was known to start his morning routine with some Bach fugue or counterpoint exercise to get things rolling (following a black coffee and cigar, apparently) and in the third movement of this sonata we can hear Brahms pay homage; here, Bagrazyan leads the charge in this torrid fugue that begins the third movement and provides a dramatic counterpoint propelling the music forward with thrust.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Cello Sonata No. 2 was subject to some unfavorable criticism at the time of its writing, the composer Hugo Wolf labeled it ‘underserving of the name of music’ and Arnold Schoenberg recalled its unpopularity at the time of Brahms's death. These days much is remarked on the works F major tonality and its intertextual relationship to the Third Symphony and the First String Quintet. In this performance, we find a broad and structural approach that renders this reading the spirit of Brahms' symphonic writing. From the opening piano flourish

see SONATAS, page 14



Peter Balakian with Tamil translator, Chita Baskaran, at the Chennai International Book Fair photo

Balakian Reads in India for Tamil Edition of *Black Dog of Fate*

HAMILTON, N.Y. — Peter Balakian's *Black Dog of Fate* will be published in Tamil by the Thaddagam Press in Chennai later this year, and Balakian went to the historic south Indian city, formerly known as Madras, to read and lecture, and attend the Chennai International Book Fair. He arrived on January 6 as the Book Fair was in its second week to do interviews, and also gave a reading at the Ana Central Library to a packed audience. His hosts included publisher Amuthrassan Paulraj, his translator Chitra Baskaran, a professor of English at the Elilraj College for Women in Chennai, and his friend and former student, the poet Vivek Narayanan. On January 10, he read at the French Institute in Pondicherry, the fashionable sea-side city on the Bay of Bengal where he was hosted by Kannan Muthukrishnan, distinguished scholar of Tamil literature at the French Institute.

Traveling with his cousin Lynn Derderian of Oakland, Calif.,

a seasoned traveler and admirer of Indian culture, Balakian visited Chennai's St Mary's Armenian Church on commercially thriving Armenia Street. Founded in 1712, it is one of the oldest churches on the Indian subcontinent. They were guided by Ashken Khachatryan who lives in the city with her family and is doing research on the Armenians of Chennai. Balakian found the church and its beautiful grounds meticulously maintained and still used for services.

After touring various cities and sites across India, including a pilgrimage site on the Ganges River, Balakian ended his trip in Kolkata, where he read at the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy to a lively audience of students and faculty and community members. He was hosted by Very Rev. Dajad Tsaturyan and several teachers from the Academy. Following the reading, a question-and-answer session with students, whose ages ranged from 7 to 20, went on for an hour. Later, on a tour with Tsaturyan of the four Armenian churches of Kolkata, Balakian and Derderian found each church on elegantly groomed grounds and still in use.



Peter Balakian and cousin Lynn Derderian on Armenian Street, Chennai

Violinist Melikian To Present Arno Babadjanian Program at NAASR

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will host a hybrid lecture by Dr. Nuné Melikian titled “Arno Babadjanian: An Armenian Beat in Soviet Time,” on Thursday, March 6, at 7:30 p.m. (Eastern) / 4:30 (Pacific), at the NAASR Vartan Gregorian Building, 395 Concord Ave.

The program is co-sponsored by the Mashtots Chair in Armenian Studies at Harvard University, Friends of Armenian Culture Society (FACS), and Tekeyan Cultural Association — Boston Chapter. It is open to all free of charge, and a reception and book signing will follow the program.

This will be an in-person event and also presented online live via Zoom (Registration: <https://bit.ly/42VyLOJ>) and YouTube (www.youtube.com/c/ArmenianStudies).

Babadjanian, born in Yerevan, was one of the most influential musical figures of the Soviet Union. Despite the constraints of composing within the Soviet musical landscape, Babadjanian's works are deeply infused with a distinctively Armenian spirit, making his compositions resonate with a unique cultural essence. Though he is well-known in Russia and the former Soviet republics and revered in Armenia, Babadjanian's music remains relatively unknown in the Western world.



Melikian's *Arno Babadjanian: An Armenian Beat in Soviet Time* is the first English-language book on this remarkable composer, aiming to introduce his genius to a broader audience. It features never-seen-before archival photos, musical analysis of his most notable works, first-hand recollections by his contemporaries, and a full list of his works.

This special program will include the performance of selected pieces as part of the presentation.

Melikian is an acclaimed violinist, scholar and educator. A prize-winner of numerous competitions and audience awards, she has performed at the Stern Auditorium and Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Merkin Hall at Lincoln Center, and many other prestigious venues. Nuné graduated from the Gnessin Music College, studied at the Moscow State Conservatory, and holds a Masters from the University of Montreal and a PhD from McGill University.



ARTS & CULTURE

Mario Migirdic Atakliyan

Sports and Jewelry Together

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/CAPE TOWN — My interlocutor, Mario Migirdic (Megerdich) Atakliyan, resides in South Africa. Born in 1965 in Istanbul, he studied at the Surp Haç Tbrebank Armenian Lycée. Actively involved in sports throughout his life, he now works in the jewelry industry.

Migirdic, I recall a note in the 1988 Istanbul Armenian press about you securing second place in Turkey's bodybuilding championship. What memories do you have of that achievement?

It was a great accomplishment to come in second, and I was very proud to repre-



Migirdic Atakliyan (1988)

sent Armenians! Before me, there were two prominent Armenian bodybuilders in Turkey — Parunak Atan and Fermun Çırak. They were my mentors. By the way, Fermun Çırak's real name was Nubar Ozanyan. He was a revolutionary who was tragically killed a few years ago in the battle of Rakkah in Syria.

