

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

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## Armenian Ministers Visit Border Villages Under Fire

By Ani Ohanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Two members of Armenia’s government have visited border villages in the Syunik province whose residents have reported nightly gunfire from Azerbaijani army positions for more than a month.

Minister of Territorial Administration Davit Khudatyan and Economy Minister Gevorg Papoyan traveled to the area on Tuesday and spent the night in one of those villages, Khnatsakh. Villagers told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service on Wednesday that they heard more cross-border gunfire overnight.

“They shoot for a few minutes, stop, and then shoot again,” said one Khnatsakh resident who did not want to be identified.

Vahan Zakyan, who runs the nearby village of Khoznavar, also reported gunshots fired towards his community.

When asked whether the ministers promised any solutions to the growing security concerns of the local population, Zakian said: “They didn’t tell us anything.”

The Armenian Economy Ministry said nothing about the gunshots in a video report on Papoyan’s and Khudatyan’s visit released by it. He said the ministers discussed with villagers government efforts to support local agriculture, upgrade roads and improve water supply.

Papoyan was shown saying that the people of Khnatsakh and Khoznavar remain “attached to their land” and strongly support the Armenian government’s “peace agenda.” His press office declined to say whether he also heard gunshots.

“Providing information on ceasefire violations is beyond the ministry’s authority,” it said. “Please contact the Ministry of Defense.”

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The nurses at the entrance sign to Winchester Hospital with, far left, Dr. Nancy Barsamian, furthest to the rear at the sign Winchester Chief Nursing Officer Karen Keaney, and far right, Winchester President Al Campbell. AUA Instructor Vicky Hergelian is to the left of Campbell in the rear.

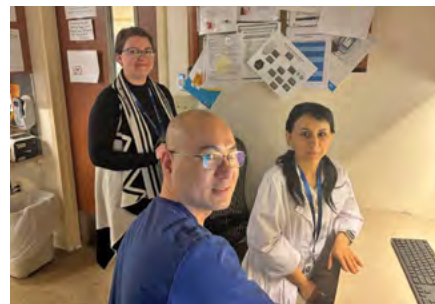
## Winchester Hospital Trains Armenian Nurses as Part of Healthcare Reform

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WINCHESTER, Mass. — Nine nursing students from Armenia, together with their instructor, spent two weeks in March at Winchester Hospital in a practicum as part of their training to become the first class of nurses to obtain a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree in Armenia.

The American University of Armenia (AUA) established the first Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program in the country in the fall of 2022, designed for nurses with diplomas in nursing or midwifery who want to advance their skills and education. Dr. Nancy Arou-



Winchester Nurse Manager Emily Callery, Howie Chen (B3 RN), and Vera Minasyan, Armenian nurse siag Barsamian, an assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School Tan Chingfen Graduate see NURSES, page 8

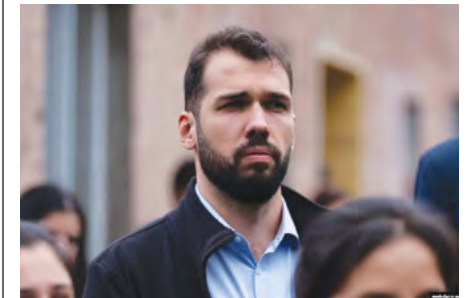
## Ruben Vardanyan’s Son Appeals to Trump

By Artak Khulian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The son of Ruben Vardanyan has called on US President Donald Trump to press Azerbaijan to release the prominent businessman and philanthropist and all other Armenian prisoners.

David Vardanyan made the appeal in an op-ed article published on Thursday, May 1, on the website of the US Fox News Channel and titled: “My dad has been in prison for more than 550 days simply for being Christian.”

“Personally, I am alive because my great-grandfather was saved by an American orphanage organized by Christian missionaries in Echmiadzin, Armenia,” he wrote. “Today, we see signs that Armenians are again not alone. Most importantly, President Trump has vowed to protect persecuted Armenian Christians in Azerbaijan and beyond.”



