

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932

Volume LXXXII, No. 38, Issue 4878

APRIL 12, 2025

\$2.00

Armenian Foreign Ministry Blames Karabakh Leadership

By Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia's government has drawn strong condemnation from the opposition after saying that Nagorno-Karabakh's leaders are to blame for its decision to stop raising the Karabakh issue in peace talks with Azerbaijan.

In a weekend statement to RFE/RL's Armenian Service, the Foreign Ministry in Yerevan said "the issue was removed from the agenda of the normalization of interstate relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan" because of a decree signed by Samvel Shahramanyan, the Karabakh president, in September 2023 following an Azerbaijani military offensive that restored Baku's control of the region.

The decree liquidated the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Shahramanyan invalidated it in December 2023, saying that he had to



Former Karabakh President Samvel Shahramanyan

sign it in order to enable Karabakh's endangered population to safely flee to Armenia. He also argued that the decree, apparently demanded by Baku, was unconstitutional in the first place.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's political allies accused the Karabakh leader of putting Armenia's national security at serious risk after he declared the decree null and void. Pashinyan has since repeatedly indicated that the Karabakh issue is closed for his administration.

In its statement, the Foreign Ministry also claimed that Karabakh's leadership refused to hold talks with Azerbaijani officials "in third countries" three months before the Azerbaijani offensive.

The talks organized by Western mediators were reportedly due to take place in Bulgaria's capital Sofia in July 2023. Karabakh representatives said at the time that they were rescheduled for August 2023 but then canceled by the Azerbaijani side. Pashinyan publicly recognized Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh earlier in 2023.

Ssee KARABAKH, page 3



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Uzbek Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov, and European Council President Antonio Costa visit the Registan square in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on April 3 ahead of the EU-Central Asia summit.

von der Leyen: Opening of Armenia-Türkiye-Azerbaijan Borders Will Be a Game Changer

SAMARKAND, Uzbekistan (caucasuswatch.de) — The opening of Armenia's borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan after three decades of closure is set to transform connectivity across Eurasia, said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen during the inaugural EU-Central Asia Summit on April 3.

At the plenary session, von der Leyen highlighted the strategic significance of the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor, noting the EU's 10-billion-euro

pledge to reduce overland transit time between Europe and Central Asia to 15 days. She called Central Asia the "beating heart of Eurasia" and emphasized that infrastructure must be complemented by smooth border crossings, particularly through the South Caucasus.

"The opening of Armenia's borders with Türkiye and Azerbaijan will be a game changer," von der Leyen said. "It will bring Europe and Central Asia closer to-

gether like never before."

She also announced that a new Investors Forum is planned in Uzbekistan in 2025 to secure private funding for the corridor and assess progress.

In a June 2024 interview with RFE/RL's

Armenian Service, then-US Assistant Secretary of State James O'Brien stated that a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan could do more than just end their protracted conflict - it could also significantly diminish

Russian influence in the South Caucasus and open a strategic trade corridor connecting Central Asia to Turkey and beyond.

O'Brien described the situation as a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a trade route from Central Asia across to the Mediterranean," highlighting the broader geopolitical stakes of a potential peace deal. However, whether the current US administration continues to actively pursue this vision remains uncertain.

"THE OPENING OF ARMENIA'S BORDERS... WILL BRING EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA CLOSER TOGETHER LIKE NEVER BEFORE."

-EUROPEAN COMMISSION PRESIDENT URSULA VON DER LEYEN



Ellen Alaverdyan Feels the Groove

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

LAS VEGAS — A casual observer of Ellen Alaverdyan might be fooled by her cute smile or sweet peals of laughter. After all, she looks like a charming pre-teen. However, once she starts playing her bass guitar, she unleashes riffs from songs by a variety of bands, from Metallica to Earth Wind and Fire.

Alaverdyan, 12, has even gotten a nod of approval from none other than Sir Paul McCartney for her YouTube video recording of the Beatles' 1968 song, Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da.

see ELLEN, page 16

Mass. Governor Healey Proclaims April as Armenian Heritage Month

BOSTON — Massachusetts Governor Maura T. Healey has proclaimed April as Armenian-American Heritage Month and urged all residents of the Commonwealth to participate fittingly in its observance.



The following is a few excerpts of the proclamation: The proclamation notes, "Over 30,000 Armenian-Americans live in Massachusetts, with the first Armenian people arriving in Massachusetts in the mid-1800s.

"Whereas, Armenian-Americans have made significant contributions to the cultural, social, and economic fabric of Massachusetts, enriching the state with their traditions, values, and entrepreneurial spirit.

"Whereas the initial migration of Armenians to the United States occurred due to the horrific large-scale massacres of the Armenian population by Sultan Abdul Hamid. During the Armenian Genocide, 1.5 million people were killed, deported, or forcibly converted. Armenian migration to Massachusetts continued after World War II and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"Whereas the early Armenian settlers sought physical safety, freedom, and liberty of conscience, which has empowered them and their descendants to prosper for generations.

In acknowledging the enormous challenges and sacrifices the Armenian people faced over these years, we reaffirm that the Armenian culture is an integral part of American culture, with strong influence across all spheres of life."

The proclamation also pays tribute to Sara Yazijian, "known affectionately as 'the mother of Armenian immigrants,'" who became the first Armenian woman to arrive in Worcester, in 1882.

Appropriately, the proclamation was initiated by Worcester area student Anahit Marutyan.

ARMENIA

Americans Helped Soviet Armenian Leader's Parents Survive Genocide

Page 3



LOS ANGELES

Female Tech Platform Expands to Los Angeles

Page 8



NEW YORK

Kardash Onnig Advocates Fasting To 'Redeem This World'

Page 12





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

More than 11,000 Artsakh Armenians Have Left as of March

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — As of March 1, 2025, a total of 26,899 forcibly displaced residents of Artsakh have departed Armenia, while 15,642 have returned. This means that since the forced displacement in September 2023, 11,257 people have left, according to data from the National Security Service, reported CivilNet on April 8.

Alongside the increase in departures, the number of returning Artsakh residents is also rising in recent months have shown a slightly positive trend.

Starting in April, the monthly aid of 50,000 drams (\$128) intended for living expenses and other costs of the displaced will be reduced to 40,000 drams (\$103). This reduced amount will be allocated only to certain groups: individuals with a disability (first or second category), persons aged 63 and over, those who have lost a breadwinner, and recipients of social benefits or pensions, as well as children under 18. Between July and December 2025, aid will be further reduced to 30,000 drams (\$77) and will still be granted only to these select groups.

Integration into Azerbaijani Society Impossible, Babayan Says

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The sham trial of Artsakh's former military and political leadership resumed in Azerbaijan on Monday, April 7.

Former Artsakh Foreign Minister David Babayan provided testimony during the session.

Babayan stated that he had always opposed the integration of Armenians into Azerbaijani society.

"Integration was impossible," Babayan said in response to a question by a prosecutor.

He stressed that former Artsakh President Arayik Harutyunyan, State Minister Ruben Vardanyan and other Artsakh leaders shared his stance.

"None of them ever saw integration as a viable option," Babayan added.

Michael Danna's 'Ararat' Suite Premieres in Armenia

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The Armenian premiere of Michael Danna's suite from Atom Egoyan's film "Ararat" took place at the closing concert of the 5th Penderecki Contemporary Music Festival on April 7.

Performed by the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra and the Armenian National Academic Choir under the baton of Sergey Smbatyan, the music blends Armenian sacred hymns and folk melodies, including *Krunk*, *Yeraz* and *Ur es, mayr im*, the Symphony Orchestra reports.

Will Peace Agreement Be Signed or Lead to Actual Peace for Armenia?

By Anzhela Sedrakyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Since the March 19 announcement by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that a draft peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan had been agreed upon and was awaiting signing, little has happened to indicate peace is at hand. "I am ready to put my signature under this document," he wrote on his [Facebook](#) page when he announced Armenia's stance. This was followed by several other posts with similar content. By contrast, at the same time, Azerbaijan intensified claims that Armenia was attacking the border. Reality showed something else entirely, with the residents on Armenia's borderlands under regular attack by the Azerbaijani army.

There has been concern about the possible items in the agreement. In an interview with [Public Television](#), Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan reiterated that Armenia and Azerbaijan had recognized each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and political independence based on the borders of the Soviet republics.

He added he does not understand what Armenia has supposedly conceded. He stated: "What have we conceded, or have we conceded anything at all?" However, it is important to recall the trilateral agreement signed on November 9, 2020, following the 44-day war, as well as the events of 2022-2023, when Artsakh was ultimately depopulated of Armenians.

Nevertheless, Pashinyan did not disclose the specific provisions of the agreement, which leaves room for speculation. It remains uncertain whether the document addresses the issue of individuals held in Baku, particularly the return of prisoners of war. It is worth recalling that during his 2021 election campaign, Pashinyan [stated](#), "The prisoners will forgive us for remaining in captivity for one or two more months." In this context, it is unclear why the Armenian side has not yet demanded the immediate repatriation of prisoners of war.

The former ambassador Edgar Ghazaryan said he believes that the agreement will not be signed, as it requires not only Armenia's but also Azerbaijan's consent.

He said, "Aliyev has stated that he is not ready to sign without preconditions, which are not included in the agreement due to limitations imposed by international law. According to Ghazaryan, the agreement itself cannot guarantee peace."

Ghazaryan added, "Prime Minister Pashinyan himself noted two years ago that even if an agreement is signed, war could resume at any moment. This document may inspire hope but does not ensure stability in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. After the war, Azerbaijan presented unilateral demands to Armenia, which the Armenian authorities have consistently complied with. Now, Azerbaijan has put forward 17 new demands, which the Armenian authorities have agreed to, and more may follow in the near future," he said. "In this situation, I am convinced that the agreement will not be signed and will not ensure peace. Furthermore, a question arises: Can a democratic state keep the terms of an agreement secret? Pashinyan claims that they will be published after the signing, but if the negotiation process is already completed, there is no reason to keep them secret. Perhaps the provisions are dangerous and could provoke a strong public reaction. If confidentiality was in the interests of negotiations, why did Aliyev disclose the unapproved points of the agreement? Azerbaijan openly states its position, while the Armenian

authorities continue to keep the document secret, which is illogical."

Another person unsure about the terms is writer and poet Ruzan Asatryan, calling it a utopia under the name of "peace," which cannot solve Armenia's problems. She points out that Azerbaijan, with its aggressive policies, is attempting to conflate peace with capitulation at the expense of Armenian territories.

Said Asatryan, "For two years now, the 'Peace Agreement' has been like a soccer ball, moving between Azerbaijan's and Armenia's goalposts. Armenia has made numerous concessions, not compromises. Unfortunately, the miraculous word 'peace' has become a blank check for Azerbaijan to impose capitulation on Armenia. The 17 points that were never put up for discussion and remain a mystery to the public — being well-acquainted with the enemy's strategic pulse — I am convinced that Ilham Aliyev, who is implementing a 'Pan-Turkic' project with Erdogan, will, through a new escalation, attempt to seize what he calls 'Western Azerbaijan,' dreaming of a future Armenia without Armenians, a dream that will ultimately choke him."

She suggested that many approve of the idea because they want peace. "Peace is a word that resonates with ordinary people, especially for us Armenians, who have lost territories and have soldiers buried in Yerablur. However, for great powers, as well as militarily strong small states like Azerbaijan and Israel, wars are a tool for carrying out expansionist policies, colonizing nations, and appropriating their national wealth."

She noted that peace is as necessary as air and water, but not at the cost of Armenian territories, losses, constitutional restrictions, the weakening of national ideology, the devaluation of national symbols, the prevention of army strengthening, and the internal erosion of Armenian identity.

"Aliyev must answer for the crimes committed against Armenia, for torturing prisoners, for occupying 200 sq. km of sovereign Armenian territory and key heights, and for the ongoing aggression against Armenia. We must not believe his false narratives... He will not sign because he wants war, not peace. And the West? I want to see my Homeland protected. We need to think about this and unite — only then will Aliyev be the one begging us to sign a peace agreement," she added.

For human rights defender Nina Karapetyants, the peace treaty fails to guarantee rights for Armenia. She noted that Azerbaijan is continuing its blatant warmongering, while this process is ongoing.

"The Azerbaijani authorities pursue an aggressive policy, whereas the Armenian government is accepting an agreement that fundamentally undermines our rights. Some concessions might be necessary in negotiations, but if those concessions involve amending the Constitution, withdrawing discrimination claims, or completely disregarding our rights, it is disastrous. Claiming that those opposing this version of peace want war is a falsehood. Everyone wants peace, but not at the cost of our sovereignty and rights," she said.

It seems, she said, that with all the concessions, Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev is still not signing the agreement. "He currently holds a position of strength and can impose new demands at any moment. Meanwhile, the Armenian authorities seem ready to accept any conditions, even at the expense of our national interests. Society will not remain indifferent. Just like in 2018, public discontent is enormous to-

day, and at any moment, it could turn into a large-scale movement. People who previously wouldn't even greet each other are now uniting around a common cause," she noted.

Mariam Avagyan, coordinator of the Congress of Refugees from the Azerbaijani SSR and a biologist, added her voice to those concerned about the agreement, suggesting that Azerbaijan is purposely creating tension and worry, especially when it comes to the demands for the "Zangezur Corridor."

"Since 2020, Armenian society has been under constant pressure, weakening its ability to resist. This is part of Azerbaijan's strategy — to exert psychological and political pressure on Armenia. Even after signing a 'peace agreement,' it is evident that Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian policies will not decrease but will escalate further. Azerbaijan is actively trying to remove Artsakh from public discourse, refusing to acknowledge it despite its de facto existence as a republic. There are no real guarantees that Azerbaijan will not continue exerting pressure after signing a new agreement," she said. "On the contrary, if Armenia accepts this document without clear guarantees, it will open the door to greater pressure and losses. Azerbaijan has stated that Armenia must revise its Constitution as part of the peace deal. However, there is no mention of Azerbaijan making any constitutional changes in return. Armenia is carrying out border demarcations at the cost of its own territories, which is a direct blow to our sovereignty."

For now, the government remains upbeat about the peace agreement though Azerbaijan does not show any intention to sign the document.

On March 14, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan told a session of the Standing Committee on Foreign Relations that "Armenia proposes to start consultations with Azerbaijan as soon as possible in order to agree on the location, time, and other details of the agreement."

He emphasized that the agreed text does not contain any provision related to the so-called "corridor" or mechanisms of unblocking.

"There is mutual readiness to cooperate in various fields, including transportation, transit, and economic issues. All railways, roads, and infrastructure in Armenia will remain under the sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia and will operate in accordance with Armenian legislation," said Mirzoyan.

Mirzoyan also stated that the agreed text contains no provisions regarding the return of people who lived in the territories of both countries before the collapse of the USSR and later left those areas.

"We have heard Azerbaijan's comments on Armenia's Constitution, but there is nothing about that in the agreement text. In general, the document does not contain any unilateral regulation or provision related to constitutions."

The Minister also touched upon the role of the Constitutional Court: "Even if, theoretically, such formulations exist in constitutions, by signing and ratifying the agreement — which will again be assessed by the Constitutional Court — those issues can be considered permanently closed."

He added, "Of course, there will be sensitive and highly sensitive issues that must be discussed and resolved later. Our agreement text is no exception. However, what is important is that it includes mechanisms that can be applied to address future problems and to achieve the final settlement of relations."



ARMENIA

Human-Rights Lawyer Says Trump Administration Poised to Help Armenian Christian POWs

By Madalaine Elhabbal

WASHINGTON (Catholic News Agency) — A renowned international human rights lawyer is urging the Trump administration to fulfill its campaign promise and intervene on behalf of Armenian Christians as a recently negotiated peace agreement with Azerbaijan threatens to leave prisoners stranded.

“Our request up front to the administration has been quite clear: [A] deal for the release of Armenian Christian POWs must be a precondition to [a peace deal] moving forward, which has been the position of the administration,” Washington, D.C.-based international human rights lawyer Jared Genser told CNA.