Did your Armenian identity present any challenges in your sports career in Turkey?

There were only minor challenges — nothing too serious.

Armenian jewelry has a rich history in Turkey. Was this tradition passed down in your family?

Yes, I began working as a goldsmith with my uncle, Isa Atakliyan. In 1978, when he emigrated to Sydney, I continued learning under two master goldsmiths — Vache Muhtaryan and Arto Zarukyan. They were truly masters of the art, and I owe much of my expertise to their guidance.

You currently work at the well-known Marios Jewellers in Cape Town. What makes the company unique?

We pride ourselves on excellent service and top-quality craftsmanship. Besides running the jewelry shop, I'm also involved in soccer as a players' agent.

How did you end up in South Africa?

When my uncle left for Australia, I wasn't happy staying in Turkey. I had a strong bond with him, and his departure left a void. At the time, it was challenging for Turkish Armenians to obtain visas for most countries, but South Africa was an easier option. I initially planned to move to Australia after becoming a South African citizen, but I fell in love with Cape Town and decided to stay. It's still my favorite place, despite traveling extensively around the world.

Have you also visited Armenia?

New Release of Brahms Sonatas Performed by Bagratuni and Bagrazyan

SONATAS, from page 13

Bagrazyan provides an orchestral wash of sound maintaining clarity in the moving bass lines, while Bagratuni launches forth with terrific intensity in the heroic opening theme- one senses that both musicians are fully in their element here. The central movement in this sonata is the Adagio Affetuoso, the pacing is natural and never languid, and there is some lovely unending cantabile in the cello coupled with the most sensitive voicing and lyrical musicianship from Bagrazyan.



Hrant Bagrazyan

It was between 1878 and 1879 at the town of Pörschach on Lake Worth that Brahms wrote the *Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 1, Op. 78*. He wrote of the work, "The melodies fly so thick here that you have to be careful not to step on one." The opening of the work marked 'mezza voce' exploits the higher register for the cello, and here, Bagratuni captures the most singular singing 'contralto' quality as if to evoke the most private inner feelings of the composer. In this most nostalgic and song-like Sonata, Bagrazyan plays with the intuition and empathy of a great lieder-pianist, and has at his fingertips the virtuoso color palette that this emotionally complex work calls for.

This new release stands apart from many current recordings of the Brahms Sonatas for Piano and Cello in that it evokes a larger Brahmsian soundscape, positing it within the realm of the so-called 'monumental interpretations' by Rostropovich/Serkin (DG) or Schiff/Oppitz (Philips). Superbly recorded by Sergei Kvitko of Blue Griffin Recordings, the sound engineering and mastering capture the musical breadth of this wonderful playing.

For more information or purchase, see <https://www.bluegriffin.com/cd-catalog/p/brahms-three-sonatas-for-cello-and-piano-suren-bagratuni-and-hrant-bagrazyan>.

(Isoa Chapman is a violin and viola instructor at Duke University.)



Migirdic Atakliyan with his son Sabro

Yes, I've been to Armenia and loved it — especially the food, like local *dolma* and *khorovats* (barbecue). I only visited Yerevan, but it left a lasting impression. My favorite Armenian figures include the national hero Andranik Ozanian, chess player Tigran Petrosian, and singers Charles Aznavour and Paul Baghdadian. As for sports, my heart belongs to the Yerevan soccer team, Ararat.

Last year, I published a study on Armenians in Africa. In 2003, the Armenian population in South Africa was estimated to be around 300. Are you familiar with other Armenians in South Africa, particularly in Cape Town?

When I lived in Johannesburg, I knew many Armenians, and we used to gather frequently. In Cape Town, however, I only know eight Armenians. Others here work

in fields like finance, insurance, and retail.

Have you started a family in Africa?

Yes, I have a wonderful son, Sabro, named after my late father. He's 22 years old, very handsome Armenian boy, who models professionally. A few years ago, he ranked among the top 15 mountain bikers in his age group in South Africa. Now, he also helps me at the jewelry shop.

My mother is still alive — she's 86 and lives in Istanbul, along with my three sisters and two brothers. I visit them every year for six weeks.

How do you maintain your physique after turning 50?

I still go to the gym four times a week and play indoor soccer twice a week. Life is too short to worry about anything, so love everyone, take care of your health, and keep smiling!

KEV ORKIAN

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ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Fanouropita, the Greek Mama's Olive Oil Cake

Fanouropita is a sweet cake recipe from Greek cuisine and is traditionally a Lenten cake, also called "lost and found cake." It is traditionally served on St. Fanourios' feast day on August 27, given to Greek Orthodox believers as a blessing.

In 2018 Anita Zachou founded Mykonos Olive Oil Tasting, an educational and consulting company based in Mykonos, Greece, delivering seminars, workshops, and webinars on Olive Oil Tasting, Olive Oil Gastronomy, Mediterranean Diet, Holistic Health, and Beauty & Wellness to foreign visitors and locals but also to consumers, kids, producers, wholesalers, and culinary professionals all over Greece and abroad.