Ruben Vardanyan’s son David

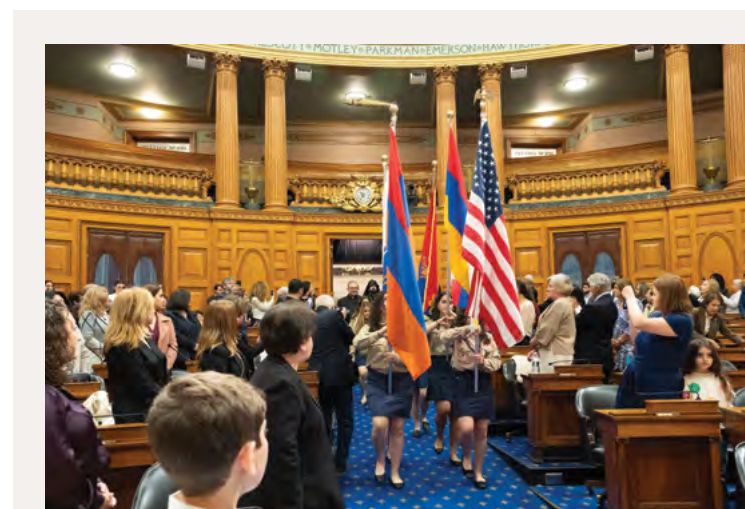
“My family and I look to the leadership of President Donald Trump to fulfill his commitment as a President of Peace. He can do this by making the regime in Baku understand that it must adhere to international rules and show its commitment to peace in the Caucasus by releasing my father and the other Armenian prisoners,” added the younger Vardanyan.

At least 23 Armenians are known to remain in Azerbaijani captivity. Among them are eight former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh, including Ruben Vardanyan, who went on trial in January together with eight other Karabakh Armenians.

Vardanyan, who held the second-highest post in Karabakh’s leadership from November 2022 to February 2023 and is being tried separately, has rejected a long list of accusations leveled against him. Those include “financing terrorism,” illegally entering Karabakh and supplying its armed forces with military equipment.

Vardanyan’s American lawyer, Jared Genser, said last month that the release of his client and other Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan is a “top priority” for the Trump administration.

In a March post on the platform known formerly as Twitter (now X), the then US see VARDANYAN, page 20



Students from St. Stephen’s Armenian Elementary School and Erebuni Armenian School sing anthems conducted by Maro Arakelian (photo David Medzorian)

## 110<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Armenian Genocide Commemorated at Mass. State House

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

BOSTON — The 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of the Armenian Genocide took place in the Chamber of the House of Representatives of the State House on Friday, April 25.

Master of ceremonies state Rep. David Muradian (of the 9<sup>th</sup> Worcester District) invited Very Rev. Hrant Tahanian, pastor of St. Stephen’s Armenian Church to offer the invocation. Muradian gave a welcome address following the pledge of allegiance and singing of the American and Armenian national anthems by the children of St. Stephen’s Armenian Elementary School and Erebuni Armenian School.

Muradian stressed the importance of both honoring the victims of the Genocide and fighting for justice and see COMMEMORATION, page 10

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## ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

## Former FSIB Chief Arrested, Accused of Embezzlement

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The former head of Armenia's Food Safety Inspection Body (FSIB), Armen Danielyan, and several FSIB employees have been arrested as part of a criminal probe into misappropriation, it was reported on May 5. Authorities have requested pre-trial detention for Danielyan.

Sources said Danielyan misappropriated fuel allocated for official trips to the regions by selling it instead of distributing it to employees as intended.

In another reported incident, Danielyan distributed bonuses to his subordinates only to reclaim the money from them, effectively pocketing funds that had been allocated from the state budget.

Earlier, the Anti-Corruption Committee confirmed that Danielyan was arrested on suspicion of large-scale embezzlement through abuse of office.

*Hraparak* reported that Danielyan's dismissal followed an internal audit that uncovered financial misconduct, particularly involving the use of fuel for official vehicles.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan dismissed Danielyan on April 30.