Earlier this month, Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to the text of a peace agreement that would end nearly four decades of conflict between the embattled countries. Neither country has signed the compact, though Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on social media has expressed eagerness to do so, despite widespread disagreement over several of its reported stipulations.

Once dubbed “the Extractor” by the *New York Times*, Genser is known for his successful work in freeing wrongfully imprisoned people around the world. He is currently working to free Ruben Vardanyan, the former state minister of the Nagorno-Karabakh region’s ethnic Armenian separatist government.

At the end of Azerbaijan’s nine-month blockade of the territory, Vardanyan was arrested while attempting to flee with his wife and has been detained in Baku ever since.

Genser said that Vardanyan, a Christian belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church, has been denied access to a Bible, which he said “has only reinforced that the persecution of him and other leaders from Nagorno-Karabakh is not exclusively because they were an alleged ‘breakaway

republic’ but relates to the fact that he’s a Christian.”

“We’ve also seen since the ethnic cleansing as well the burning to the ground of Armenian churches and other Armenian heritage sites,” Genser added.

Vardanyan faces 42 separate charges and awaits trial before a military tribunal, despite never having served in the military. Since being imprisoned, he has undergone two hunger strikes, according to Genser, with the latest strike lasting 23 days, during which he lost about 14 pounds.

Part of his work in freeing Vardanyan, Genser said, is advocating on behalf of all Armenian prisoners of war and refugees of Nagorno-Karabakh and for true peace and stability between the two countries.

“When you represent a high-profile political prisoner,” Genser said, “your instructions are not to exclusively lobby for them because that really doesn’t even work, even if you wanted to do that. Really, it’s to look at the broader set of issues that are implicated and to work hard at addressing them.”

Genser pointed out that President Donald Trump had campaigned on standing up for persecuted Armenian Christians, condemning what took place in Nagorno-Karabakh as “ethnic cleansing” while on the campaign trail in October 2024.

Now, Genser said release of the prisoners is “a top priority for the new administration.”

“We have been told that their freedom needs to be a precondition for President Trump to ultimately bless a peace deal,” Genser revealed.

“I think that’s a really important development because our biggest fear all along has been that if a peace deal were to proceed, and there was no resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh or of the Armenian Christian POWs, then unfortunately, it could lead to a sacrificing of those prisoners as a part of the peace deal.”

Neither of these critical issues are contained in the current peace deal, nor are they on the bilateral agenda, according to Genser. However, he said there are many things the Trump administration can do to push for these ends.

Genser declined to say what specific methods should be employed to apply pressure on Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev for the POWs, though he encouraged the Trump administration to “shock” Azerbaijan’s president, whom he described as a dictator.

“At the end of the day,” Genser said, “dictators only release political prisoners when they have to. They never do it because they want to or because they’re unanimous or humanitarian by orientation.”

“The only way that happens is when the dictator sees the cost of detaining the political prisoner or political prisoners as being dramatically higher than the benefits of detaining them.”

Beyond the situation faced by Armenian POWs in Azerbaijan, Genser said there are “many issues outstanding in terms of the conditions of the peace deal as well that are worrying.”

Chief among them are Aliyev’s demands that Armenia cede the Lachin Corridor, giving him a pathway to lay a pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey via Armenia, and that Armenia remove a preamble in its constitution that lays a territorial claim on Nagorno-Karabakh.

“The problem with that is that one has never seen any peace deal in the world where a country gives up their sovereign land and cuts off part of their own population from the main part of the country, which is what this would do,” Genser said.

As the Jamestown Foundation pointed out in its analysis of the peace deal, the Armenian government’s messaging on this front has been mixed, with Pashinyan having in the past stated Azerbaijan’s constitution contains territorial claims rather than the other way around, while also ad-

vocating as recently as March 13 for constitutional amendments that would have “inherently regional significance.”

“Unless Azerbaijan withdraws its long-standing demand that the Armenian Constitution be changed, it is unlikely to be signed before mid-2026 or even 2027,” the article noted.

Amid the dispute, Azerbaijan has accused Armenia of violating its ceasefire agreement — which Armenia denies — augmenting further tension between the countries as the fate of political prisoners hangs in the balance.

When asked about the plight of Armenian Christian POWs, the State Department told CNA: “We continue to monitor the situation closely through our embassies in the region. All those detained should have their human rights respected and, if criminally charged, have all fair trial guarantees afforded to them.”

Genser said peace will not be possible until “all relevant issues and all relevant potential provocations have been identified, negotiated, and fully addressed as part of a peace deal itself.”

“A peace deal that leaves unresolved what the future is going to look like for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and the release of the Armenian Christian POWs is a recipe for future flare-ups, disagreements, and even potential war,” he said.

Armenian Foreign Ministry Blames Karabakh Leadership

KARABAKH, from page 1

The Foreign Ministry claims reflecting Pashinyan’s and his associates’ Karabakh-related rhetoric were strongly condemned by Armenia’s main opposition groups. Their leaders accused the ministry of distorting facts in a bid to absolve Pashinyan of blame for the fall of Karabakh.

“Even [Azerbaijani President Ilham] Aliyev, in his remarks on the occupation of Artsakh and the final closure of the Artsakh issue, does not refer to the illegal document on the dissolution of Artsakh’s state bodies,” Ishkhan Saghatelian of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun) said in a Facebook post on Monday. “Therefore, the efforts of Aliyev’s Armenian advocates are pathetic and futile.”

“The authorities do not manage to erase the traces of their own crimes even by distorting history and resorting to blatant falsifications,” Tigran Abrahamian, a senior lawmaker from the opposition Pativ Unem bloc, wrote for his part.

Edmon Marukyan, another opposition leader who served as ambassador-at-large until March 2024, likewise called the Foreign Ministry statement a “disgrace.”

The ministry statement commented on Aliyev’s claim that up until January 2024 Yerevan sought to include “the fate of the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic” into a draft peace treaty discussed with Baku. He said that was the main sticking point in Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks.

The text of the treaty, essentially finalized by the two sides on March 13, is understood to make no reference to Karabakh or its displaced population’s right to safely return home. Nevertheless, Aliyev has set a number of preconditions for his signing.

Armenian Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Meets with Italian Ambassador

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Minister of Labor and Social Affairs of Armenia, Narek Mkrtychyan, received the newly appointed Ambassador of Italy to Armenia, Alessandro Ferranti.

The minister congratulated the Ambassador on his appointment and wished him a fruitful tenure.

According to the ministry, a number of issues of mutual interest were discussed during the meeting. These included cooperation in areas such as addressing issues pertaining to persons with disabilities, pension security, digitalization, and other fields.

Mkrtychyan highly appreciated the friendly relations between the two countries, emphasizing the great potential for further cooperation.

“During my visit to Rome in 2022, I had constructive discussions with the ministers responsible for issues related to persons with disabilities and labor in Italy. As a result, we decided to sign a memorandum of cooperation. I hope the signing of the planned memorandum will become a reality in the near future, opening the door to further opportunities for collaboration,” the minister noted.

Ferranti also highlighted the importance of expanding cooperation between the two countries in the field of labor and social protection, expressing his readiness to contribute to the development of Armenian-Italian relations.

“We are ready to continue our friendly relations across all



The two delegations meet

areas. Much has been achieved over the past two years. The memorandum you have mentioned is one of the most vivid examples, but there is still much more to be done,” the Ambassador stated.

During the meeting, the parties also discussed opportunities for joint work within the framework of the action plan derived from the 2024–2040 Strategy for Improving the Demographic Situation of the Republic of Armenia.

They explored possibilities for implementing joint projects across various sectors.

Americans Helped Soviet Armenian Leader Demirchyan's Parents Survive Genocide

By Haykaram Nahapetyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — During his tenure as a leader of Soviet Armenia in 1974-1988, Karen Demirchyan took action to bolster the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide in the Republic. The tradition of the “minute of silence” on April 24, i.e., a minute when all citizens were asked to remain silent in honor of those who had fallen in 1915, was introduced and commemorative events took a more formal character. In 1998, when running for the presidency of a now independent Armenia, Demirchyan was asked about his position regarding the Armenian Genocide. He replied: “What else could my position be? I am the son of two orphans – a mother from Van and a father from Erzerum.”

Demirchyan was killed in 1999 in a terrorist attack on the Parliament. Years later, as part of a crew working on “The American Good Samaritans,” a film that told the story of American people who helped Armenians during the Genocide, this journalist recalled that statement and realized that the survival of Demirchyan’s parents must be connected to American relief efforts. Our crew met Rima Demirchyan, Karen’s widow, who, as it turned out, knew a lot about her husband’s parents and grandparents.

Based on our interview of her, the following story can be constructed.

Karen Demirchyan’s mother, Lusine (Lusentag) Karakhanian, was born in Van, in 1906. The family was wealthy and re-



Karen Demirchyan, holding wreath at right, visiting the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan in the Soviet period

van], a local worker approached me and told me that his grandfather worked on Karakhanian’s boat in Van as a fisherman,” related Rima. Hovsep was described as a kindhearted man who helped the locals.

“An American woman, whom my mother-in-law identified as ‘Miss Silliman’ resided at Karakhanian’s house. Knowing this American lady would later play a huge role in the life of Lusine Karakhanian,” Rima noted.

Many details that Demirchyan provided in her story are confirmed by other sources, both academic publications and memoirs. For example, the memoirs of Grace Knapp (1870-1953), another American missionary from

Van, mention Caroline Silliman, described as “being in charge of the primary department.”

Lusine Karakhanian had three more siblings: in 1915, the two elder brothers were students in Constantinople, and the younger sister was three years old. It happened to be that in April, as the Genocide unfolded, the elder brothers were visiting the family in Van. Had they stayed in Constantinople, perhaps they would have a greater chance to survive the tragic events. The family tried to board the boat and cross the lake, but Hovsep, his wife, and two brothers were killed. Lusine and his sister managed to hide. Russian Cossacks picked them up later and brought them to Echmiadzin. As the little sister got very sick, the siblings had to be separated. Some sources suggest that a wealthy Armenian family eventually adopted the little sister and later migrated to Canada.

One day, Hovhannes Tumanyan came to Echmiadzin, picked up 10 orphans, and took them with him back to Tiflis (modern Tbilisi) to be sheltered at his home for some

time. “The poet was doing this from time to time, on account that orphans should feel a family’s cozy and warm atmosphere. So, Lusine spent some time at Tumanyan’s house,” commented Rima Demirchyan.

“General Andranik was a typical guest at Hovhannes Tumanyan’s house,” she noted. Many sources, including Armenian-American Andranik Chelebian’s volume *General Andranik*, include details about the endur-

From Lusine, the American missionary learned about the tragic fate of her elder brothers. “For as long as I knew Lusine, she was always appreciative of Americans,” added Rima Demirchyan. The education she received, the personal character she developed, the way she treated and talked to people, all that she had learned from Americans. By age 14, they put her to work. This was part of the rehabilitation.



Karen Demirchyan in the back, with, seated, from left, brother Kamo, mother Lusine and father Serop

sided in the Aykestan part of the town. Rose bushes rather than fences marked the boundaries of their premises. Her father, Hovsep, owned a boat in Van and was engaged in fishing and agriculture businesses. “Once, when I was visiting the Pantheon [Karen Demirchyan’s gravesite in Yere-



photo by E. J. Harbottle
A schoolroom without books. Polygon, Aleksandropol, where Miss Caroline Silliman and her ingenious boys manage to teach and learn despite all handicaps

Caroline Silliman teaching at the Aleksandropol (Gyumri) American Orphanage

ing friendship between the national hero and the national poet. “At one of his visits, Andranik talked to Lyusya (Demirchyan’s mother was commonly known as Lusine or Lyusya in the Soviet times) and asked her to sing. She sang a folk song about Andranik,” remembers Rima. Per her recollections, Karen Demirchyan and his brother Kamo had learned some Armenian revolutionary “fedayi” songs from their mother and sang them occasionally at home. This is a previously unknown side of the future Communist Party leader of Soviet Armenia.

After Tumanyan’s health deteriorated, Lusine moved to an American orphanage in Gyumri, where she met Miss Sullivan again. On a special note, the Near East Relief Foundation publications confirm that after leaving Van, Catherine Silliman worked at American orphanages in Aleksandropol (now Gyumri) and Kars.

“She was the teacher’s assistant, helping to maintain order in the class,” added the interviewee.

Per Rima Demirchyan, one of the photos from her husband’s archives featured Miss Silliman teaching and Lusine Karakhanian in the front seat. The Near East Relief’s archives also include a photo of Silliman teaching a lesson to Armenian boys.

Lusine met Serop Demirchyan, an orphan from Erzurum who would later become her husband at Aleksandropol’s American orphanage.

Rima Demirchyan’s recollections about Serop, the father of Karen Demirchyan, were recorded as part of the interview. Rima passed away soon after the interview was recorded, making the record a unique and valuable historical source.

For an accompanying video report, see mirrorspectator.com.



Lusine Karakhanian’s photo at the Karen Demirchyan Museum in Yerevan



INTERNATIONAL

President Khachaturyan Visits UAE

ABU DHABI — At the invitation of Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, President of the Republic of Armenia Vahagn Khachaturyan paid a working visit to the United Arab Emirates to participate in the Annual Investment Meeting held in Abu Dhabi on April 7.

He delivered a speech at the opening of the forum.

Within the framework of the visit, meetings also took place between Khachaturyan and high-ranking representatives of the UAE leadership.

Khachaturyan met with the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure of the United Arab Emirates, Suhail Al Mazroui, and the Executive Director of Etihad Rail, Shadi Malak, at his residence.

The parties had comprehensive discussions on the prospects for implementing various investment programs in sectors of mutual interest. The importance of living up to the existing cooperation potential in infrastructure, energy, high technologies and other priority sectors was particularly emphasized.

The parties commended the stable partnership formed between Armenia and the Emirates and the close cooperation deepening year by year, noting the positive dynamics of the development of bilateral relations.

During the conversation, thoughts were exchanged on the implementation of the Crossroads of Peace project of the Armenian government.

The meeting also touched upon the need to take practical steps to strengthen ties between the business communities of the countries, which would contribute to the further development of economic ties.

At the conference, Khachaturyan presented Armenia as a democratic, peace-loving and democratic country with a vision of developing technology, which is building a modern viable political and competitive economic system.

“Our most important capital is an educated, hardworking and law-abiding society. The government, in turn, is investing in the necessary infrastructure to support technological growth. Technology centers and parks are being created, such as the COAF and TUMO Centers, which are focused on developing young talents and educating a competitive generation,” he said.

He noted that the youth is highly interested in high technologies, artificial intelligence, robotics and innovation.

“We offer one of the most open and attractive investment environments in the region, pursuing an “open door” policy. With the development of democracy, we are continuously strengthening the fair and competitive economic environment, the rule of law and an independent judiciary in the country, which directly contributes to the reliability, protection and development



President Khachaturyan meets with UAE Minister Suhail Al Mazroui

of the investment environment,” Vahagn Khachaturyan said.

He emphasized that the deep and comprehensive reforms of the business environment implemented by the authorities offer favorable conditions for attracting foreign investments.

“Armenia provides legal guarantees for foreign investors, including property protection, free movement of capital and a transparent tax system. In recent years, Armenia has ranked high in international indices, in indicators such as democracy and human rights protection, uncompromising fight against corruption, economic freedom, business and investment liberalization. Armenia has bilateral investment protection agreements with more than 40 countries, including the United Arab Emirates,” the President said.

He noted that Armenia offers several Free Economic Zones, which provide favorable conditions for foreign investors. These zones offer tax benefits, simplified customs procedures, and access to regional markets.

He emphasized that normalization of relations with neighbors is one of the main

priorities of the Republic of Armenia.

“Our country remains committed to the agenda of achieving peace, an important part of which is the Crossroads of Peace project presented by the Government of the Republic of Armenia as a tool for establishing peace in the region and promoting economic ties. This initiative provides a unique opportunity for regional stability,

economic development and the operation of international trade corridors,” Khachaturyan said.

“The key idea of the project is the development of communications through the repair, construction, operation of roads, railways, pipelines, communication cables and power lines and, ultimately, creating opportunities for people-to-people contacts, which is a crucial component for peace,” he noted.