Anita Zachou

Anita Zachou, Expert Olive Oil Taster & Sommelier, Agricultural Engineer, Founder of Mykonos Olive Oil Tasting

"There is little literature around St. Fanourios, although all Greeks celebrate

him on August 27. St. Fanourios was discovered in Rhodes around 1500AD when after a local pillaging by a roaming band of foreigners, a group of nomadic pagans found a ruined church full of decayed rubble including some destroyed icons. There amidst the rocks and dust gleamed the perfectly preserved icon of

St. Fanourios. Clearly preserved by miracle, it was concluded that he must have been a saint, not least because of his story."

"On this day Greeks and Cypriots greet one another with 'May God grant rest to the soul of Saint Fanourios' Mother.' The church however passes no statement as there is no evidence to conclude that she was as they say such a sinful woman. Still, the blessing is taken with a slice of olive oil cake, a delicious and simple recipe including flour, orange, sugar, cinnamon and olive oil amongst other optional flavors and touches. If you are so fortunate to be the child of a Greek mother or married to one, she will no doubt have the very best recipe with a unique and particular way to make it which will give you a superior Fanouropita. She probably has already made it for you, your family and your entire neighborhood. If she hasn't, then you can try making it by using our recipe," adds Zachou.

"This moist, aromatic cake is usually small, round, and made with simple ingredients. It doesn't have eggs or dairy, so it's naturally vegan, but it does have warm cinnamon and clove spices."

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/2 cups mildly intense extra virgin olive oil
- 1 1/2 cups fresh orange juice
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon sesame seeds
- 1/4 teaspoon cloves
- 4 1/2 cups self-rising flour
- 1 cup chopped walnuts
- 1/2 cup raisins (any variety)
- Confectioners' sugar

PREPARATION:

Preheat the oven at 340°F.

Beat the sugar with extra virgin olive oil and half the fresh orange juice in a large bowl until the sugar melts, optionally adding the raisins. In a fresh bowl, combine the remaining orange with the baking soda (see Note), cinnamon and cloves. Mix it until all the baking soda is frothed.

Combine the two bowls and mix until thoroughly whisked. Transfer the mixture to a prepared baking pan and sprinkle with sesame seeds, if desired. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool. Transfer the cake to a serving tray and dust with confectioners' sugar. Serve with fresh mint leaves and mixed nuts.

Note: Adding the baking soda to the orange juice helps it dissolve and prevents bitterness in your cake.

For this recipe, see: <https://www.mykonosoliveoiltasting.com/post/fanouropita-the-greek-mama-s-olive-oil-cake>

For more recipes: <https://www.mykonosoliveoiltasting.com/blog/categories/recipes>

Also see: <https://www.dimitrasdishes.com/greek-fanouropita-the-cake-for-lost-things-vegan/>

Mykonos Olive Oil Tasting was created by Anita Zachou following her passion for nature, olive oil, and a healthy lifestyle. She was born and raised in Athens but spent almost all her childhood vacations in Kalamata (South Peloponnese), her mother's homeland. Since she can remember she was playing around or climbing on some of the millions of olive trees of the Messinian land creating a special bond with them. When she finished school it came naturally for her to study agronomy. She was curious to know how nature really works and how she could contribute to this amazing process. Her passion for gastronomy and good olive oil led her to seek deeper knowledge and become an Expert Olive Oil Taster in 2012.

Zachou is a Certified Holistic Life & Wellness Coach and a HeartMath Licensed Mentor. She is a Member of: the Italian Association of Olive Oil Tasters (ONAOO), the Spanish Olive Oil Gastronomy Academy, the FILAIOS Club of Olive Oil Friends, the Women In Olive Oil (WIOO) International Group, the International Coach Federation, and the European Lifestyle Medicine Organization. She participates as a judge in various International Olive Oil Competitions.

Balakian Reads In India for Tamil Edition of *Black Dog of Fate*

BALAKIAN, from page 13

"Each of them – St. John the Baptist, Nazareth, St. Mary's and St. Gregory the Illuminator," Balakian note, "were unique and impressive and gave us insight into the long history of Armenians in India."

Black Dog of Fate will be published in Tamil by Thaddagam Press in summer. Balakian is the Donald M. and Constance H. Rebar Professor of the Humanities in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Colgate University and the winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for poetry.



Peter Balakian with students at Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy in Kolkata



ARTS & CULTURE

Books

Mehmet Polatel's Book *Armenians and Land Disputes In the Ottoman Empire, 1850–1914* Published

EDINBURGH — Edinburgh University Press has announced the publication of Dr. Mehmet Polatel's *Armenians and Land Disputes in the Ottoman Empire, 1850–1914*. The book is part of the series *Edinburgh Studies on Ottoman History* edited by Kent F. Schull (Binghamton University).

Armenians and Land Disputes in the Ottoman Empire traces the transformation of land disputes involving Armenians into the Armenian land question from the mid-nineteenth century to the outbreak of the First World War. Situating this event into its historical context marked by the rise of the central administrative state, encroachment of capitalism and the new territorial turn that changed the political significance of land ownership, this book argues that the Armenian land question was shaped by two conflicting trends: liberalization and nationalization of land. The book also shows how mass violence transformed competitive struggles and socioeconomic life and structures on the one hand, and how these struggles strained intercommunal relations and blocked possibilities of normalization on the other. Examining the actions and discourses of Armenian and Kurdish intellectuals, Muslim powerholders in the provinces, and Ottoman officials and the Istanbul elite — along with the institutions, local and national, that sustained these groups, it populates a large blank space in our existing picture of the late Ottoman Empire.