## MF: Armenia Second In South Caucasus Per Capita GDP

YEREVAN (News.am) — Armenia ranks second in terms of GDP per capita among the countries of the South Caucasus, according to a report of the International Monetary Fund released this month.

It is noted that GDP per capita in Armenia is \$8,860 annually. Georgia leads with \$9,570 and Azerbaijan is in third place with \$7,600.

In Russia this indicator is recorded at the level of \$14,260 while Turkey stands at \$16,710 and Iran at \$3,900.

## Ishkhanyan Testifies at Sham Azeri Trial

BAKU (Panorama.am) — A court in Baku on May 5 resumed the sham trial of Artsakh's former military and political leaders.

According to Azerbaijani media reports, prosecutors presented a video allegedly showing the "occupation of the Martuni region by Armenian forces." The footage featured Serzh Sargsyan, who led the Nagorno-Karabakh Self-Defense Committee at the time, along with Monte Melkonian and David Ishkhanyan, a former Artsakh parliament speaker.

Based on the footage, prosecutors posed a series of questions to Ishkhanyan. In response, he stated, "They had come to my battalion and familiarized themselves with the situation at the combat positions."

Several so-called "victims" were also questioned during the hearing.

The next court hearing was scheduled for May 8.

# Athletes Supported by H. Hovnanian Family Foundation Bring Home the Gold

YEREVAN — Three Muay Thai champions carry Armenia's flag to the top of the world in Bangkok, backed by a fellowship that changed everything.

Three Armenian fighters walked into the heart of Thailand's capital this March, each carrying years of training, discipline, and a history of navigating the sport with minimal external support. That changed when they were selected to represent Armenia at the 20th World Muay Thai Championship in Bangkok. They returned with three gold medals, turning heads not only with their victories in the ring, but also with the significance of what it took to get there.

Karapet "Karo" Voskanyan, Hayk Vardanyan and Roman Kalashyan are familiar names within Armenia's martial arts circles. What brought them to Bangkok, and what allowed them to compete at the sport's highest level, was a full fellowship from the H. Hovnanian Family Foundation's Armenian Fellowships program — an initiative that supports Armenians with the drive and talent to shine globally. For the first time in their careers, they weren't worrying about money; they were focused entirely on their fights.

Voskanyan has spent more than two decades in martial arts. Born and raised in Yerevan, he returned to the ring after a seven-year break and secured gold at the Worlds. "I wanted to prove something to myself and my students: that it's never too late. I came back and won the World Championship." While in Bangkok, he also earned his certification as a professional referee — another milestone



From left, Hayk Vardanyan, Roman Kalashyan and Karapet (Karo) Voskanyan

made possible by the H. Hovnanian Family Foundation. "[The Foundation] gave us what was always missing: a real chance," Voskanyan said. "We've gone to many tournaments over the years, funded out of our own pockets. We've also missed out on opportunities because we simply couldn't afford to go. This time, we had everything we needed."

As the founder and president of Patriot Fight Club, he works alongside Vardanyan to strengthen the sport's infrastructure in Armenia, where Muay Thai continues to

face funding and visibility challenges. But he says the tide is turning. "This was a productive trip all around. Armenia was even selected to host the European Open Championships later this year. That's huge." For Vardanyan, who clinched gold in the 57-kilogram category, it was a surreal experience. "To be in Thailand, where Muay Thai was born, and have Armenian athletes winning golds, that's incredible," he explained.

Like Voskanyan, he is from Yerevan and has fought in tournaments across Lebanon, Russia, China, Ukraine, and Turkey.

Kalashyan grew up in the village of Armavir, where there were few opportunities and even fewer resources for aspiring athletes. "I had a goal, and that was it. There was no equipment, no club, nothing, but I kept going." His determination took him from youth championships across Europe to over 20 professional bouts in the adult division. This year in Bangkok, he won his final match by knockout. "There are no second-rate athletes at the World Championship. Everyone there is top-level. Winning that way felt like everything came together," he said.