“The unblocking of all regional infrastructures in the South Caucasus, based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, as well as the principles of equality and reciprocity, will create exceptional opportunities for the movement of goods and citizens,” the President said.

“I am confident that there is no alternative to peace in the region; moreover, the South Caucasus should become a region without closed borders, which, in turn, will contribute to the deepening of economic cooperation, the activation of people-to-people contacts, while ensuring sustainable economic growth in the entire region,” Khachaturyan stated.

Tumo Center for Creative Technologies Will Officially Open in Japan on June 1

TOKYO — Within the framework of the 150th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Vice President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia Hakob Arshakyan met with the Head of the Japanese Delegation Seki Yoshihiro, ac-

ording to a readout issued by the Parliament, on April 8.

Arshakyan emphasized that Japan is one of Armenia’s important partners, and Armenia is interested in deepening multipolar cooperation, also considering the development of inter-parliamentary ties within that framework.

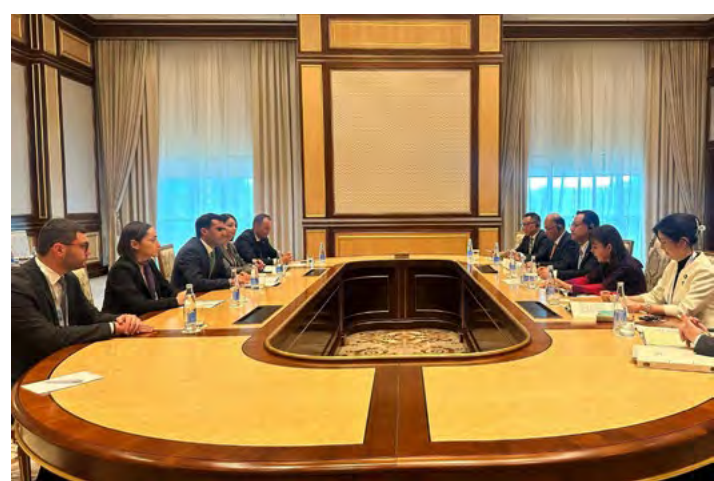
He touched upon the JAPAN 2025 exhibition, Armenia’s participation in the Osaka EXPO, which will create a new opportunity for strengthening business ties. He stated that the Tumo Center for Creative Technologies will officially

open in Japan on June 1, expressing confidence that it will serve to train thousands of Japanese youth and breathe new life into cooperation between the two countries in the field of education.

Seki Yoshihiro attached importance to the establishment of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan and expressed readiness to assist in providing assistance to the Armenians displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh.

Arshakyan presented details on regional issues, the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, and at the end of the meeting invited his colleague to Armenia.

The Armenian National Assembly delegation includes the Chair of the Standing Committee on Financial-Credit and Budgetary Affairs Tsovinar Vardanyan, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Health Care Arsen Torosyan, the NA deputy Hasmik Hakobyan, and the NA Chief of Staff, Secretary General Davit Arakelyan.



Delegations from Tumo in Armenia and Japan meet in Tokyo.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump Imposes 10% Tariff on Armenia

WASHINGTON (news.am) — US tariffs on former Soviet Union countries will reach up to 31% — the tariff that US President Donald Trump has imposed on Moldova.

But 10% rate has been introduced for most of these countries, including Ukraine.

The list is as follows: Moldova - 31%; Kazakhstan - 27%; Armenia - 10%; Azerbaijan - 10%; Georgia - 10%; Ukraine - 10%; Uzbekistan - 10%; Turkmenistan - 10%; Kyrgyzstan - 10% and Tajikistan - 10%.

Russia, however, is not on this list.

Armenian Chess Player Secures Key Win in European Tournament

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian chess player Lilit Mkrtychyan, competing with the black pieces, secured a victory over Azerbaijani international grandmaster Govhar Abdullayeva, in the seventh round of the European Women’s Individual Chess Championship held on the Greek island of Rhodes, on April 8.

Following this successful game, Mkrtychyan earned 5.5 points, advancing to fourth place in the tournament standings, according to *Aravot*.

Elina Danielyan, grandmaster and leader of the Armenian women’s national team, as well as FIDE master Anna Khachatryan, both ended their matches in a draw. Danielyan now holds 5.0 points and ranks ninth, while Khachatryan has 4.5 points and stands at 26th place.

Trump Deports Illegal Armenian, Azerbaijani Immigrants to Costa Rica

WASHINGTON (News.am) — A group of 200 people, after being deported from the US in February, was flown to Costa Rica as part of US President Donald Trump’s initiative to “clean” the country of illegal immigrants, SWI reports.

The deportees include citizens of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, China, Russia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, India, Uzbekistan, Congo, Vietnam, and Nepal.

Those who apply for asylum in Costa Rica have the right to leave immigration detention and work in the country.

Eightyfour deportees have already been returned to their countries, while 94 remain in the shelter.

The Costa Rican government said the US State Department is providing financial support to the International Organization for Migration to provide humanitarian assistance and care to these people. But conditions at the CATEM shelter, located in the southern Costa Rican canton of Corredores, near the border with Panama, have been slammed by human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, and individual lawmakers.



INTERNATIONAL



Pilgrimage to the Church of San Gregorio Armeno in Naples

NAPLES, Italy — On April 5, the Church of San Gregorio Armeno in Naples hosted the Feast of St. Gregory the Illuminator, celebrated by Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, the Representative of the Armenian Church to the Holy See and the Pontifical Legate of Western Europe. The observance brought together Armenian pilgrims from various countries, including Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, France and a multitude of cities throughout Italy. Their presence at this sacred site created a beautiful tapestry of unity and devotion among those who came to partake in prayer and reflection. Several Armenian clerics from different communities of the Pontifical Legation of the Western Europe and the Pastor of the Armenian Church in Poland, participated in the celebration of the Liturgy.

The solemn liturgy was further enriched by the presence of Bishop Gaetano Castello, a representative of Cardinal Domenico Battaglia. Bishop Castello delivered a poignant homily that not only conveyed the cardinal's warm fraternal greetings to Archbishop Khajag but also offered a deeper exploration of the meaning behind the celebration. In his thoughtful address, he emphasized the significance of this gathering as an expression of the close bonds and cooperative spirit that exists between the Armenian Church and the Catholic Church. This year the milestones of the Year of Jubilee and the important 1,700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council, known as the Council of Nicaea, serve to symbolize a tangible commitment to unity among Christian denominations, reminding attendees of the vital importance of collaboration in matters of faith.

As the Divine Liturgy reached its conclusion, Archbishop Khajag took a moment to express his heartfelt gratitude to Bishop Gaetano for his insightful and uplifting homily, kindly requesting him to extend his warmest best wishes to Cardinal Battaglia as a gesture of goodwill. Acknowledging the “Suore Crocifisse Adoratrici del'Eucaristia di Napoli,” the custodians of the Relics of St. Gregory the Illuminator, who contributed their time and effort in supporting this momentous event, the archbishop then addressed the

Armenian pilgrims who had gathered to participate in this significant spiritual journey. He reminded everyone, “You all came from different countries and cities to this pilgrimage site to pray before the relics of our St. Gregory the Illuminator. This is indeed an occasion to remind ourselves of our roots and foundation as a Christian people.” He reminded them of the pivotal role that St. Gregory played in the introduction of Christianity to Armenia, holy sanctification of the land, and the establishment of Holy Echmiadzin as the spiritual heart of the Armenian nation.

The archbishop called upon the faithful to engage in prayers for peace and unity, particularly focusing on the ongoing struggles faced by the people of Armenia. His message underscored the continuing relevance of St. Gregory's vision and teachings in navigating the challenges of today's world. After the liturgy, a reception followed at the Monastery of San Gregorio Armeno. This event provided an opportunity for pilgrims to come together in a moment of spiritual solidarity, allowing them to share their experiences, deepen their connections



with one another, and strengthen their ties to their shared heritage.

Through such gatherings, the bonds between the Armenian Church and the Catholic Church continue to flourish. The pilgrimage to the Church of San Gregorio

Armeno in Naples therefore serves not only as a cherished tradition but also as a living testament to the enduring power of faith, community, and the shared history that unites believers from diverse backgrounds and geographies across the globe.





INTERNATIONAL

Musk Slammed for ‘Double Standard’ in Turkey As X Shuts down Dissidents’ Accounts

By Eliza Gkritsi

ISTANBUL (Politico.eu) — Tech mogul Elon Musk is under fire from Turkish dissidents over moves to shut down X (formerly Twitter) accounts aligned with the demonstrations and opposition against the country’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The X owner has a “double standard,” Can Dündar, former editor-in-chief of *Cumhuriyet*, one of Turkey’s oldest daily newspapers, told POLITICO. While Musk was talking free speech at the U.S. election, he was collaborating with an autocratic regime to censor speech, he said.

Istanbul and other major cities have been roiled by anti-government protests by students, democratic activists and other dissidents for weeks, following the arrest of Erdoğan’s main political rival, presidential candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu.

In response, Erdoğan has taken social media platforms in his crosshairs. His government has issued a spate of gag orders to take down accounts. A spokesperson for Facebook’s parent company Meta said on Tuesday it had been fined for not complying with shutdown requests from the Turkish government.

Musk — not someone known for biting his tongue — has kept quiet on the protests, with his X account making little mention of the Turkish turmoil.

By contrast, the tech entrepreneur has meddled in European politics in the past year. He criticized United Kingdom Prime Minister Keir Starmer for his handling of protests last summer and comparing the U.K. to the Soviet Union. He called the European Union’s former digital affairs chief, Thierry Breton, a “tyrant of Europe.” And recently he lashed out against a French court verdict finding far-right leader Marine Le Pen guilty of embezzle-

ment and blocking her from a 2027 presidential run.

X said after the protests began that it had been ordered by the Turkish government to suspend some 700 accounts.

Dündar’s account was suspended along with 177 others last October within a broad shutdown of online accounts.

X said last week it had challenged a shutdown order in the country’s Constitutional Court. However, the order in ques-



tion, seen by POLITICO, predates the protest by weeks. X did not respond to a question from POLITICO as to whether it has appealed any more recent government orders. The firm said in a post it “objects” to multiple court orders, it didn’t clarify which orders and how it was objecting to them. One person at the firm, granted anonymity to disclose confidential information, said it had filed six challenges to government orders in total at Turkey’s Constitutional Court.

X has complied with requests from Erdoğan’s government to intervene in the past. Ahead of the 2023 Turkish elections, X restricted access to content — a deci-

sion Musk personally defended.

Some years back, X would have “just ignored these demands, they would send a letter to us to tell us this [government] request [to suspend accounts] was made” but they wouldn’t heed it, said Metin Cihan, an independent journalist whose X account was also suspended in February before the current protests began.

Cihan said that policy changed after Musk took over X in 2022.

Musk also met with Erdoğan in 2023, with the Turkish president asking him to build a Tesla factory in the country, Reuters reported. The two at the time also discussed licenses for Turkey from satellite internet provider Starlink, a subsidiary of Musk’s SpaceX.

Two Turkish gag orders seen by POLITICO were based on the grounds of national security and public order, and contained little explanation to justify the shutdowns.

Turkish law does not require prior judicial review of such orders when they are issued as emergency measures. Article 8A of Turkey’s internet law, invoked in the orders seen by POLITICO, “cannot be considered as providing the necessary procedural guarantees in order to protect the right to freedom of expression on the internet,” experts at the human rights organization Council of Europe have said.

In the first half of 2024 Google reported that 29 percent of Turkish government orders for content removal had been issued on national security grounds — the highest percentage since 2019. The tech firm removed at least 28 percent of overall content subject to takedown requests, it said.

Beyond X and Facebook, Google’s YouTube is one of the few free-speech options left to journalists and opposition figures. Dündar lamented what would happen if

YouTube also bends the knee.

YouTube steered POLITICO toward existing online documentation on how they handle government requests to remove content.

The Turkish government has been putting pressure on the firm, saying last September that journalists on the platform must be licensed.

YouTube said in an email it had established processes to review government requests in line with the applicable laws and its own policies. It declined to comment on how it will implement the policy requiring journalists to be licensed.

While platforms wrestle with Ankara’s requests, their legal efforts — like X’s court challenge — could prove meaningless. The Constitutional Court takes one to three years to rule, and sometimes even longer, Istanbul Bilgi University law professor Yaman Akdeniz wrote on X.

According to journalist Hayko Bağdat, whose account was also recently suspended, challenging gag orders in court is “not enough” because Turkey’s judiciary is filled with Erdoğan loyalists.

Iranian Citizens Arrested in Armenia for Smuggling Nearly 12 KG of Drugs

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Two Iranian citizens were arrested in Armenia on April 8 after customs officers uncovered nearly 12 kilograms of methamphetamine hidden in a truck entering the country.

Recently, at the Agarak border crossing on Armenia’s southern land border, customs officers used an X-ray device to inspect a truck driven by an Iranian national. During the inspection, suspicious substances were found in the vehicle’s water tank, according to the State Revenue Committee (SRC).

A joint operation by the anti-smuggling division of the SRC and customs officials led to the discovery of 15 foil-wrapped packages weighing a total of 11,962 grams, containing a white crystalline substance resembling methamphetamine.

Based on strong suspicions of drug smuggling, the suspect was detained and transferred to the regional department of the Investigative Committee in Syunik Province and later was formally arrested, and the investigation was handed over to the General Department of Investigation of Particularly Important Cases of the Investigative Committee of Armenia, which specializes in drug trafficking and crimes involving trafficking and minors.

Further investigation by the SRC, the National Security Service’s economic security and anti-corruption unit, and relevant investigative departments revealed that the drugs were intended for another Iranian citizen.

A court approved motions to detain both Iranian nationals pending further investigation.

US Export-Import Bank to Provide ‘\$339 Million Loan’ To Azerbaijani Airline Moving Military Cargo

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

RFE/RL has reported that the board of directors of the US government-owned Export-Import Bank (EXIM) “has approved a \$339 million loan to the Azerbaijani airline Silk Way to purchase Boeing aircraft.” The article noted that Silk Way’s aircraft, “according to reputable media outlets, were involved in the transportation of weapons” and that fact “did not prevent the American side from approving the loan.”

Silk Way, as noted by RFE/RL, is known “for transporting weapons to conflict zones” and for its affiliation with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

The investigation was published on Friday, April 4, noting that an undisclosed number of aircraft would be delivered by the summer of 2026. They linked the relevant decision of the EXIM Bank published on March 31.

Santander, a Spanish bank, and the American Private Export Finance Corporation (PEFCO) acted as loan guarantors, with Santander declining to comment to RFE/RL.

The loan transaction was led by several EXIM Bank stakeholders, including Cheryl Conlin, Senior Loan Officer at the Transportation Division, who in 2021 par-

ticipated in a virtual forum organized by the US Embassy in Baku, during which US officials and businesspeople presented US technologies and financial capabilities in logistics.

The EXIM Bank also participated in COP29, which was held in Baku in November 2024.

The bank, as revealed by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), previously provided a loan to the Silk Way for the same purpose.

In 2014, through the EXIM Bank, the US government “awarded a \$419.5 million loan guarantee to Silk Way Airlines to buy [...] three Boeing 747-8 Freighter airplanes.”

Three years later, an additional \$1 billion contract was signed with Silk Way “for 10 more passenger planes, and plans to buy two more 747-8 Freighter airplanes.”

RFE/RL quoted another investigation published in 2022, this time from The Washington Post, revealing that “Pentagon officials persuaded Aliyev to open his country’s borders and airspace to critical US and NATO supply routes to Afghanistan.”

The media noted that in exchange, US officials “promised a closer diplomatic partnership with Aliyev and steered \$369

million in defense contracts to Silk Way Airlines.”

RFE/RL, also quoting a report by the Armenian investigative outlet Hetq, noted that Silk Way, prior to and during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, as well as its final offensive to the region in 2023, made frequent flights from Israel, Turkey, and Afghanistan.