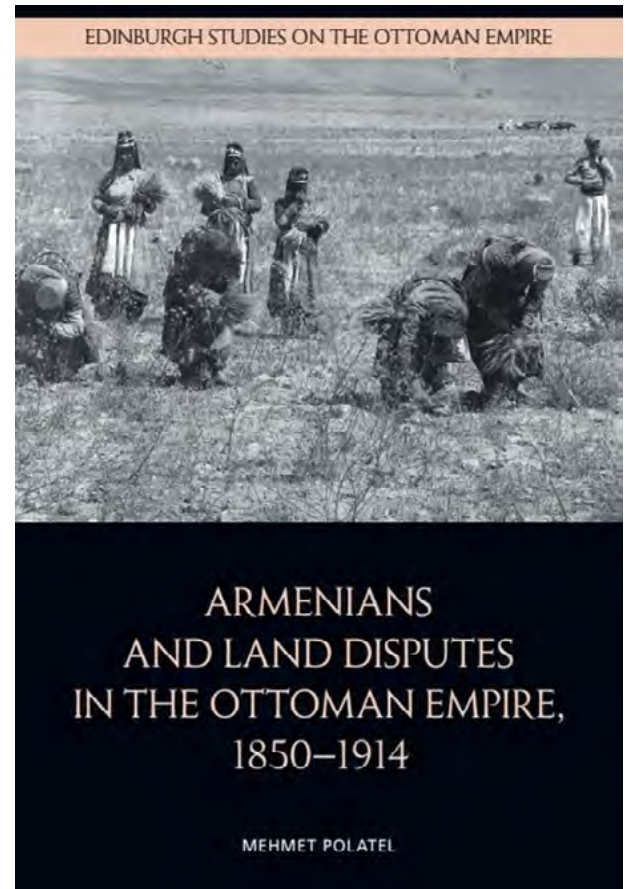
Mehmet Polatel

Polatel commented on the book, saying, "I am thrilled that my book on the emergence and transformation of the Armenian land question in the Ottoman Empire has been published. I first encountered this issue when I began my graduate studies, and since then, I have traced the struggle of Ottoman Armenians for their lands. I am delighted that my efforts to trace this issue led to the publication of this book, which is the first manuscript in English to trace the evolution of this problem, which deeply affected state-society relations and inter-communal relations in the late Ottoman Empire. I hope it will contribute to deepening our understanding of this period and trigger new debates in the field."

"This groundbreaking work analyses the genealogy of the Armenian land question from the second half of the 19th century to the eve of World War. Mehmet Polatel has made a monumental contribution from both empirical and theoretical perspectives to the study of the agrarian question in the Ottoman Empire and beyond," said Bedross Der Matossian of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

"With meticulous research, deep archival dives and acute theoretical insights, Mehmet Polatel restores the lost history of the dispossession of the lands of Ottoman Armenians through misuse of the law and deployment of violence. Polatel brilliantly tells the tragic tale of nation formation as a process by an imperial government aided by local officials and ordinary people. With graphic examples, precision in his analysis and a deep humanistic sensibility, he reveals how ideology, greed and the search for security lead to horrific crimes against humanity," added Ronald Grigor Suny of the University of Michigan.

Polatel is the academy coordinator for the Minority Rights Academy at the Hrant Dink Foundation based in Istanbul. He received his PhD from Bogazici University in Istanbul with his dissertation on the emergence and



transformation of the Armenian land question in the late Ottoman Empire. Prior to receiving his Ph.D., he earned a BS in International Relations from the Middle East Technical University in 2007, and an MA in Comparative Studies in History and Society from Koç University, Istanbul in 2009. After receiving his PhD, he was awarded Manoogian Postdoctoral Fellowship in Armenian Studies from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He was a junior postdoctoral fellow at the USC Shoah Foundation Center for Advanced Genocide Research in 2019-2020. His main research interests are state-society relations, minority rights, property politics, cultural heritage, the Armenian Genocide, and the dispossession of Armenians. He co-authored a book with Uğur Ü. Üngör entitled *Confiscation and Destruction: Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Properties* (Bloomsbury, 2011) and published several articles and book chapters on the Hamidian massacres, land question, and the Armenian Genocide.

'When Two of Us Meet' Musical Sets Sights on LA

LOS ANGELES — The concert reading of "When Two of Us Meet," a new Armenian-American musical, has officially sold out its New York City premiere at The Green Room 42 — just two weeks after tickets were released. Now, the all-female Armenian-American creative team of California natives is setting its sights closer to home with a potential Los Angeles presentation, aiming to engage both industry professionals and their vibrant Armenian diaspora community.

"When Two of Us Meet" chronicles the journey of an Armenian family immigrating to America in the early 20th century, weaving themes of love, resilience, and cultural identity into a contemporary musical score. Hailed as Broadway-worthy by early reviewers,

the show resonates deeply with audiences seeking stories of heritage, survival, and hope.

Los Angeles offers a natural home for the show's next developmental milestone. An L.A. reading would provide an opportunity to further workshop the material while inviting industry leaders, producers, and Armenian-American audiences to experience the story firsthand.

Emily Simonian, the composer-lyricist and creator of "When Two of Us Meet," is an award-winning composer and librettist. She is a recipient of the 2024 Laurel Karabian Fund for the Arts Grant from the Armenian International Women's Association and has placed in multiple national new musical festivals, proving to be a rising composer to watch. Recognized for her pow-

erful storytelling and evocative compositions, Simonian has a deep connection to both music and Armenian heritage. She is passionate about creating works that honor cultural narratives while resonating with universal audiences.

The creative team is currently in discussions to secure a venue and gauge interest from potential partners and presenters in Los Angeles. As momentum builds, Simonian remains committed to bringing *When Two of Us Meet* to a broader audience while honoring the cultural significance behind the piece.

For updates on future readings and production opportunities, visit www.whentwoofusmeetmusical.com or follow on social media: @whentwoofusmeet



Alena Kutumian
Orchestrator



Emily Simonian
Composer, Lyricist, Librettist



Rebecka Kazarian Webb
Director



ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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

MARCH 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 Kheyima, \$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

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. Proceeds will benefit Armenian Schools in Istanbul.

MARCH 22 — Lowell ARF 130th Anniversary. Dinner-Program. Featured speaker, Prof. Christina Maranci, Mashtots Professor of Armenian Studies, Harvard University, who will discuss Destruction of Artsakh’s Priceless Cultural Heritage by Azerbaijan. Kazanjian Ballroom, Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church, 180 Old Westford, Rd., Chelmsford. 6 p.m. Reservations required. Call or email Armen Jeknavorian, 978-265-9479; armenjeknavorian@gmail.com. or Ara Jeknavorian, 617-803-2612, ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com. Adults - \$35. Students - \$15. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to assist the thousands of Artsakh refugees forced from their homeland and now living in Armenia.

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

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

APRIL 12 — Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church presents a nostalgic concert by Marten Yorgantz and Meghedi Vocal Ensemble, artistic director Marina Margarian. If your child would like to perform on stage,

they can audition to join Meghedi Children’s Chorus every Saturday, 3.15 to 4.15 p.m. 200 Lexington St., Belmont. For registration and information, call 781-929-3415 or 781-439-3702.

APRIL 13 — Piano Recital by Prominent Armenian Pianist Sahar Arzruni in tribute to Armenian woman composers. Works by: M. Kouyoumdjian, K. Gazarossian, A. Terzian. S. Karamanuk, D. Goolkasian-Rahbee, L. Hazarabedian, G. Chitchyan, and G. Chebotaryan. Organized by Armenian Cultural Foundation, Mirak Chamber Music Series. Co-sponsored by AGBU Boston Affiliate, AIWA New England Affiliate, Amaras Art Alliance, Sunday, 5 p.m., Robbins Memorial Town Hall (730 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington). Free and Open to the public.

APRIL 15 — National Association of Armenian Studies and Research hosts author Nancy Kricorian in conversation with Nanore Barsoumian, IALA Literary Lights spring series event, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. To be filmed and posted online. 395 Concord Avenue, Belmont.

APRIL 17 — Author Nancy Kricorian will appear at Porter Square Books, Cambridge, on Thursday at 7 p.m. Author talk and Q&A about her new book, *Burning Heart of the World*, followed by book signing. In Conversation with Lisa Gulesserian. Contact: Katie Haemmerle. 1815 Mass Ave., Cambridge.

APRIL 27 — Book Launch: A Conversation and Reception with Narine Abgaryan, author of *To Go on Living*. Organized by Armenian Cultural Foundation, co-sponsored by Plough Quarterly, NAASR, AIWA New England Affiliate, Amara Art Alliance, Sunday, 5 p.m. Armenian Cultural Foundation (441 Mystic Street, Arlington).

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). Gala Banquet & Dance open to the public on Friday, May 2 at the Hilton Boston Woburn 2 Forbes Rd., Woburn, MA 01801. For more information, please visit <https://www.hyepointearmenianchurch.org/>

NEW JERSEY

APRIL 10 — AMAA NY/NJ Orphan & Child Care Committee invites you to a Rendezvous @ the Barnes Foundation – a guided tour of the Barnes Foundation Collection. Tickets: \$250, Lunch at 11 a.m., Guided Tour at 12:30 p.m. Roundtrip transportation provided from the Armenian Presbyterian Church (APC) in Paramus, NJ to the Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA and back. For more info and RSVP visit: <https://amaa.org/rendezvousatthebarnes/>

RHODE ISLAND

MARCH 22 — The Cultural Committee of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church presents “A tribute to the music of Charles Aznavour.” Presented by Berge Turabian, with guest singer Alvard Mayilyan. Guest of Honor Louise Janigian. Belcour of Newport (657 Bellevue Avenue, Newport). Saturday, doors open at 5:30 p.m. Concert at 6 p.m. Refreshments immediately following. Suggested Donation \$30. 3COMMON.COM/AZNAVOUR. Tickets also available at the church. Call 401-272-7712.

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. Keynote Speakers: Garo Armen and Emma Arakelyan. For details and registration, visit tennessee.hyelandproject.com/armenian-american-forum-2025/ or email hyelandproject@gmail.com

To send Calendar items to the *Mirror-Spectator* email alin@mirrorspectator.com or alin.gregorian@gmail.com. You can also visit our website, www.mirrorspectator.com, and find the “calendar” section under the heading “More” 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.

Secret Trio Featuring Ara Dinkjian to Perform at Mosesian Theater

WATERTOWN — The Secret Trio, made up of three musicians at the top of their games, will perform on March 21 at 7.30 p.m. at the Charles Mosesian Theater.

The group is composed of Armenian *oud* player Ara Dinkjian, Macedonian clarinetist Ismail Lumanovski and Turkish *kanun* player Tamer Pinarbasi. The resulting music is at once deeply rooted in their respective traditions and yet startlingly innovative.

The concert is organized by the Society of Istanbul Armenians of Boston; proceeds from the concert will be used in support of Armenian schools in Istanbul.