In an article published on 2 April, Hetq counted six such flights between January–March 2025 from Israel to Azerbaijan, highlighting the trend they observed of the intensity of the flights prior to Azerbaijani military attacks.

The US State Department did not respond to RFE/RL’s inquiry regarding the deal, while the Armenian Foreign Ministry responded that the relations with the US “are carried out in the format of a strategic partnership [...] and are not conditioned by bilateral cooperation between the United States and third countries.” In its own response to RFE/RL, the EXIM Bank, did not address whether other state bodies had submitted comments and observations regarding this transaction prior to the decision to lend to Silk Way.

(This article originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on April 4.)

Community News

Actor Joe Manganiello Speaks on Capitol Hill at Genocide Commemoration

WASHINGTON — Actor and director Joe Manganiello joined Members of Congress as keynote speaker at the annual Congressional Armenian Genocide Commemoration. In a moving tribute to his great-grandmother, who was an Armenian Genocide survivor, he delivered a powerful and moving presentation in a capacity-filled room on Capitol Hill on Wednesday, April 2, 2025.

Manganiello told the rapt audience how he became inspired by his grandmother's and great-grandmother's courage to speak out about the Armenian Genocide and to advocate for the rights of Armenians. His genuine passion for human rights and concerns about the plight of the Armenian people was shared by a number of elected officials in an evening of commemoration and vows to ensure a more secure future for Armenia.

"As the echoes of what happened 110 years ago still reverberate throughout our generation...we have



Actor and director Joe Manganiello

to take action and we have to use our voices," said Joe Manganiello. "I'm here to tell my great-grandmother's story, I'm here to put an end to the generational trauma that has affected my family, I'm here because of the current situation, and I'm here to tell the world to do the right thing."

Elected officials present at the Commemoration included: Senators Adam Schiff (D-CA), Andy Kim (D-NJ), Edward Markey (D-MA), Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Representatives Frank Pallone, Jr (D-NJ), Brad Sherman (D-CA), Laura Friedman (D-CA), Jim McGovern (D-MA), George Latimer (D-NY), Herb Conaway (D-NJ), and a statement by Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) was referenced.

Markey reflected on the 1.5 million Armenians who were massacred during the Armenian Genocide who perished at the hands of the Ottoman Empire and emphasized that he "fought alongside" the Armenian people "for many years in order to have a formal recognition of that genocide, and after decades of advocacy" the U.S. "finally got to stand on the right side of history."

Tying in the continuing atrocities against the Armenian people by Azerbaijan, Markey emphasized that "these crimes demand accountability," and pressed for the immediate release of Armenian prisoners of war and civilians. He recalled his trip to

see **COMMEMORATION**, page 12



Seda Papoyan & Elen Asatryan

Armenian Female Tech Platform Expands to Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles is now home to FEMINNO, the largest female innovation platform in Armenia and the entire South Caucasus. The platform officially celebrated its Los Angeles chapter launch in Glendale, joined by the city's mayor, Elen Asatryan.

"We are eager to see the amazing work you do and the opportunities you will bring to the community by empowering women to succeed in their endeavors and creating space to lead by example and innovation," the Mayor's Commendation noted; it was handed to FEMINNO founder Seda Papoyan by Mayor Asatryan following her opening remarks.

Founded in Armenia, FEMINNO is a global movement dedicated to empowering women through innovation, leadership and breaking barriers in STEM and beyond. Its mission is to challenge gender stereotypes and create opportunities for women to thrive. The Los Angeles launch marks FEMINNO's first official international chapter.

see **FEMINNO**, page 11



Mariam Torosyan

Assembly Co-Chair Talin Yacoubian Testifies Before House Committee

WASHINGTON — Armenian Assembly of America Co-Chair Talin Yacoubian testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs on Wednesday, April 2, during the Subcommittee's public witness hearing on Fiscal Year 2026 funding, calling for humanitarian aid and security assistance to Armenia, continued enforcement of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act, and implementation of targeted sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act.

"In the wake of a war and forced displacement of 120,000 people from their ancestral lands, the Armenian people and Armenia are facing ongoing existential threats," said Yacoubian. "Despite hope for peace, Azerbaijan continues to illegally occupy Armenian territory, hold political hostages, conduct sham trials, and erase Armenian cultural heritage."



Armenian Assembly Co-Chair Talin Yacoubian

Yacoubian noted that in view of what Azerbaijan's President Aliyev has declared, that "[we] have destroyed Armenia," it is imperative that the United States "not look away now" because our nation has a long history of "doing the right thing."

"[The Assembly] urges Congress to enforce Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act, which prohibits aid to Azerbaijan until it ceases its use of force against Armenia," said Yacoubian, citing Azerbaijan's repeated human rights violations, and the importance of implementing sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act.

Yacoubian also urged the U.S. to "consider steps to reinforce the strategic partnership between the U.S. and Armenia" by providing not less than \$50 million in security assistance to help Armenia protect its sovereignty, and allocate not less than \$250 million in humanitarian assistance to support the over 120,000 persecuted Christians from Nagorno-Karabakh who were "forced from their lands and homes under the threat of genocide."

Upholding the right of return for displaced citizens and the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage was also highlighted by Yacoubian.

"The Armenian people who survived genocide in the 20th century now only ask for peace, dignity, and the right to exist," Yacoubian concluded.

The hearing coincided with the Assembly's Spring 2025 Advocacy Summit when participants joined Members of Congress in meetings on the Hill to advocate for the same issue.



COMMUNITY NEWS

COAF Launches Appeal to Build Sports Complex for Children in Rural Armenia

YEREVAN — The Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) has officially launched its annual Spring Appeal, aiming to raise \$200,000 to build a multi-purpose sports field and playground at the COAF SMART Center in Lori, Armenia.

This new facility will serve over 30 communities, offering more than 1,600 children each week a safe space for play, physical development, and personal growth. This includes more than 1,400 students enrolled in COAF's SMART Center afterschool program, as well as additional COAF beneficiaries throughout Lori. All programs and transportation services at the SMART Center are provided free of charge, ensuring accessibility for children from across the region.

The \$200,000 fundraising target will cover key components such as: Multi-Purpose Sports Field: Featuring a high-quality resin turf designed for soccer, basketball, and volleyball. Children's Playground for children ages 3-6 and essential infrastructure including lighting, drainage systems, fencing, and benches to create a fully functional and accessible recreational space.

To help COAF reach its goal, longtime supporters Vahe and Anni Bedian have pledged to match the first \$75,000 raised by the COAF community. In addition, the Armen and Gloria Hampar Family Foundation has contributed \$50,000 in seed funding to launch the fundraising drive.



The proposed new playground



Children enjoying some playtime outside

In recognition of their generosity, the new sports field will bear the Bedian family name, while the playground will be named in honor of the Hampar family.

This latest initiative comes in response to a troubling trend of declining sports participation among Armenian youth. According to a 2018 World Health Organization (WHO) study, only 16% of boys and 12% of girls aged 15-17 are involved in sports, with participation rates continuing to fall. By providing safe, engaging spaces for play and physical activity, COAF aims to remove barriers and help children in rural Armenia build confidence, connection, and healthy lifelong habits.

“Our goal is to provide children in Lori with opportunities for growth that every child deserves through access to safe, well-equipped recreational spaces,” said Liana Ghaltaghchyan, executive director at COAF. “This project will offer a chance for thousands of children to develop physically, socially, and mentally.”

“This new sports complex is more than just a place to play—it’s a space for children to develop essential life skills,” said Dr. Garo Armen, Founder and Chairman of the Children of Armenia Fund. “Sports teach discipline, teamwork, and perseverance. These are values we should all aspire to instill in the next generation.”

THE ARMENIAN **MIRROR** **SPECTATOR**

Armenian Mirror-Spectator Seeks Summer Intern

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* is seeking an intern for a six-week program this summer (mid-July through August).

The intern will receive a \$150 weekly stipend provided through the Armenian Students' Association of America's Internship Program.

The intern should be in college or graduate school and does not necessarily have to be studying journalism. Most likely, the internship will be done long distance, via electronic communications, therefore location is not an issue (but native speaker knowledge of English remains important). Main tasks will be writing and working on the *Mirror* website, but they could also take part in marketing campaigns and work to increase digital advertising.

The *Mirror* also is looking for interns during the regular year.

If interested, please email a resume and cover letter to either tcadirector@aol.com and alin.gregorian@gmail.com.

Nardolillo Funeral Home

Est. 1906

John K. Najarian, Jr.

Rhode Island's Only Licensed Armenian Funeral Director

1278 Park Ave. Cranston, RI 02910 (401) 942-1220
1111 Boston Neck Rd. Narragansett, RI 02882 (401) 789-6300
www.nardolillo.com

James "Jack" Giragosian, CPC

Mark J. Giragosian

Giragosian
FUNERAL HOME

576 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472, Tel: 617-924-0606
www.giragosianfuneralhome.com

Telephone (617) 924-7400

Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Inc.

Continuous Service By The Bedrosian Family Since 1945

558 MOUNT AUBURN STREET
WATERTOWN, MA 02472

MARION BEDROSIAN
PAUL BEDROSIAN
LARRY BEDROSIAN

ADVERTISE IN THE MIRROR



COMMUNITY NEWS

Metaport Launches Global Platform to Map History

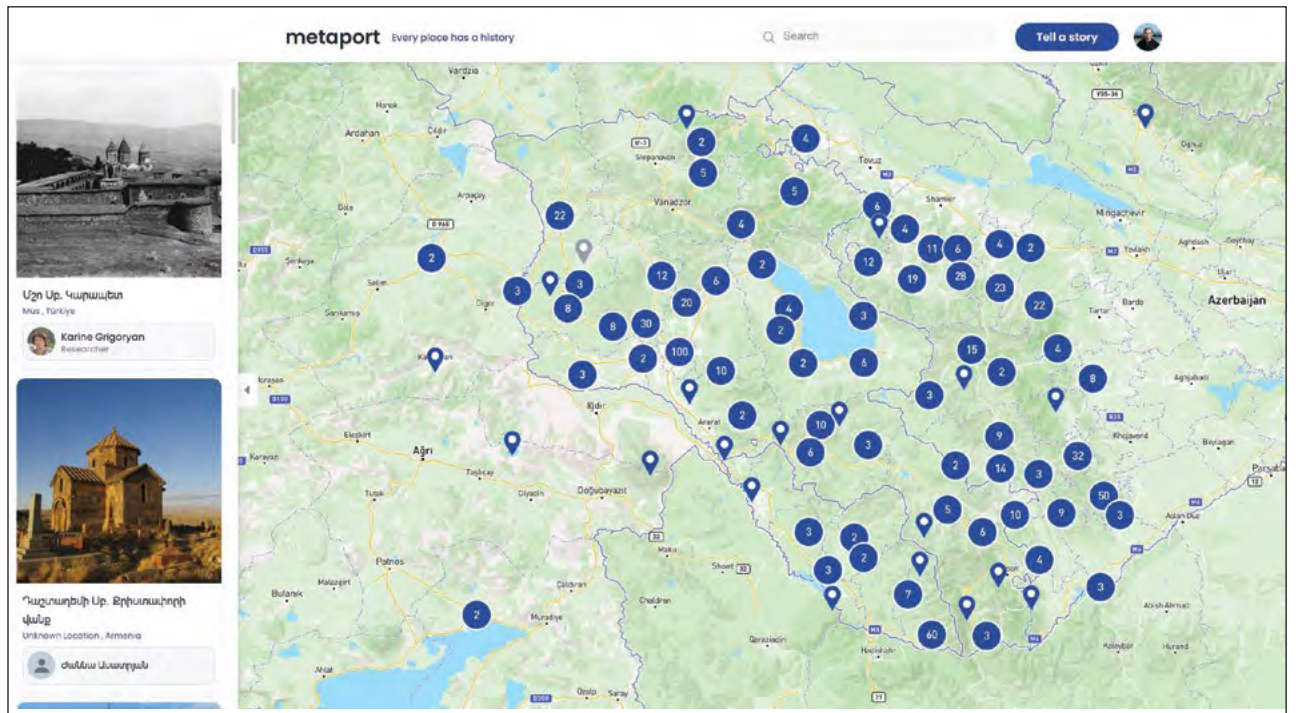
SAN FRANCISCO — This spring Metaport (metaport.ai) officially launched as a groundbreaking map-based platform that combines historical data with community submissions to preserve history for every location worldwide. Kicking off this April, marking 110 years since the Armenian Genocide, Metaport invites the Armenian diaspora to pin ancestral memories, ensuring stories of survival and resilience endure for generations.

From San Francisco, the Metaport team is building a digital archive where anyone can contribute, browse, or explore history tied to specific places. “We’re creating a living map of humanity’s past,” said Raffi Berberian, head of community engagement, “This April, we’re calling on the diaspora to map 1915 survivor stories, free for all to join.”

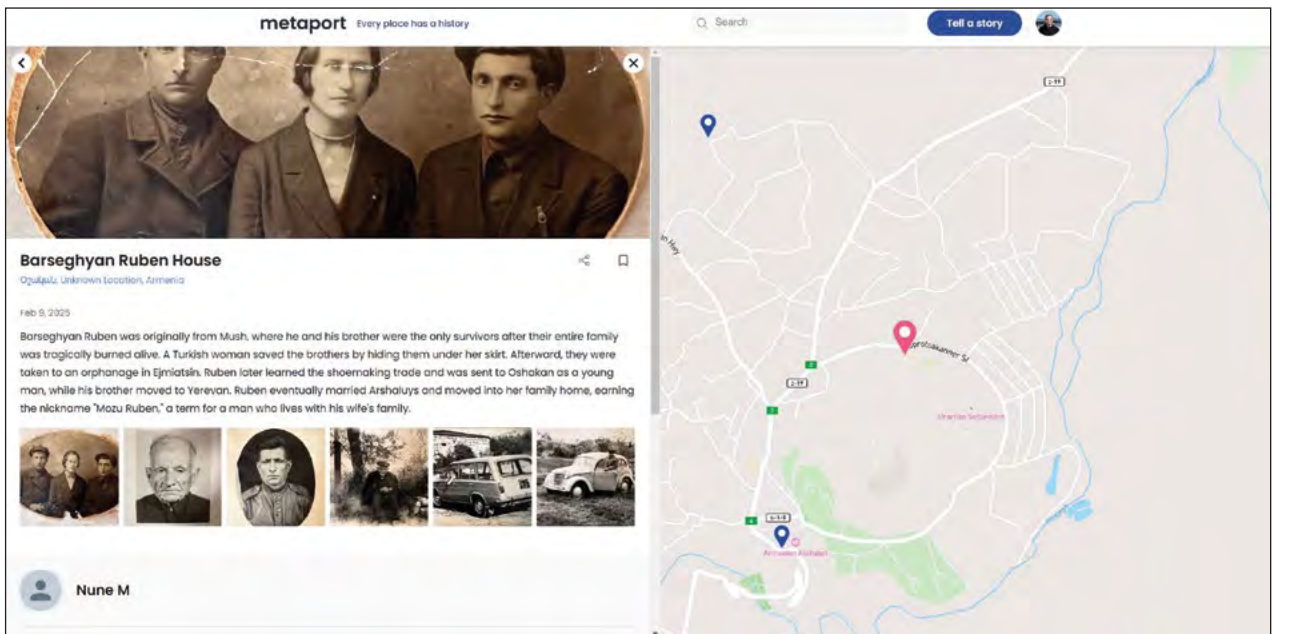
“History slips away when it’s not tied to a place,” says Raffi, Metaport’s Head of the Community. “I saw my own Armenian heritage fading—Metaport’s goal is to let anyone, anywhere, map their past so it’s never lost.” Free to join, users can add up to 10 photos or documents per story, like the Barseghyan-Ruben House entry (<https://metaport.ai/stories/Barseghyan-Ruben-House-5af832903e8348d9/>). How does it work? Anyone can pin a story, type an address or zoom into the map, while historians and researchers verify data via partnerships. “We’re not just Armenian-focused,” Raffi adds. “Over time, when we get thousands of submissions, our AI engine will arrange multiple submissions in one spot to different eras. You can see what was standing in the place of the World Trade center 80 or 100 years ago.”

With 1,000 early contributors and counting, Metaport’s “110 Stories for 110 Years” campaign begins now, tied to Armenian Genocide remembrance. The goal is to pin 110 stories on the territory of Turkey where our ancestors belonged. Unlike Social Media posts, these stories on the map can be discovered by anyone, from anywhere in the world. No one can tell our stories better than us. Let’s build an all-inclusive history.

An early example, the Barseghyan-Ruben House story (<https://metaport.ai/stories/Barseghyan-Ruben-House-5af832903e8348d9/>), showcases how users can add photos, documents, and narratives to locations. Free to start, Metaport in the future will offer premium AI tools, like self-guided tours, for deeper engagement, with plans to further partner with historians, educators, and local businesses.



Armenia stories with one of the maps



The Barseghyan-Ruben House entry

ST. LEON ARMENIAN CHURCH
&
TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION
MHER MEGERDCHIAN THEATRICAL GROUP
Present

ANTON CHEKHOV'S
The Marriage Proposal
A Comedy Directed by
HAROUT CHATMAJIAN

Performed in Armenian with English Subtitles
SURPRISE PRESHOW

SATURDAY
MAY 10, 2025

COCKTAILS @ **7:00PM**
DINNER @ **7:30PM**

ST. LEON ARMENIAN CHURCH
ABAJIAN HALL
12 - 61 Saddle River Road, Fair Lawn, NJ

\$70 ADULTS
CASH BAR
\$45 STUDENTS

RESERVATIONS
ALINE ARAZ (917) 716-3827
aline@edrcorp.net
MARIE ZOKIAN (201) 745-8850

Reservations Accepted with
Payment and Names of Guests

Make Checks Payable to
St. Leon Armenian Church
Mail to Aline Araz
876 Pueblo Drive
Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417

Or Purchase Online At ...

Tekeyan Cultural Association | Philadelphia Chapter
Villanova Armenian Students Organization
Present

My Sweet Land
A film by SAREEN HAIRABEDIAN

Special Screening with the Director
Saturday | April 12th | 7pm
Connelly Center @ Villanova University

Tickets:
\$20 Regular Package
\$50 VIP Package (Includes Meet & Greet with the Director & Welcome Reception @5:30pm)

For more info:
tekeyanphilly@gmail.com
484-402-0128

Parking available: M-2 SAC Parking
Garage @ Villanova University



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Female Tech Platform Expands to Los Angeles

FEMINNO, from page 8

“After three transformative years in Armenia and hosting satellite conferences in San Francisco and Sydney, we are thrilled to bring our powerful movement to Los Angeles. This is an opportunity to elevate the local Armenian talent while engaging a diverse community — women and men alike,” said Papoyan.

The launch event featured a lineup of



Karine Sargsyan

speakers making significant contributions both locally and internationally. Among them was Dr. Karine Sargsyan, the scientific director of the Cancer Biobank at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, a precision medicine expert, foresight scientist and bestselling author. Zarik Boghossian, Chairman of ZEMA Group and a technology entrepreneur with over 30 years of experience in advanced tech innovation, also joined the stage. Linda Megerdichian, a digital hardware design engineer specializing in high-speed signal processing devices, shared her perspective as a woman in the tech industry. Traveling from Armenia, Mariam Torosyan, founder and CEO of Safe YOU, presented her vision for a safer digital space for women and girls. Her platform, now active in six countries including the U.S., combats gender-based violence through technology. The evening also featured speakers and contributors from the tech, academic, entrepreneurial and arts communities, further enriching the conversation with diverse perspectives and expertise.

As part of the launch program, an interactive discussion took place on the topic: “Leading in STEM: Are Women Innovating or Just Catching Up?”

The event also spotlighted the launch



FEMINNO team and volunteers

of FEMINNO’s newest initiative in the AI space — AI Girls — a movement focused on empowering young girls in Armenia and beyond to become creators and leaders in artificial intelligence.

“Imagine girls starting to understand AI as early as middle school, gradually mov-

ing from users to creators — and eventually, decision-makers. This is our vision with AI Girls,” said Papoyan, announcing the start of an online fundraising campaign to support the initiative.

To learn more about FEMINNO and its programs, visit www.feminno.com.

END THE DENIAL

THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

NYC ANNUAL COMMEMORATION

SUNDAY

APRIL 27, 2025

1:30PM

TIMES SQUARE



COMMUNITY NEWS

Actor Joe Manganiello Speaks on Capitol Hill at Genocide Commemoration

COMMEMORATION, from page 8
Baku alongside Pallone last November during COP29, to find a “resolution in a way which protects and guarantees Armenia’s sovereignty,” but in turn they were faced with threats.

“We cannot ignore Azerbaijan’s ongoing occupation of Armenia’s sovereign territory, the build-up of Azeri forces along the border, and their continued threats,” said Markey. “As we honor the memory of those who lost their lives in the Armenian Genocide, I will continue to work alongside you.”

Schiff highlighted that the historic achievement of U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide was “only possible be-

cause of a resilient, empowered, and enduring Armenian diaspora, and decades of your hard work,” and that it is a “testament to the efforts of thousands of activists and organizations, and a victory for human rights.”

He noted, however, that the “wounds remain open” as Azerbaijan “echoes the genocide and actions of a century ago, with the support of Turkey,” and that the president of the United States must “use all of the tools at his disposal to pressure Aliyev to release Armenian prisoners of war.”

Kim stated the importance of preserving memory while making ongoing efforts to stop mass atrocities, which continue to occur against the Armenian people today.

“I stand before you to pay tribute and recognize the past, and stand alongside you as we look forward to make sure we do everything we can to deliver for your children and grandchildren a better and peaceful world,” said Kim.

Assembly Co-Chair Talin Yacoubian stated that it was “heartbreaking” that Armenians are “still facing existential threats” 110 years later as she reflected on testifying before Congress and advocating alongside 80 “passionate and dedicated college students” on Capitol Hill.

“My heart was full of pride, but at the same time full of pain as I was watching these young adults grapple and advocate about so many grave issues,” said Yacoubian. “The

Armenian people have endured genocide, exile, and erasure, but we are still here.”


“In this moment we ask America not just to remember history, but to help shape its course and to stand with Armenians in our pursuit of justice,” she concluded.

ANCA National Chairman George Aghajayan reflected on his family story of survival and underscored that the “crimes did not end in 1915 and continue until today.”

Keith Nahigian, former Assembly intern and founder of Nahigian Strategies served as Master of Ceremonies, and Rev. Sarkis Aktavoukian, pastor of the Soorp Khatch Armenian Church of Bethesda, MD, offered the benediction and closing prayer.



(l-r) Senators Andy Kim (D-NJ) and Adam Schiff (D-CA), Jim McGovern (D-MA), Brad Sherman (D-CA), Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr (D-NJ), and Senator Ed Markey (D-MA), Laura Friedman (D-CA), and Herb Conaway (D-NJ)




Tekeyan Cultural Association
Boston Chapter
presents

The Global World of Armenian Merchants, 1600-1720

Lecture by **Dr. Gayane Ayvazyan**
Ph.D. from NAS, Armenia; Joint Ph.D. Candidate at Harvard University’s History Department and Center of Middle Eastern Studies

Lecture is primarily in the Armenian language

Thurs., May 1, 7 p.m.
Baikar Building
755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown
(use Norseman Ave. door)
Free admission, reception
For more info contact
syogurtian@comcast.net
617 281-1647





Armenian Studies Program
THE ARMENIAN STUDIES PROGRAM, FRESNO STATE
AND TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION METRO LOS ANGELES CHAPTER
PRESENT

“DEATH MARCHES PAST THE FRONT DOOR: CLARA AND FRITZ SIGRIST-HILTY: SWISS EYEWITNESSES TO THE ARMENIAN DANTE-INFERNO IN TURKEY (1915-1918)”

BY DR. DORA SAKAYAN

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

ԳԻՆԵՁՈՒ-BOOK LAUNCH

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

WITH HONORED GUEST HONORABLE FRANCO ZIMMERLI
HONORARY CONSUL OF SWITZERLAND IN LOS ANGELES



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



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

Sunday, April 27, 2025 • 5:00PM
Western Diocese of the Armenian Church
3325 N. Glenoaks Blvd., Burbank, CA
Յայտագիրը Անգլերէնով եւ Հայերէնով



Arts & Culture

AGBU Offers Transformative Cultural And Service Experience for Armenian Youth

NEW YORK — The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) announced this month the return of its Discover Armenia program, an immersive summer experience designed to connect Armenian youth from around the world with their peers and ancestral homeland. Through a combination of cultural exploration, community service, and adventure, this life-changing initiative fosters a deeper connection to Armenian heritage while empowering participants to make a meaningful impact and lifelong friendships.

Since its inception, Discover Armenia has provided young Armenians, aged 15 to 18, with an opportunity to experience Armenia firsthand. The program combines visits to historical landmarks, cultural workshops, and volunteer projects aimed at uplifting local communities. Participants gain invaluable knowledge about their roots, forge lifelong friendships, and contribute to the ongoing development of Armenia.

“Our goal is to provide young Armenians with a profound and personal connection to their peers from around the world and to their heritage,” said Gayane Manukian, Director of Diaspora Youth Program at AGBU. “Through hands-on experiences and meaningful engagement with local communities, Discover Armenia inspires the next generation to embrace their identity and contribute to the future of Armenia.”

The Discover Armenia Program offers unique opportunities to participants that stand out from other programs. In addition to the many iconic sites, other adventures include exploring Areni Cave, home to the world’s oldest known winery, dating back over 6,000 years; the Wings of Tatev is the world’s longest reversible cable car, leading to the stunning Tatev Monastery, an important historic and spiritual landmark, and ziplining at Yell Extreme Park, which offers a range of adrenaline-pumping activities.

A trip to Gyumri provides a deep dive into the city’s artistic and historical richness. Participants explore the Kumayri district, where cobblestone pathways lead to centuries-old homes that tell the stories of the city’s past. A visit to the Dzitoghtsyan Museum of Social Life and National Architecture offers insight into the daily lives of Gyumri’s past generations, while the Aslamazyan Sisters Gallery showcases the city’s vibrant artistic legacy. One of the most memorable experiences is a *khachkar* (cross-stone) carving workshop, where participants learn the intricate techniques of stone carving from skilled artisans, gaining a deeper appreciation for this ancient Armenian tradition. Engaging with local craftsmen, see AGBU, page 15



Sculpture garden at BARAKA

Kardash Onnig Advocates Fasting to Slow Down, to ‘Redeem This World’

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Kardash Onnig is on a mission “to heal our troubled planet.” Throughout his long artistic career, the Hudson Valley-based master carver/sculptor has remained true to his premise of transforming a world full of bigotry and violence into one where love and compassion prevail. It is the artist’s strong belief that mankind’s move away from the spiritual and its almost exclusive focus on the material and the visible has put us on the edge of the abyss. The failure of consumerism to fulfill us is all too glaring.

The current state of the world — the ongoing wars, the genocides, the uprooting of entire populations from their millennia-old homelands — evidences the destructive path we are on. The desire for more possessions, larger territories and more power has reduced everything, including human relationships, to a business transaction. Those in power have total disregard for human lives or for moral principles. We are in fact too busy accumulating and “outdoing the other guy” to pause to reflect and to connect with our inner selves. This frenzied rush is perhaps best expressed by the protagonist of Peter Najarian’s 1971 novel, *Voyages*, Aram Tomasian, born to Armenian immigrant parents in America. “Get up! Get up! To the morning commandment: Thou shalt do something,” conveys Aram’s resentment at the values of a world that cannot accommodate his difference.

Onnig’s art is an invitation to a new paradigm, a new way of thinking that would usher in the spiritual into a world reduced to surfaces and to commodities. In 1994 the artist initiated the Baraka Project, a series of initiatives — mostly books which he gives away — to help bring awareness to our destructive ways. His latest initiative, the book *Fasting as Civil Disobedience* aims to awaken us to the necessity of “cutting out, eliminating and slowing down.” Fasting is a concept people understand. The fasting metaphor vividly expresses the need to abstain in a culture — especially in the West — oversaturated with possessions. “When we fast, we slow down and create an opening to hear inner guidance. And by doing so, we acquire the strength to transcend the things that hold us down,” notes the artist. Most religions do in fact use the practice of fasting for purification and for spiritual reflection. Abstinence, it is believed, makes it easier to explore the spiritual dimension. “Imagine what would happen if billions of people fasted from the consumption of the news and social media,” wonders Onnig.

see SCULPTURES, page 14

Arpine Kalinina

‘Happiness Lies in Creativity’



By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

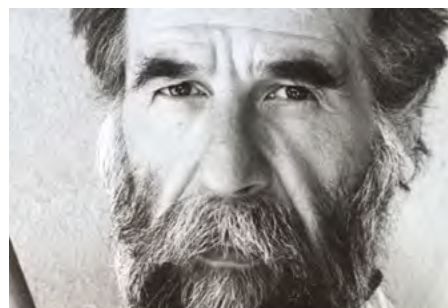
YEREVAN — This past February, the 16th Armenian Composing Art Festival, organized by the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, took place in Yerevan. During its second concert, on February 17, a piece by young composer Arpine Kalinina from Yerevan, *Impatience of the Heart*, was premiered.

Kalinina graduated from the Yerevan Komitas State Conservatory, specializing in composition (under Professor Levon Chaushyan) and piano (under Professor Maro Ghazaryan). She then pursued a master’s degree in composition at the Royal Academy of Music in London, studying under Professors Gary Carpenter and Paul Patterson. She is the author of vocal-instrumental, chamber, and orchestral works that have been performed in Armenia and abroad. As a composer, she has received national and international awards, including the “Triumph” Prize for outstanding achievements in the field of arts in the Russian Federation (Moscow, 2010) and a certificate for reaching the final round of the Bartók World Competition for String Quartets (Budapest, 2020).

Her activities are multifaceted. In 2007, she founded and led the *Kantegh* (Lantern) Ensemble of Armenian Classical Music as its artistic director and pianist until 2021. She has initiated and implemented intercultural concert projects, such as the British-Armenian Musical Bridge concert series (Yerevan-London, ongoing since 2017) and the Armenian-German Musical Bridge (Cologne, 2024). Additionally, she is actively engaged in pedagogical work.

Dear Arpine, let me once again congratulate you on the premiere of *Impatience of the Heart*. I believe many would be interested to know what unites the literary foundations of your piece, which are based on the works of Stefan Zweig and Yeghishe Charents, two authors with no apparent connection.

Literature plays a significant role in my creative life, and this piece also has a literary foundation. I composed see KALININA, page 14



Kardash Onnig (Tony Kent photo)



ARTS & CULTURE

Kardash Onnig Advocates Fasting to Slow Down

SCULPTURES, from page 13

Onnig has been constant in his advocacy for change, and because borders and the refusal to embrace the other “limit our ability to change,” he has devoted his decades-long career to forging “a universal consciousness” that would transcend all cultures and civilizations. His “Four Tools of Being” adopts the Quaternary, the principle of four that cultures across the globe have developed or adopted, to help us work together in “peaceful coexistence.” Some of Onnig’s most beautiful artifacts have been created using the “Four Tools of Being.” He has also built Mehian, the Fertility Temple at his Baraka complex, an 11-acre site in Stanfordville, NY, using the principle of four.

To many, such a vision is an impossibility, an absurdity at best. “You cannot change the world,” his critics argue. Yet the artist keeps on exploring and creating, always inspired by his basic premise of breaking down divisions to achieve peace and harmony. His 2009 GAZA/Rebirth project credits the fifty artists who delivered their message about the effects of war by painting, carving, burning and dressing up the ceramic and manure torsos sculpted by Onnig. The 2021 Collaboration, a book with a title but no author, implies equal participation by the children and the artists of different backgrounds who collaborated on the production of the volume. Art and nature blend in perfect harmony at the Baraka complex. Site-specific installations are permanently displayed on the lush green slopes amidst the surrounding



Sculpture garden at BARAKA

maple, oak and locust trees. Onnig’s use of art as a political tool is yet another instance of blurring boundaries and dismantling dichotomies. “The artist has a duty to stand up against all injustice and brutality,” notes the artist.