The Society of Istanbul Armenians of Boston’s mission is to provide annual scholarships and financial aid to indigent students who attend any of the 16 Armenian schools in Istanbul, five of which are high schools. For tickets and information, visit the Dorothy and Charles Mosesian Center for the Arts Website (www.mosesianarts.org).



From left, Tamer Pinarbasi, Ara Dinkjian and Ismail Lumanovski

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



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Foreclosure of Armenian Patriarchate Properties Threatens Christians in the Holy Land

By Bedross Der Matossian

In a stunning escalation that threatens to upend centuries of sacred stewardship, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem now faces an existential crisis as the city threatens to foreclose on its properties.

Disputed tax claims may force the auction of estates that have long been the lifeblood of Jerusalem's Christian heritage. This not only endangers the survival of a venerable institution but also imperils the historic Status Quo that has safeguarded the delicate balance of religious rights in the Holy City for generations.

That's why the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem is petitioning in court this week to halt the foreclosure process, saying in a rare statement that the alleged debts, which date back to 1994, "have never been proven in judicial proceedings, and through customary practices heretofore have never been enforced."

This dispute, which affects not only the Armenian Patriarchate but also other Christian religious institutions, has major historical and contemporary implications for the Christian communities in the city, including the Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Latin, and others. The city would be wise to employ prudence and caution.

The municipality claims that Christian religious institutions owe tens of millions of dollars in unpaid taxes for their commercial properties that generate income. According to Israeli tax laws, only non-commercial religious properties are exempt from taxes, meaning that property leased by religious institutions for commercial purposes is subject to taxes.

Income from Properties Is Seen as Essential

From the perspective of Christian religious institutions, however, the situation is more complex. The income generated from these properties is seen as essential to supporting the operations of the Patriarchates, which play a vital role in the religious, social, and cultural life of the Christian communities.

These institutions employ hundreds and are responsible for a wide range of community functions, such as seminaries, schools,

hospitals, printing houses, libraries, pilgrimage houses, and other religious and cultural activities.

Without the revenue from these properties, the Patriarchates would face significant financial challenges, which could undermine their ability to fulfill these important community roles.

The conflict over taxation is not a new issue. In 2018, during the tenure of Mayor Nir Barkat, the Jerusalem municipality attempted to implement similar measures against religious institutions, aiming to collect over \$180 million in back taxes. This move sparked outrage among the Christian religious leaders, culminating in a dramatic protest during Easter when the leaders closed the Holy Sepulcher Church for three days.

The mayor ultimately backed down, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office intervened by appointing a special commission to negotiate with the churches and find a resolution.

Despite this ongoing effort, the Jerusalem municipality has now moved ahead with its tax demands, focusing on the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The churches say the collection effort undermines the so-called "Status Quo," a longstanding arrangement that governs the management and rights of religious institutions in Jerusalem and aims to ensure that Christian religious institutions can continue their work without political or legal pressures.

Established during the Ottoman Empire. It was formalized in the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, which recognized the Status Quo as an internationally accepted framework for managing religious rights in Jerusalem. Article 62 of the treaty states that "no alteration can be made to the status quo in the holy places."

The Status Quo has been respected by various governing authorities over the years, including the Ottomans, the British, the Jordanians and the Israelis. The long-standing practice of exempting church properties from municipal property taxes has been an integral part of the Status Quo, and this exemption has been honored by all these authorities.

This arrangement was also enshrined in the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan, which called for the protection of religious rights in Jerusalem.

Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, which occurred after the 1967 Six-Day War, has been a source of controversy in international law. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 considers East Jerusalem to be an occupied territory, and Article 43 of the Hague Convention obligates an occupying power to respect the laws in force in the occupied territory.

This includes the obligation to maintain the Status Quo on religious matters, including taxation of church properties. By ignoring the Status Quo, Israel risks violating its international obligations under the laws of occupation.

The municipality's move is not just a legal or financial issue but a matter of great concern for the future of the Christian presence in Jerusalem. If the Armenian Patriarchate's properties are seized or auctioned off to pay these taxes, it could signal the beginning of a larger pattern of erosion of the rights of Christian communities in Jerusalem.

Neither is it merely a local issue; it has implications for Christians around the world, particularly those who hold the city of Jerusalem in deep religious reverence. The international community must take note of these developments, as the outcome of this dispute will shape the future of Jerusalem's status as a city of shared religious heritage for Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike.

The latest actions by the municipality should serve as a wake-up call, as they threaten to undermine the delicate balance that has allowed the Christian communities to thrive in Jerusalem for centuries.

(Born and raised in the Old City of Jerusalem, Bedross Der Matossian is a Professor of Modern Middle East History and the Hymen Rosenberg Professor in Judaic Studies at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. He is the author, editor, and co-editor of seven books. He is the co-editor of *Routledge Handbook on Jerusalem*, published in 2018. This commentary originally appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* on February 25.)

Georgia Does Not Rule out Participating in 3+3 Platform

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has once again invited Georgia to the 3+3 Regional Cooperation Platform. In response, the ruling Georgian Dream party did not rule out the possibility of accepting Russia's proposal in the future, but said it currently sees no reason to do so.

On Thursday, February 20, Georgia's First Parliamentary Vice Speaker, Gia Volski told journalists that at this stage, inclusion in the platform "is neither politically nor economically justified" for Georgia, but stated that this reality may change and that future participation would not be ruled out.

"The processes taking place in the world determine Georgia's future position," Volski said.