While much of what Onnig proposes is elusive, *Fasting as Civil Disobedience* gives his vision form. In just five pages of text the artist captures the truth of a culture reduced to “our obsession to getting ahead,” “addiction to social media,” “instant gratification,” and so on. “I am going to change the world through civil

disobedience,” affirms the visionary, citing Tolstoy, Gandhi, Martin Luther King and other great visionaries that have come before him. In stark contrast to the violence of warfare, the practice of fasting is peaceful, and therefore a viable alternative to the wars that have failed to create the peaceful world they purport to be fought for.

Transformation is an apt message at a time when we seem to be committed to destroying the human species and our planet. Frustrated over the fact that “the world looks away as blood is shed unjustly,” Onnig initiated the GAZA/Rebirth proj-

ect to raise awareness of the plight of the Palestinian people, and by extension of the plight of all oppressed and disempowered peoples, following the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2008. Ironically, the Gaza Strip has been reduced to rubble, while those who “survived” the brutal attacks are threatened with deportation. Our own Artsakh has been ethnically cleansed. We may just have gone too far down the path of violence to turn back. In the words of the eponymous hero who kills the good King Duncan of Scotland so he can become king himself in Shakespeare’s tragedy “Macbeth,” “I am in blood/Stepped in so far, that, should I wade no more,/Returning were as tedious as go o’er.” Macbeth’s ambition for power prevails over his strong sense of guilt of his descent down a bloody path.

I would like to add that confronting our current reality and saying that “we’re headed to the abyss” is not “pessimistic,” as often alleged. It may in fact be the only “optimistic” stance “to pull us away from ‘the abyss’ — should we insist on using two words that seem to have lost their meaning due to overuse, and even sometimes misuse and abuse. Bringing awareness to the one-sidedness that has tipped us off balance, and providing direction so we can connect with our inner selves and be whole again (were we ever whole?) cannot be “pessimistic.” Onnig’s work is increasingly reassuring and inspiring.

Fasting as Civil Disobedience has been translated into Eastern Armenian “to further spread out the concept of civil disobedience as a tool for change.”

Arpine Kalinina: ‘Happiness Lies in Creativity’

KALININA, from page 13

Impatience of the Heart for soprano, violin, cello and orchestra in 2008, inspired by Stefan Zweig’s novel, *Beware of Pity*. I revised the piece in 2025 specifically for this performance. Through the voices of three soloists I portrayed the novel’s central characters. It is about tragic love. I expressed the heroine’s dramatic emotional state through two poems of Charents. His poetry holds a special place in my vocal compositions, and over the years, I have often turned to his poems. By the way, I was particularly delighted that Yeghishe Charents’ descendants — his granddaughter, Mrs. Gohar Charents, and great-granddaughter, Nane Djerrhian — were present in the hall during the performance.

As a composer, collaboration with performers is invaluable to me — it enriches, inspires new creative ideas, and working with a symphony orchestra, in my opinion, is an immensely significant and irreplaceable experience for any composer. I am deeply grateful to all the performers of my work — the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra (artistic director Sergey Smbatyan), guest conductor Alexander Humala from Belarus, soloists soprano Sofya Sayadyan, violinist Erik Manukyan and cellist Sipan Toroyan — for their passionate and powerful performance. I am thrilled about the impressive collaboration with the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, which was fully realized through the brilliant interpretation of the conductor and soloists. After 17 years of waiting, I listened to the performance of my piece with indescribable emotion. I felt doubly happy, as I sensed how lovingly the musicians brought it to life.

Thanks to the “Armenian Compos-

ing Art Festival,” we are discovering composers of different generations from our time. Can you point out the general characteristics of Armenian composers of your generation?

During the festival, the works of both classical and contemporary (including young) Armenian composers are performed side by side, presenting a panorama of Armenian music. As for the young composers of my generation, I think it will only become clearer over time what common trends unite us. In composition, as in any other field of art, one of the main aspirations of a creator is to develop and refine their own style. Listening to both Armenian and foreign young composers, I primarily try to capture the uniqueness of their music. I would very much like (and I say this also as a composition teacher) for our young composers to develop an independent musical way of thinking, grounded in the traditions of the Armenian compositional school.

Komitas plays a crucial role in my creative life. I have organized 25 concert-lectures dedicated to Komitas in various educational and cultural institutions of Armenia, as well as Komitas concerts outside Armenia, bringing together foreign musicians. I try to instill a love for Komitas and Armenian music in my students.

Our musicians usually pursue further training in Germany or Italy, with very few in the UK. How did you end up there, and what makes British musical education special?

I was fascinated by British culture from an early age, especially literature. One of my first childhood books was *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, which sparked my love for England and its nature — I dreamed of visiting En-

gland. When I was awarded the Triumph Prize in the youth category for outstanding achievements in the arts in the Russian Federation, I decided to use the prize money to further my education in Europe. I chose the Royal Academy of Music in London and used that money to travel to London and take my entrance exams. This academy, which is one of the world’s leading music institutions, gives student composers the opportunity to listen all their works performed during their studies, including large-scale symphonic and choral compositions, which at the time was almost impossible in Armenia. The most important thing for me was gaining listening experience — working with symphony orchestras, choirs and various musical ensembles. At the same time, I benefited greatly from the academy’s multicultural and creative environment. The students were outstanding performers and composers from different corners of the world, many of whom were laureates of prestigious international competitions and already promising musicians. Collaborating and interacting with them enriched every composer.

The curriculum was intense, the demands were high, and the assignments were extensive. We were constantly encouraged to compose new works within tight deadlines, helping us develop the ability to quickly fulfill commissions in our professional careers. We were taught by excellent specialists, and the musical life in London was thriving. All of this combined provided invaluable experience and laid the foundation for my various intercultural projects.

Please tell us about your family.

I was born in Yerevan. My father, Stanislav Kalinin, had Slavic roots — Russian,

Ukrainian and Polish — while my mother, Anahit Khachatryan, is Armenian. My father grew up in Yerevan, was a radio engineer by profession, and a great lover of the arts (as a child, he attended a music school, studying flute). My mother is a translator and editor. At home, we always spoke Armenian, and my father had an excellent command of the language. Sometimes, our acquaintances and relatives would say they felt uncomfortable speaking Armenian in front of my father because, despite not being Armenian, he always spoke literary Armenian.

My father considered Armenia his homeland, spent his entire conscious life in Armenia, loved Armenian culture and music — especially Komitas — and was deeply concerned about Armenia’s fate. I grew up in a creative environment. My parents always encouraged artistic pursuits. My father’s favorite saying was: *Happiness lies in creativity*. This has become my artistic credo.

No doubt, he is absolutely right. What challenges does a young composer face in present-day Armenia?

Today, I believe that composers face the greatest difficulties in the field of music. Since the post-Soviet years, the culture of commissioning music from composers has not yet fully developed. A composer writes music and, one could say, is not compensated for it. But that is only one aspect of the issue.

There are very limited opportunities for young composers — especially for having their large-scale orchestral and choral works performed. The Armenian Composing Art Festival, in collaboration with the Composers’ Union of Armenia, plays an important role in this regard.



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Elsie S. Donigian's Potato Kufteh

FAIR LAWN, N.J. — Elsie S. (née Apelian) Donigian of Fair Lawn, passed away on August 19, 2003 at age 92. Elsie was the beloved wife of the late Harry Donigian, and the loving mother of David and Jeremiah Donigian.

“Elsie was a long-time member of the St. Leon Women’s Guild,” says Lucy Chagachbanian, one of her close friends of many years. “She was selfless in her commitment and dedication to our church, a shining example, and someone who never let her disabilities or handicap keep her from reaching out to others. She was not only an amazing cook and baker, but a generous and caring human being and teacher. In 1980, the St. Leon Women’s Guild, under Elsie’s chairmanship, hosted the May Fellowship Day sponsored by Church Women United -- the theme for the day was, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me,’ (Isaiah 61:1).”

“Elsie was a respected Sunday School teacher and Chairman of the St. Leon Women’s Guild Devotional Committee that blazed the way for new member activities and retreats in the 1980s. She often multiplied this famous potato kufteh recipe to feed over 150 parishioners at our luncheons and dinners. She insisted that you must use olive oil in this recipe to obtain the best results and taste.”

“From the beginning, exceptionally devoted women like Elsie have worn many hats in the St. Leon Women’s Guild. They sing in the choir, prepare the ‘mahs’ and maintain the altar cloths and vestments, teach in the Sunday and Armenian schools, cook for annual bazaars, ‘hantesses,’ and picnics, and generally support all aspects of our parish life. The St. Leon parish history is so intertwined into the history of its women that it is, at times, a dilemma to unravel parish events from the Women’s Guild events,” says Ruth Bedevian.*

“Elsie’s son David passed away a few years ago. He shared a super easy flan recipe that is foolproof and that always is a hit with guests and family. He inherited Elsie’s culinary talents and abilities. Most importantly, Elsie initiated the first outreach program to the wider community by preparing meals for the homeless men and their families in Paterson at the St. Paul’s Church shelter. She was an in-

spiration to everyone who knew or encountered her. One day, two Jehovah witnesses knocked on her door. Rather than turn them away, Elsie seized the opportunity and invited them into her home for refreshments. She then gave them testimony, revealing the long history of the Armenian Church, and enlightening them that Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity as its state religion in 301 AD. She was a proud, devoted Armenian wife, mother and grandmother, and she is missed by all who had the privilege of knowing and loving her.”

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups onions, chopped
1 cup fine bulgur
1/3 cup olive oil, to taste
1 (6 oz.) can tomato paste
2 large or 3 medium potatoes, boiled, drained
1/2 cup Italian parsley, finely chopped, to taste
Salt and pepper, to taste
4 tablespoons red pepper paste**
Paprika or red pepper as garnish

PREPARATION:

Sauté onions in olive oil and cook over a low flame for about 15-20 minutes until nice and limp.

Crush the drained potatoes with a fork and set aside. Add 2 tablespoons of the red pepper paste to the onion mixture and set aside.

Rinse the bulgur twice in hot water and drain. To the bulgur, add the remaining 2 tablespoons red pepper paste and the can of tomato paste and knead well. Add the potatoes and continue to knead well. Add the sautéed onions, parsley, salt and pepper; mix well. Form into patties, garnish with paprika or red pepper and serve.

St. Leon Armenian Church
12-61 Saddle River Road
Fair Lawn, New Jersey 07410
Phone: (201) 791-2862
Go to: <http://www.stleon.org/>

*Nearing its 100th Anniversary in 2028, the St. Leon Women’s Guild, originally titled, Ladies’ Aid Society, was established four years before enough funding was saved for the purchase of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Paterson, NJ, and consecrated in the St. Leon Armenian Church. When the present edifice was built and reconsecrated in 1965, the Women’s Guild donated \$25,000 of its savings to its construction – representing thousands of kufteh, yalanchi, choreg, and paghach sales over the years.

Recipes & Recollections Cookbook was compiled by the Women’s Guild in 2010. It contains a variety of Armenian and non-Armenian recipes submitted by members. Recipes are accompanied with fond anecdotal commentaries and includes Food Festival specialties. This cookbook is no longer in print. See: “Journey Through Eight Decades,” a Women’s Guild History by Ruth Bedevian at: <http://www.stleon.org/sl/Organizations/Women%27s%20Guild/80th%20Anniversary%20of%20St.%20Leon%20Womens%20Guild.pdf?1615240973>

**Red pepper paste is flavorful and delicious on its own, or as the perfect substitution for tomato paste in many recipes. It is a staple in kitchens and creates the flavorful base in numerous Armenian recipes.

Also see:

Feta and Potato Patties at: <https://thearmeniankitchen.com/feta-and-potato-patties/>

How to Make Potato Kibbeh Footballs | Vegan Kibbeh Recipe | Eats With Gasia at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAt-4nTCBdE>

Kuku Seebzamini – Potato patties at: <https://thecaspianchef.com/2019/03/15/potato-kuku/>

Armenian Red Lentil Patties at: <https://www.eatdrinkplayla.com/single-post/2018/10/17/armenian-red-lentil-patties-vospov-kufta>

AGBU Offers Transformative Cultural and Service Experience for Armenian Youth

AGBU, from page 13

painters and musicians, participants witness firsthand the creativity and warmth that define Gyumri.

Participants also visit Dilijan, known as the “Switzerland of Armenia,” which offers a refreshing combination of nature, history and culture, where centuries-old monasteries of Haghartsin and Goshavank are explored. Participants learn about Armenia’s medieval history and the scholars who shaped its literary and religious traditions. Beyond its historical sites, Dilijan is a hub for arts, crafts, and environmental conservation. Here, participants interact with local artisans, discovering traditional woodworking and pottery techniques. They also gain an understanding of sustainable tourism and nature preservation efforts, highlighting Dilijan’s commitment to conservation and eco-friendly develop-

ment.

The program also includes expert-led workshops that bring Armenia’s rich cultural heritage to life. In the Armenian calligraphy workshop, participants learn the delicate strokes of the Armenian alphabet under the guidance of skilled calligraphers. The khachkar carving session provides hands-on experience with tuff stone, as expert stone carvers teach the techniques behind one of Armenia’s most iconic art forms. Culinary enthusiasts engage in traditional Armenian cooking, preparing dishes such as dolma, gata and lavash while exploring the deep cultural significance behind Armenian cuisine.

In addition to the many adventures, there is an intensive community building component to the program. Participants will take part in service projects that support underprivileged communities, including working

with displaced individuals from Artsakh. Additional service project themes include environmental conservation, and education initiatives, which earns participants 20 or 60 hours of community service credits depending on the session. These experiences not only enrich their experience but also instills a sense of responsibility and commitment to Armenia’s future.

Discover Armenia is open to young Armenians worldwide, with applications available on the official AGBU website. Spring dates are April 12-21, Summer 1 dates are June 19-July 6, and Summer 2 sessions are July 30-August 16. As spots fill quickly, interested individuals are encouraged to apply early.

For more information about Discover Armenia and how to apply, visit <https://agbu.org/discover-armenia>.



Mimino Statue in Dilijan, Armenia

ARTS & CULTURE

Ellen Alaverdyan Feels the Groove

ELLEN, from page 1

The video, with more than 480,000 views on her YouTube channel, *Ellen Plays Bass*, shows off her singing as well as performing every single instrument. At the very end, a message pops up from Sir Paul, dated May 2024, noting, “Dear Ellen, Sir McCartney was particularly moved by your interpretation of one of his songs (Ob La Di, Ob-L-Da). Your unique choice of instrument (ukulele) he found to be a creative and a fresh perspective. He said it’s heartwarming to see how his music continues to inspire young artists like yourself.”

And the statement continues, “Thank you for sharing your music with the world and for allowing me to witness your incredible talent. Keep playing, keep creating and most importantly, keep enjoying every moment of it. I look forward to seeing where your musical journey takes you and hope one day your paths will cross.”

In a recent interview, Ellen, and her father, Hovak Alaverdyan, spoke about the young musician and her path.

“Shocked. That’s the only word I can use,” said Hovak. He said the video reached McCartney through indirect means. “They tried to get a message to Paul McCartney and that is the response they got from him,” Hovak noted.

There are dozens of videos on YouTube as well as on Instagram showing Ellen’s prowess on the bass guitar, as well as participating in challenges and throw downs with other — much older — professional musicians. When playing, she truly looks like it costs her no effort at all. But young Ellen is no braggart. “It’s all just practicing, to be honest. I didn’t do anything specific to play like that,” Alaverdyan said.

She is regularly being challenged by much older musicians to reproduce specific riffs — and she does.



She can be seen performing live with Steve Vai, a Grammy-winning guitarist who has played with everyone from Frank Zappa to White Snake and David Lee Roth (former lead singer of Van Halen).

When asked just how it is that this very small human being has this enormous supernova coming out of her every pore, her father, Hovak, answered very matter-of-factly.

“She has the talent and she works a lot,” he said.

Ellen is the only child of Hovak and his wife, Marine, a makeup artist. The couple moved to the US from Armenia 17 years



ago.

Hovak is a rock musician and music producer, which could explain her taking to music so naturally. For many years he produced records for many clients, though in the past six or seven years, he has been working on his own music. He said in Armenia, he worked with many pop stars and did a lot of session work.

“She was around music and musicians and a recording studio all the time. That’s the environment she grew up in and that was her day-to-day life,” he said.

Her father said that when Ellen was a baby, there was little indication that she had such explosive talent, but there were indications that she was musical. “She would pick up songs we would hear in the car. Just normal stuff.”

Viewers can see her on YouTube as she performs bass lines from *Superfreak* by Rick James, *Good Times* by Chic, *Another One Bites the Dust* by Queen and *Can’t Stop* by the Red Hot Chili Peppers, among many others. She also does plenty of heavy metal ones from bands like Metallica, among others.

She looks like she is nowhere near breaking a sweat even when her fingers are practically a blur.

“It may look like that because I worked hard,” she replied with a sweet laugh. “It’s not every single day that I practice. When I do, I don’t count, but maybe

around two hours a day.”

Ellen said that she does not take formal music lessons but aside from practicing, she is working on learning how to read music.

“I can’t read notes fast, but I can understand them,” Ellen said.

Hovak first started posting videos of Ellen playing bass four years ago. “I didn’t have any expectations. I just posted it to see what happens,” he said.

The reaction has been tremendous, to say the least.

In fact, word got out and she ended up on the “Steve Harvey Show” at the ripe

old age of 9 three years ago, performing to the delight of the grooving audience and meeting a hero, funk bassist Bootsy Collins, most famously with Parliament-Funkadelic, as well as Verdine White, the bassist for one of her favorite bands, Earth Wind and Fire. Ellen fell into Harvey’s arms crying tears of joy while many in the audience were wiping tears of their own.

“At that point I had just begun to play. I was new and I guess I wasn’t very prepared for the Steve Harvey show,” she said. “I’m kind of used to talking in front of a camera. Now I’m a little bit more used to being interviewed.”

Ellen started playing bass six years ago after she had tried some other musical instruments.

“I don’t remember specifically choosing the bass. I just kind of started and continued. I had started a lot of instruments but haven’t continued,” she said.

“I’m pretty sure,” rhythm is what she responds to.

“Anything else that I play isn’t as advanced as the bass. I played a couple of songs on the piano, a little on the drums and I played one song on acoustic guitar or ukulele, she said.

When asked to name some of her favorite bassists as well as musicians, she replied, “There are so many. Paul McCartney. I like Paul McCartney as an artist and a bassist,” adding that she really admires the styles of bassist I like Victor Wooten of Béla Fleck and the Flecktones, jazz bassist Richard Bona among others. As for bands, she said she loves the progressive rock group Tool, as well as Queen.

“I don’t even count the Beatles. I think everyone knows that,” Ellen said.

She is not a huge fan of heavy metal, but she gets thrown a lot of metal challenges by fellow musicians on YouTube.

“It’s not that I hate heavy metal, but I like progressive rock and most of the bass lines were similar [to heavy metal] and they were good bass lines,” she noted.

She added, “If I like the song I like the song. If I like how it sounds, it gets stuck in my head, I like to listen to it and I play it.”

In addition to the challenges, she releases various favorite top 10 bass lines in different categories.

Ellen is home schooled but takes some

classes, like art, chess and Armenian language. “Everything is once a week. On a typical day I will watch something, or call a friend, besides practicing,” Ellen said. “Usually people think I don’t do anything else but I do board games, painting, chess or watch movies.”

At home, the family speaks Armenian and therefore Ellen is fluent. “It’s my first language. I speak more Armenian than English. I don’t speak English at home,” she said.

It’s not just her father that influences her. Ellen praised her mother as “artistic,” noting “that is where I get my creative side.”

And don’t expect Ellen’s friends to be aware of the noted musicians she duets with or be impressed with her view count or for that matter for her to brag.

“Most of my friends didn’t even know until a while ago” about the YouTube and Instagram posts, she said. “It’s not the first thing I tell them. It’s not like it’s anything too big anyway and it’s not the reason they are talking to me. When they find out they do know they say ‘cool’ and forget about it.”

The father and daughter are now working on releasing an album of original works. They have one full-time collaborator — Ara Torosyan, known as Murzo on keyboards— and are looking for a full-time drummer. They already have about seven songs finished with a session drummer.

Hovak said that they are not going to go after a record deal, and instead will release it themselves. “We have all the resources. We are able to do it independently,” he said.

Hovak said he would be supportive if Ellen wanted to pursue a music career. “If she wants to, yes,” he said. “The only thing I can say is that it would be easy for her, given the fact that I’m in the industry and I have the contacts.”

No date has been set for the record release. “We need a few more songs to write and produce,” he said.

The two have sponsorships and endorsements, including Mayones basses, which is one of the most notable European bass brands.

Before that, plans are underway for a live show in Los Angeles sometime soon. They are nailing down details.



ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

CONNECTICUT

APRIL 26 — The Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of Connecticut will hold its annual program on the 110th anniversary of the Genocide, Saturday at 10:30 a.m. at the Connecticut House Chamber at the State Capitol, 210 Capitol Avenue, Hartford. Clergy from Armenian Churches in Connecticut will participate. Keynote speaker will be Artak Beglaryan, former State Minister and former Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and President of the "Union for Protection of the Interests and Rights of the Artsakh People." He will speak on "Genocide of Armenians in Artsakh." A reception will follow the commemoration. For questions call Melanie at 860-651-0629

MASSACHUSETTS

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. Gazrossian, 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 26 — Opening Reception. *Fragments of Memory: The Art and Legacy of Varujan Boghosian*. His work is in collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of America Art, and Philadelphia Museum of Art. Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown, Saturday. Save the date. RSVP details to follow.

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 open to the public on Friday, May 2 at the Hilton Boston Woburn 2 Forbes Rd. For more information, please visit <https://www.hypointearmenianchurch.org/>

MAY 1 — The Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter presents "The Global World of Armenian Merchants, 1600-1720," a lecture by Dr. Gayane Ayvazyan, a PhD candidate at Harvard University's History Department and Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Lecture primarily in Armenian. Thursday, 7 p.m., Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown (use Norseman Avenue door). Free admission, reception to follow. For more information, contact syogurtian@comcast.net or call (617) 281-1647.

MAY 2 — 123rd DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY DANCE hosted by Holy Archangels Armenian Church. Music by Jason Naroian & His Band featuring the voice of Michael Gostanian. Friday, from 9 pm to 12 am. at the Hilton Boston Woburn, 2 Forbes Rd. Woburn. \$50.00; reserve your dance tickets at Tiny.cc/AssemblyDance. Walk-ins welcome.

MAY 3 — CELEBRATE PUBLIC ART! Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Saturday at 12:45 p.m. Remarks: Rita Fucillo, co-Publisher, Art New England followed by participating World Labyrinth Day: Walk As One at 1PM joining all ages in cities and towns worldwide. Refreshments. RSVP hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

MAY 16-17 — Annual Fair at Armenian Memorial Church, 32 Bigelow Ave., Watertown dine-in or take-out. Beef, chicken, losh kabob or vegetarian meals Friday 4-8 p.m.-Saturday 12-7 p.m. Sale of Armenian desserts and delicacies. The Church will donate 10% of the fair proceeds to the California Wildfire Relief Fund through the Armenian Missionary Association of America.

NEW JERSEY

MAY 10 — St. Leon Armenian Church and Tekeyan Cultural Association Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group present Anton Chekhov's "The Marriage Proposal," a comedy directed by Harout Chatmajian for an evening of dinner theater. Play will be performed in Armenian with English subtitles. Saturday, cocktails at 7 p.m. and dinner at 7.30 p.m., St. Leon Armenian Church Abajian Hall, 12-61 Saddle River Road, Fair Lawn. Tickets \$70 for adults, \$45 for students. Cash bar. For reservations, Aline Araz at (917) 716-3827 or aline@edrcorp.net or Marie Zokian (201) 745-8850. Reservations accepted with payment and names of guests. Make checks payable to St. Leon Armenian Church. Mail to Aline Araz, 876 Pueblo Drive, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417.

PENNSYLVANIA

APRIL 26 — Armenian Heritage Walk Groundbreaking, Saturday, 2 p.m. Beside the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2600 Benjamin Franklin Pkwy, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia.

RHODE ISLAND

JUNE 28 — Save the date. The Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island 70th Anniversary Concert. Saturday, at 7 pm, Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson Street, Providence. Details to follow.

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.

'Barber of Seville' Brings Down the House in Wiesbaden

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WIESBADEN, Germany — On March 30, the Wiesbaden State Theater premiered a fantastic production of Giacomo Rossini's comic opera, "The Barber of Seville," with bass-baritone Hovhannes Karapetyan in the role of Dottor Bartolo. The production, directed by Nikolaus Habjan, features life-size clap-mouth puppets, doubles of the singers, in a hilariously brilliant, musically exceptional rendition of the opera that becomes a parody of itself. The capacity audience responded with laughter, amazement, admiration, and standing ovations. A full report will appear next week.



Young Doo Park, Angelo Konzett, Joshua Sanders, Jack Lee, Max Konrad, Hovhannes Karapetyan, Camille Sherman, Inna Fedorii, left to right, photo by Maximilian Borchardt



Hovhannes Karapetyan as Dottor Bartolo. Photo by Maximilian Borchardt

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE
UNITED STATES

EDITOR

Alin K. Gregorian

MANAGING EDITOR

Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

CONTRIBUTORS

Christopher Atamian, Artsvi Bakhchinyan,
Florence Avakian, Christine Vartanian
Datian, Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, Philippe
Raffi Kalfayan, Ken Martin, Gerald
Papasian, Benjamin Poghosyan, Suren
Sargsyan, Harut Sassounian, Hagop
Vartivarian

REGIONAL

CORRESPONDENTS

LOS ANGELES: Ani Duzdabanyan-
Manoukian, Kevork Keushkerian,
Michelle Mkhlian
YEREVAN: Raffi Elliott
BERLIN: Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
PARIS: Jean Eckian
SAN FRANCISCO: Kim Bardakian
Demirjian
CAIRO: Maydaa Nadar

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

VIDEO CORRESPONDENT

Haykaram Nahapetyan

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

Baikar Association, Inc.

755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA
02472-1509

Telephone: 617-924-4420

FAX: 617-924-2887

www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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

ISSN 0004-234X

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

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

Life After Assad: The Challenges of Syria's Armenian Community

By George Meneshian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

What is the situation of Syrian Armenians four months after the fall of the Assad regime?

Regime change in Syria had an immense impact on the already dwindling Armenian community in the country. While initial fears of large-scale attacks against Christian communities proved, fortunately, to be unfounded, Armenians, like most Christians, had felt relatively secure under the state-sponsored secularism of the Assad government.

However, the emergence of new authorities, primarily composed of Islamist former rebel groups under the now-dissolved Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, has left people living with a persistent sense of fear, unsure of what the future holds. The tragic events on the Syrian coast in March, marked by a massacre of innocent civilians at the hands of both Islamists and members of the security forces, have exacerbated this anxiety. Particularly alarming were reports that two Armenians were among the victims.

In Aleppo, the primary hub of Syrian-Armenians, Christians, including Armenians, were allowed to celebrate Christmas, but life has not fully returned to its pre-conflict state. One notable change is that Christian-owned stores are now closed on Fridays — the Muslim day of rest — while remaining open on Sundays. The same pattern applies to schools: although they remain open, they must adhere to the Islamic calendar. For instance, Armenian schools were instructed to close during the Eid al-Fitr holiday. Additionally, alcohol is now banned, and there have been isolated incidents of verbal and physical attacks by Muslim individuals. Despite these challenges, the new authorities have not systematically targeted Christians.

At the same time, the transitional government's decision to elevate the role of Islamic law in the provisional constitution has sparked further fears among Armenians, many of whom are deeply concerned about the preservation of their religious freedoms and rights. Nevertheless, Armenian organizations and churches continue to operate, maintaining regular activities while community and religious leaders stay in close contact with the authorities.

Armenians, like other Aleppo residents, face ongoing challenges related to basic services. Water and electricity shortages remain unresolved, with the new authorities providing just four hours of electricity per day. Although the supply was increased to six hours daily in late March, technical issues with electricity production facilities have caused frequent outages, not only in Aleppo but also in other cities, including Damascus. As financial struggles persist after 14 years of war and poverty, many people are forced to pay for power from private generators, which is burdensome and costly.

Economic hardship is further compounded by inflation and the difficulty of securing basic goods, despite the influx of Turkish products. Long-standing conflict and the devastating February 2023 earthquake have left much of the infrastructure damaged or dysfunctional. Employment opportunities are scarce, and housing costs remain unaffordable for most.

Meanwhile, crime rates have surged dramatically. After sunset, streets are almost deserted, as burglaries, robberies and shoplifting have become commonplace. The lack of adequate military and security personnel is particularly evident in Aleppo and across the

government-controlled regions, with Damascus being the only potential exception. The situation has become so severe that local authorities aligned with the transitional government have requested Armenian volunteers to assist with neighborhood patrols, to which the community has agreed. However, Armenians who participate in patrols are unarmed.

Moreover, government services are virtually nonexistent. Basic administrative tasks, such as renewing passports, selling property, or handling official documentation, are nearly impossible without functioning state agencies.

Despite the upheaval, Armenia promptly reopened its embassy in Damascus and the Consulate General in Aleppo, establishing communication with the new transitional government under Ahmed al-Sharaa (also known as Abu Mohammad al-Jolani). In late March, the Armenian government dispatched humanitarian aid to Syria through Turkey. However, despite this re-engagement, many within the Armenian community feel that Armenia has not done enough to support them in these challenging times.

Although the situation has not dramatically changed from the final years of the Assad regime, struggles persist, and uncertainty looms. Many remain fearful and pessimist about the fate of the remaining Christian populations, despite al-Sharaa's assurances of respecting diversity and minority rights. Several Armenian families have already left or are planning to leave for Armenia or other countries.

Armenia must do more. Syrian Armenians contributed significantly to Armenia's post-independence development and have consistently supported both Armenia and Mountainous Karabakh (Artsakh). Today, with the Syrian Armenian community facing ongoing instability, the Armenian state has a responsibility to respond proactively. Armenia should facilitate the safe and dignified exodus of those who wish to leave, while simultaneously bolstering efforts to preserve and support the small community that chooses to remain. This includes providing more than symbolic humanitarian assistance, supporting cultural preservation initiatives, and engaging in more active and consistent diplomatic efforts to ensure their security.

At the same time, prosperous Armenian diaspora communities in the United States, France, and beyond can play a constructive role. In addition to offering financial support, they can intensify lobbying efforts to pressure influential governments to urge Damascus to uphold the rights and safety of Syrian Christians, including Armenians.

Through a coordinated and compassionate effort, both Armenia and its global diaspora can help safeguard this vulnerable yet resilient community.

(George Meneshian is a policy analyst specializing in the Caucasus and Middle East, currently serving as Head of the Middle East Research Group at the Institute of International Relations (IDIS) in Athens, Greece. He studied International Relations at Panteion University in Athens and earned his master's degree in Middle East, Caucasus, and Central Asia Studies from the University of St Andrews in the United Kingdom. He has authored numerous articles and papers across various platforms and has been featured in multiple media outlets. In 2024, he published a book on Greek-Armenian relations — soon to be translated into English — and has co-authored four other books.)

Sign the Petition to Help Release Armenian Hostages in Baku

Dear compatriots,

As we all well know, one of the most outrageous humanitarian tragedies and injustices that to this date continues to be perpetrated against Armenians is the continuing detention of so-called ethnic Armenian prisoners in Baku and the conduct of "public trials" which violate fundamental international legal rules and regulations.

We are highly supportive of the efforts of a nonpartisan prisoners' defense team composed of internationally recognized legal experts which has undertaken a robust legal action in defense of our brethren. This team is currently seeking a strong multinational, international diplomatic support to this action.

We in turn are providing our fullest support to this undertaking in as many ways as possible.