The 3+3 format meetings include Turkey, Iran, and Russia on one side, and Armenia, Azerbaijan, and, theoretically, Georgia on the other. However, Georgia has declined to join the format, citing Russia's participation. This format was put forward by the presidents of Azerbaijan and Turkey at the end of 2020 following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

According to Volski, it is important for Georgia and for the government that "neither its political image nor its foreign policy,

nor its economic interests are damaged in any way."

"Therefore, in the future, something may appear, but at this stage, nothing seems to justify our involvement in this format, either politically or economically. So, let's wait for the processes," he said.

On Wednesday, February 19, Lavrov stated in the Russian parliament that the doors are open for Georgia in the platform, and "the chair will always be in the meeting room of this format," the Russian state-run media outlet TASS reported.

"From the very beginning, everyone agreed that we have a 3+3 format and that we understand the doubts and nuances of Georgia's position, but that the chair for Georgian representatives will always be in the meeting room of this format," he claimed.

Moscow has repeatedly reiterated that it expects Georgia to join the 3+3 Regional Cooperation Platform meetings.

Grigol Gegelia, a member of the opposition group Strong Georgia, said on Friday that "any national government should work to deepen relations with the European Union, instead of flirting with Russia and failing to speak out about the unacceptable-

ity of the "chair" that Lavrov and others are offering us."

"We welcome the start of bilateral negotiations with regional powers, but it is unacceptable for Georgia to become a member of the [3+3 platform]," he said.

"Georgia cannot be a member of a format in which the Russian Federation is present, which has occupied 20% of Georgia's sovereign territory. Against the backdrop of a new security order being created, while the European Union is becoming increasingly active in independently ensuring security, at such a time, national interest requires an accelerated rapprochement with the very space where there is peace, prosperity and security," he added.

Georgians throughout the country have been protesting for more than 80 days against the government's policies and the announcement the ruling party would halt the country's EU accession process. The political crisis followed October's parliamentary elections, which according to official results, gave Georgian Dream a large majority, with 54% of the vote.

(This analysis originally appeared on the website www.oc-media.org on February 21.)



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.

Why India and Armenia Are Now Taking Their Relationship to New Heights

By Tatevik Khachatryan and Srujan Palkar

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trips to Paris and Washington, DC, in the past month were high-profile examples of India's diplomatic engagement with major powers. But under the radar, New Delhi has made important strides with smaller countries as well.

India and Armenia, for example, have steadily strengthened their defense partnership since 2020, driven by a shared need for strategic alliances in a turbulent geopolitical landscape. For Armenia, a small landlocked country in the South Caucasus, ongoing security threats from neighboring Azerbaijan have necessitated a shift away from its traditional dependence on Russian military support.

The South Caucasus remains politically unstable, marked by territorial conflicts and shifting alliances. The loss of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), displacing an estimated 100,000 ethnic Armenians, underscores this instability. Ongoing tensions raise security concerns for Armenia, which is promoting efforts to expand its diplomatic and security agreements following Russia's failure to uphold its security agreement. Russia's diminishing influence in the region and specifically with Armenia, exacerbated by a lack of support for Armenia's defense against Azerbaijan and by its invasion of Ukraine, has made it more urgent for Armenia to find new, reliable partners.

To bolster its defense, it has turned to India, expanding

its procurement of Indian weapons systems, such as the Akash-1S air defense system and the Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher. This partnership not only enhances Armenia's defense capabilities but also allows India to expand its influence in the South Caucasus, where it faces opposition from Turkish and Pakistani alliances that support Azerbaijan.

Critically, however, India's involvement in Armenia goes beyond defense; it is part of a broader regional strategy. By deepening relations with Armenia, India strengthens its position as a major player across Eurasia and emphasizes the importance of the International North-South Transport Corridor, which aims to connect India with Europe through Armenia and Iran. Moreover, India's support for Armenia's latest "Crossroads for Peace" initiative — a regional transport proposal that aims to connect Armenia with its neighbors — would be beneficial for regional development and could potentially offer India new business and trade opportunities.

Defense and Beyond

The growing military and diplomatic cooperation between India and Armenia benefits both countries beyond immediate defense concerns. From a geopolitical perspective, India is filling a vacuum left by Russia, which has traditionally supplied most of Armenia's arms. How actively the United States will support this development going forward depends on the broader strategic dynamics of US-India and US-Armenia relations. Armenia has signed multiple defense deals with India, making India its largest defense supplier, replacing its decade-long largest supplier, Russia, in 2020. These agreements include advanced technologies such as anti-drone systems, radars, and air-defense missiles. This shift strengthens Armenia's military and secures for India a strategic partner in a region that could serve as a gateway for Indian exports to both Europe and Russia.

Beyond military collaboration, Armenia and India are also expanding their economic partnership. In 2024, leaders from both countries explored potential cooperation in renewable energy, artificial intelligence, and infrastructure development. With Armenia emerging as a tech powerhouse in the Southern Caucasus, it could serve as an important hub for Indian high-tech compa-

nies, helping India gain access to new markets in the Eurasian Economic Union.

At the same time, both nations have sought to strengthen people-to-people connections by fostering dialogues around labor, education, and cultural exchanges.

What to Expect Next

While defense remains central to India-Armenia relations, both countries must work to institutionalize their growing security partnership alongside existing trade relations, which total \$400 million in precious metals, broadcasting equipment, and infrastructure.

One important next step is establishing a formal 2+2 dialogue mechanism, bringing together the defense and foreign ministers of both nations. This would elevate the relationship from a tactical military collaboration to a more comprehensive strategic partnership and enhance both security and diplomatic coordination on broader regional issues.

Additionally, India and Armenia could further expand their multilateral engagement. Their partnership, for example, could extend to collaborations with other nations that share mutual interests in defense, trade, and infrastructure. Deepening cooperation in technology and artificial intelligence — particularly in cybersecurity and space technology — would further broaden the scope of the partnership.

Another critical focus is leveraging the potential of the Armenian and Indian diasporas. Both countries have significant expatriate communities that can act as ambassadors for economic and cultural diplomacy. Establishing a joint diaspora cooperation framework could unlock new trade and investment opportunities.

India and Armenia have laid a solid foundation for collaboration in recent years, with defense cooperation as a strong pillar. Now, both nations must seize the opportunity to transform this relationship into a strategic partnership, advancing their geopolitical, economic, and security interests in an increasingly multipolar world.

(Tatevik Khachatryan is an assistant director with the Atlantic Council's engagement team. Srujan Palkar is a global India fellow at the Atlantic Council. This analysis first appeared on the Atlantic Council website on February 19.)



Institute of Armenian Sacred Music Launches Second Annual Kinarik Altinyuzuk Scholarship Fund

CALABASAS, Calif. — A central initiative of the Armenian Sacred Music Project, the Institute of Armenian Sacred Music, announced recently the launch of its Second Annual Kinarik Altinyuzuk Scholarship Fund, focused on aiding music students who continue to cherish and promote Armenian sacred music in their personal and musical journeys. This vital initiative provides financial assistance, access to a professional network, and the opportunity to make a significant cultural impact, ensuring the vibrant future of Armenian sacred music within faith communities and academic study.

The Kinarik Altinyuzuk Scholarship Fund will support eligible students specializing in vocal performance, organ, choral conducting, composition, and other disciplines related to Armenian liturgical music. Through this initiative, the Institute of

Armenian Sacred Music reaffirms its commitment to preserving and enriching the rich tradition of Armenian sacred music by making quality education more accessible to dedicated individuals.

“This scholarship is a tribute to the memory of my beloved grandmother Kinarik Altinyuzuk, a devout Christian whose life exemplified a deep love for her Armenian heritage and the sacred music that enriched it,” said Sevag Derderian, Historian at the Institute of Armenian Sacred Music. “We hope that this fund, in her name, will inspire a new generation to embrace their cultural and spiritual roots, fostering a vibrant future for Armenian sacred music, just as Kinarik cherished it throughout her life. It’s about both honoring her legacy and building a community of passionate musicians.”

Applicants will be evaluated based on their demonstrated commitment to Arme-



Kinarik Altinyuzuk

nian sacred music, academic merit, and financial need. The scholarship is open to students enrolled in accredited music programs, conservatories, or recognized training initiatives with a focus on sacred or liturgical music, particularly those with a demonstrated interest in Armenian musical

traditions. Previous scholarship recipients have been enrolled at institutions such as the Boston Conservatory at Berklee, Hochschule für Musik Karlsruhe, Yerevan State Conservatory, The London Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, and the University of Maryland, demonstrating the scholarship’s broad reach and support for diverse educational paths.

The Institute of Armenian Sacred Music invites interested students, educators, and supporters of sacred music to learn more about the Kinarik Altinyuzuk Scholarship Fund. Applications open on May 1, 2025, and the deadline for submissions is August 30, 2025. Decisions and disbursements will be made in mid-September.

For more information about the Kinarik Altinyuzuk Scholarship Fund, including eligibility requirements and application details, visit www.sacred-music.org.

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Minas Avetisyan’s ‘Sleeping Woman’ Auctioned for over \$38,000

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Notable Armenian painter Minas Avetisyan’s “Sleeping Woman” (1963) became the top lot at the Art Investment auction in Moscow, selling for 3,363,000 rubles (\$38,000).

The painting was featured in lots titled “21st Century: Contemporary Russian Art,” as reported by Kulturomania.

Avetisyan had painted around 500 paintings.

The Minas House-Museum was reopened in his hometown of Janur in 2005 after being destroyed in the devastating 1988 earthquake.

Avetisyan’s works depict Armenian rural life, landscapes, portraits, still lifes, and murals, characterized by vivid color contrasts.

MEP Calls for Armenian Political Unity for Peace

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — European Parliament member Nathalie Loiseau on February 25 called on Armenia’s political forces to unite for the sake of peace. She said she that the more divided Armenian political groups are, the more pleased their opponents will be.

Loiseau made this statement during the 4th session of the EU-Armenia Parliamentary Partnership Committee held in Armenia’s National Assembly.

She noted that Europe is well aware that Armenia is in a region full of challenges, and the only way to overcome these difficulties is through political unity, Armenpress reports.

Loiseau praised Armenia’s efforts to establish peace in the region.

“We know that Armenia has two neighbors with whom its relations are not good. The only way forward is unity. The more divided you are, the happier your opponents will be. I urge Armenia’s political forces to come together for peace,” she emphasized.

She also noted that Armenia’s initiatives require the European Union’s support.

Loiseau expressed satisfaction with France’s military cooperation with Armenia.

“Let me take this opportunity to commend and praise Armenia’s current government in this regard,” she added.

The session covered the new EU-Armenia partnership agenda, the implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, and EU support for Armenia’s resilience through economic, trade, and energy cooperation and diversification.