Considering that the petition below initiated by the Armenian National Committee would provide an additional important backing to the efforts of the prisoners' defense team, we urge you to go ahead and sign this petition and try furthermore to get as many of your friends as possible to do the same.

On behalf of the worldwide Press of the

Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL) / Ramgavar Azadagan Gousagtsoutyoum

And Tekeyan Cultural Association

Action Alert !!! Sign the Petition: You Can Help Release the Armenian Hostages in Baku

We are advocating for the release of Armenian hostages detained by Azerbaijan, and for that, we need your assistance.

We have launched this petition directed to several OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) high-ranking officials to initiate mechanisms available to the OSCE to assess Azerbaijan's legal and administrative practice in light of its commitments to the OSCE, establish the facts, and provide recommendations and advice.

Every day counts for the well-being and lives of these prisoners. The international community must put pressure on Azerbaijan and its president, Ilham Aliyev, to stop committing gross human rights violations and release all illegally detained prisoners.

Please sign our petition and help free the Armenian hostages being illegally held in Baku by going to <https://armeniancause.com>.



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Overwhelming Majority Of Turks View Foreign Countries as Enemies

Given Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's frequent and inflammatory attacks on the United States, Europe and Israel, it is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of Turks consider these countries as their biggest enemies. This is a serious issue because Turkey, as a NATO member, is part of the Western military alliance. Unfortunately, NATO lacks a mechanism to expel a misbehaving member, leaving voluntary resignation as the only option for Turkey to exit the alliance.

Erdogan's attacks on the West are part of his strategy to divert the Turkish public's attention away from the country's severe internal economic problems and political turmoil, aiming to bolster his waning popularity.

A recent survey by the Turkish polling company ASAL Araştırma ve Danışmanlık, revealed that 84 percent of Turks view Israel as an enemy, 75 percent regard the United States with hostility, and 55 percent see France as an adversary. Only 7 percent, 14 percent, and 25 percent, respectively, see these nations as friendly, with the remainder expressing no opinion. This anti-West sentiment has been steadily growing for several years.

Erdogan's relationship with President Biden has been particularly strained. Throughout Biden's presidency, Erdogan was denied a White House visit. In a January 17, 2020, interview with the New York Times, Biden, then a presidential candidate, labeled Erdogan an "autocrat," pledged support for his opponents, and advocated for his electoral "defeat," Erdogan's presidential advisor, Ibrahim Kalin, responded by accusing Biden of ignorance, arrogance and hypocrisy, while Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu questioned how "someone this disinformed wants to run the country [United States]."

One of Erdogan's biggest shocks came on April 24, 2021, when President Biden officially recognized the Armenian Genocide -- a dramatic shift in U.S.-Turkey relations. Erdogan responded by saying that "the U.S. President has made baseless, unjust and untrue remarks about the sad events that took place in our geography over a century ago. I hope the U.S. President will turn back from this wrong step as soon as possible." Erdogan also stated that he will have a serious conversation with Biden on this topic when they meet at a NATO summit in June 2021. However, during that meeting, Erdogan did not bring up the genocide issue.

Beyond historical disputes, Erdogan has clashed with Biden over Ukraine

and Gaza, Turkey's obstruction of Finland's and Sweden's NATO accession, and its purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense system -- leading the U.S. to block Turkey's purchase of F-35 advanced fighter jets. Erdogan also denounced U.S. support for Kurdish forces in Syria and criticized Washington's decision to host Fethullah Gulen, a dissident Turkish cleric.

Erdogan hostility toward Israel escalated dramatically. Following Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel and the subsequent Israeli military response in Gaza, Israel-Turkey relations plunged into hostility.

In 2009, during a World Economic Forum panel in Davos, Switzerland, in front of the assembled world leaders, Erdogan directly confronted Israel's President Shimon Peres, declaring: "When it comes to killing, you know very well how to kill. I know very well how you killed children on the beaches [of Gaza]."

A violent clash occurred in 2010 when Israeli forces boarded Turkish ships attempting to deliver aid to Palestinians in Gaza, killing 10 Turks and wounding dozens. In response, Turkey withdrew its ambassador from Tel Aviv and expelled Israel's ambassador from Ankara. Erdogan condemned the incident as a "bloody massacre," forcing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to issue a formal apology and pay \$20 million to the families of the victims.

Recently, Erdogan has intensified his verbal attacks on Netanyahu likening him to "Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin -- today's Nazis," describing him as the "Butcher of Gaza," and accusing him of committing genocide against the Palestinians. He further declared, he will "send Netanyahu to Allah to take care of him, make him miserable and curse him."

Israel responded forcefully. In January 2024, Israel's foreign minister tweeted: "The President of Turkey Erdogan, from a country with the Armenian Genocide in its past, now boasts of targeting Israel with unfounded claims. We remember the Armenians, the Kurds. Your history speaks for itself." Prime Minister Netanyahu added: Erdogan "denies the Armenian Holocaust, massacres Kurds in his own country and eliminates regime opponents and journalists."

Ironically, both Erdogan and Netanyahu -- who refuse to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide -- invoke it selectively when convenient to attack each other. In one of his more extreme claims, Erdogan recently alleged that Israel was planning to invade Turkey and annex its territory.

Erdogan's confrontations extend beyond the United States and Israel, spilling into Europe. In 2017, he compared today's German leaders to those of the Nazi era, accusing them of engaging in "fascist actions" reminiscent of Nazi times. He has also attacked French President Emmanuel Macron, questioning his mental health, which led France to recall its ambassador from Ankara.

Erdogan's relentless demonization of foreign leaders has fueled the perception among many Turks that the world is conspiring against them.

In the Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Deal, Russia May Try to Play Spoiler

By Zaur Shiriyev

In mid-March, Armenia and Azerbaijan announced they had finalized the text of a long-anticipated peace agreement, which, if signed, marks a potential end to more than three decades of conflict. Yet the signing remains elusive.

As a prerequisite for signing the deal, Azerbaijan is insisting on changes to Armenia's constitution to remove language it sees as implying territorial claims. It also wants a guarantee of unimpeded overland access to its Nakhchivan exclave, a landlocked territory bordered by Armenia, Iran, and Türkiye, and separated from the rest of Azerbaijan by Armenian territory. Access to Nakhchivan is closely tied to Baku's broader aim of reopening regional transport links, including with Armenia and Türkiye, its close ally, though Ankara has not publicly endorsed such a linkage. Finally, Azerbaijan has called for the formal dissolution of the long-defunct OSCE Minsk Group, once the main mediation platform between the two countries. That demand is considered relatively uncontroversial and likely to be accepted. Though not unsurmountable, these unresolved issues risk stalling the fragile momentum.

The origins of this process lie not in the aftermath of the 2020 war between Azerbaijan and Armenia—in which Baku regained most of the territories it had lost in the 1990s, and Russia introduced peacekeepers, gaining a monopoly over mediation between the two sides—but in the fallout from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Only amid Moscow's distraction and weakening regional grip did serious negotiations begin. Talks resumed based on a framework initially proposed by Baku in 2021, which Yerevan did not respond to or engage with at the time. The resurrection of talks reflected not only

new military realities but a broader recalibration of power across the South Caucasus, as Russia—preoccupied with occupying its neighbor and increasingly weakened—lost its grip on the region, prompting Armenia to reassess its strategic orientation. In this shifting landscape, Armenia accelerated efforts to diversify its foreign policy beyond Moscow, while Azerbaijan positioned itself as a strategic energy partner to Europe—though the partnership has delivered mixed results and unfolded alongside growing political tensions with Brussels.

Baku, sensing an opening after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, moved swiftly to consolidate its military and diplomatic gains. In 2023, it regained full control over Nagorno-Karabakh, a region within its internationally recognized borders, and compelled the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers a year before their mandate was due to expire. This outcome was unthinkable just a few years earlier. Baku also advanced its role in regional trade and energy corridors and deepened partnerships with Türkiye and the EU. Moscow viewed these moves warily. Rather than welcoming peace, it saw the process as a challenge to the monopoly it had reasserted after 2020, undermining the system of managed instability it had long used to exert control.

Azerbaijan's confidence is now on display. When a Russian missile mistakenly downed an Azerbaijani civilian aircraft last December, Baku's response was swift and public—unthinkable not long ago. Unlike other post-Soviet states, Azerbaijan is not a member of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization or the Eurasian Economic Union, and its economy operates largely outside Kremlin influence. That autonomy has enabled Baku to pursue a more assertive foreign policy.

Yet Russia has not exited the scene. As Baku and Yerevan inch toward normalization, Moscow may seek to play spoiler. It might argue that, absent a signed agreement, the foundation of their relations remains the defunct 2020 ceasefire and its 2021 auxiliary protocols, signed under Russian patronage. Only a new, jointly ratified peace accord can displace Moscow's claim to that role. Russia could point to the ceasefire's vague language on transit route monitoring—including the route to Nakhchivan—as a pretext to argue that connectivity can only be resolved through its involvement. Yet under the finalized peace agreement, both sides have agreed not to allow

third-party forces along their mutual border—a principle that should apply to Russia as well.

The controversy around connectivity illustrates how unresolved bilateral issues—alongside constitutional reform—continue to complicate the path to a final peace. Responsibility for resolving them rests with both sides.

First, on constitutional reform, the Armenian government has signaled its intent to draft a new constitution, though it is unlikely to do so before parliamentary elections in 2026. Trying to force the issue without a signed agreement could trigger backlash and undermine the broader peace process. Framing the reform as a bilateral confidence-building measure, rather than a unilateral Azerbaijani demand, could give Yerevan the political space it needs.

Second, the issue of connectivity to Nakhchivan remains highly politicized and burdened by mutual distrust. On their own, Baku and Yerevan may lack the flexibility or political space to resolve it. Brussels helped facilitate earlier rounds of negotiation and, despite some skepticism from Baku, still retains enough credibility to play a constructive role. Renewed EU engagement could help depoliticize the issue, introduce creative solutions, and unlock international support for long-term connectivity.

The stakes extend well beyond Armenia and Azerbaijan. A signed peace deal would reshape the regional order. Türkiye, which sees the South Caucasus as part of its strategic hinterland, has tied the reopening of its border with Armenia to progress in Baku-Yerevan talks. For Armenia, that opening offers not just symbolic value but a vital economic and geopolitical alternative to reliance on Russia.

But the window is narrowing. If no agreement is signed by year's end, the momentum built since 2022 could collapse. Armenia's domestic fragility, a distracted international environment, and the prospect of renewed Russian pressure all threaten the process. A U.S.-Russia settlement over Ukraine—especially one that sidelines Kyiv—could free Moscow to reassert itself in the South Caucasus. More than that, it could tacitly affirm Russia's claim to a sphere of influence in the region, which Azerbaijan has actively challenged since 2020. Rather than being sidelined, Russia may seize the moment to reclaim the dominance it lost after 2022.

see SPOILER, page 20



California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation Announces New Members

SACRAMENTO — The California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation announced this week the addition of two new members: Speaker of the Assembly Robert Rivas and Senate President pro Tempore Senator Mike McGuire. They are welcomed by over 50 colleagues including Chair, Assemblymember John Harabedian, board members: Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Assemblymember Jessica Caloza, Assemblymember Nick Schultz and Assemblymember David Tangipa.

“I’m proud to join the California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation. Diversity is California’s greatest strength, and the Armenian-American community has contributed so much to the cultural,

civic, and economic fabric of our state. As Speaker, I’m committed to uplifting Armenian voices and working alongside my colleagues to preserve history and ensure every Californian is represented at our Capitol,” said Rivas.

In turn, Assemblymember John Harabedian, chair of the California Legislative Armenian Caucus Foundation, declared: “It is an honor to have Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas and Senate President pro Tempore Mike McGuire join the California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation. California is home to the largest diaspora of Armenians outside of Armenia and I look forward to working with them to celebrate and preserve the rich culture and her-

Russia May Try to Play Spoiler in Peace Deal

SPOILER, from page 19

Russia’s hegemonic moment in the South Caucasus has passed, but it retains the ability to spoil. That influence, however, is not entirely self-made. It has been sustained by both sides’ past tendencies to selectively invoke agreements and mediation frameworks to suit their political needs. This diplomatic forum-shopping has kept Moscow relevant before and could do so again, especially in the absence of a final peace deal. The choice for Armenia and Azerbaijan is whether to deal with Russia while its influence is diminished or to wait until it is emboldened. Better to strike a deal now, on their own terms, than risk ceding control to a process driven by Russia’s agenda.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan now stand at a strategic crossroads—but it is Azerbaijan that holds the stronger position. It aspires to be a regional power, yet that status depends on more than battlefield gains or favorable timing. The opportunity created by Russia’s distraction will not last. Without peace, Baku risks mistaking short-term leverage for lasting influence. With an agreement, Azerbaijan could consolidate its leadership and help shape a more stable regional order less dependent on Russian oversight. Without one, its recent gains—and the region’s future—could remain uncertain.

(This analysis originally appeared on www.carnegieendowment.org on March 28.)

NAASR Planning Historic Armenia Trip in August

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies (NAASR) is organizing a special trip across Cilicia and Western Armenia August 16 through August 29, to celebrate the organization’s 70 years of pioneering Armenian Studies. This trip will be NAASR’s first to Historic Armenia since 2013. The first ever NAASR Armenian Heritage Tour took place in 1967. The immersive experience planned by Dr. Khatchig Mouradian (Columbia University) offers an opportunity to personally access the cultural memory of Armenia through the monuments, churches, and Armenian communities that have persevered against all odds.

Mouradian is the author of *The Resistance Network: The Armenian Genocide and Humanitarianism in Ottoman Syria, 1915-1918* and a member of the NAASR Board of Directors and Academic Advisory Committee. Mouradian, who has led two dozen trips to historic Armenia since 2010, said of this trip: “The people and places we will visit are not ‘hidden’ or ‘ruins.’ They are remnants resisting erasure, full of life and defiance — and by standing with them, we, too, are revitalized.”

The journey will begin on the historic Mountain of Musa Dagh, just in time for the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and the Blessing of the Grapes in Vakif, the last remaining Armenian village in Turkey. From there, travelers will venture through the storied landscapes of Adana, Aint-

ab and Kharpert, with stops in Zeytun, Malatya and Lake Hazar. Continuing from Kharpert, the path will lead to Dikranagerd and Tatvan, with visits to Mardin, Bitlis, Por, Mush and Sasun along the way. The 14-day tour culminates in Van, with an exploration of its rich cultural and historical treasures, the stunning landscapes of the ancient monasteries scattered across Lake Van’s islands, including the iconic Holy Cross Cathedral on Akhtamar, and more of the region’s centuries-old sites.

The total cost of the trip is \$3,900 per person for double occupancy and \$4,600 for single occupancy, which includes all meals, daily excursions, accommodations, administrative fees and gratuities, and in-country transportation from Vakif to Van.

Space is limited to 26 participants, and the goal is to bring together a diverse group across all ages and backgrounds. NAASR invites expressions of interest by May 5. More details, including how to confirm a spot and submit payment, will be shared shortly thereafter. Final payment will be due June 15, 2025.

Note: Travel to Vakif and from Van to your next destination is not included. Discounts may be available for recent graduates. For assistance with travel arrangements to and from Turkey, contact Sonya Bekarian at sonyabekarian@aol.com.

AGBU DISCOVER ARMENIA
YOUTH PROGRAM

Transformative Cultural and Service Experience for Armenian Youth

An immersive summer experience connecting Armenian youth from around the world with their peers and ancestral homeland, through a combination of cultural exploration, community service, and adventure, while earning 20-60 hours of community service credits.



Construction

Eco-Clean Up

Workshops and Classes

Ziplining

Who Can Join?

Armenian youth from all over the world, ages 15-18, eager to be engaged in the community service projects and immerse themselves in their heritage and culture in the homeland.

Program Dates

Summer Session 1
JUNE 19 - JULY 6

Apply by: MAY | 15 | 2025

Summer Session 2
JULY 30 - AUGUST 16

Apply by: JUN | 15 | 2025

Book Your Spot agbu.org/discover-armenia