Roman, the founder and head trainer of Tornado Fight Promotion, aims to increase the sport's popularity in Armenia and improve the sport's youth system for younger athletes. "We've done well in individual combat sports, but Muay Thai hasn't gotten the support it deserves. That's changing, and we're going to push that change forward."



Muay Thai Champion Hayk Vardanyan

## Armenian Speaker Brands Kocharyan 'Russian Spy'

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Parliament speaker Alen Simonyan branded former President Robert Kocharyan a "Russian spy" on Monday, May 5, amid the Armenian government's apparent efforts to ease tensions with Moscow.

"I believe that Robert Kocharyan is a person with the status of a Russian spy in Armenia," Simonyan told reporters. "He is a political figure pursuing Russian interests and providing services only in that direction," he said, adding that Kocharyan's criticism of the government mirrors statements made by Russian officials.

Kocharyan, who leads Armenia's largest opposition group, scoffed at the accusation through the head of his office, Bagrat Mikoyan. The latter labeled Simonyan as an "Azerbaijani corporal spy and Turkish agent" whose public pronouncements are "disgusting for any

Armenian."

"Give him [Turkish President Tayyip] Erdogan's book so that he hugs it and calms down," Mikoyan added in a short statement.

Simonyan, who is a key political ally of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, attacked Kocharyan just over a week after the ex-president reaffirmed his intention to continue fighting for regime change in Armenia. Kocharyan referred to the next general elections due in June 2026 as the best opportunity to achieve that goal with the help of other opposition groups. Kocharyan also reiterated his strong criticism of the Pashinyan government's pro-Western foreign policy which he believes has alienated Russia and aggravated security challenges facing Armenia.

In recent weeks, there have been indications that Pashinyan now wants to mend fences with Moscow in response to global geopolitical shifts

generated by the new US administration of President Donald Trump. The Armenian premier is expected to attend on Friday a military parade in Moscow dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany.

Simonyan said on May 5 that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Speaker of Russia's Upper House of Parliament Valentina Matviyenko are due to visit Yerevan soon. Simonyan met with Russian Ambassador to Armenia Sergei Kopyrkin earlier in the day to discuss preparations for Matviyenko's visit.

Simonyan has repeatedly raised eyebrows in Moscow with his public criticism of Russia's policy on Armenia and actions in the region. In April 2024, he criticized the Russian invasion of Ukraine and accused Moscow of meddling in Armenia's internal affairs through a "campaign of threats and disinformation."



ARMENIA

# President Khachaturyan, Marseille Mayor Discuss Strengthening Armenia-France Cooperation

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — President of the Republic of Armenia Vahagn Khachaturyan received a delegation led by the Mayor of the French city of Marseille, Benoît Payan, on May 5.

According to the Presidential Office, welcoming the delegation's visit to Armenia, Khachaturyan stated: "France holds a special role and significance for the Republic of Armenia. Over the past thirty years, we have not had such relations. These relations are rooted in traditions and conditioned by the historical ties between our peoples. Marseille has a special role for us, as it warmly welcomed our compatriots who survived the Genocide."

Payan noted: "Our visit is very significant and important for us because we represent

Marseille, where Armenians have played and will certainly continue to play an important role. Marseille, as a city, carries a part of Armenianness within itself."

During the meeting, the parties discussed the further development and expansion of decentralized cooperation between France and Armenia. The importance of strengthening ties between Marseille and Yerevan was positively emphasized.

Cooperation in the field of high technologies and existing joint programs, as well as the need to adopt and implement French best practices, were also highlighted. At



Delegations of Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan and Marseille Mayor Benoît Payan meet

the meeting views were exchanged on effective cooperation between Armenia and France in the defense sector, underlining the importance of continued efforts in this

direction.

The parties also emphasized the importance of establishing stable and lasting peace in the region.

## Lawyer: Experts, Diplomats Prohibited from Entering Baku Military Court

YEREVAN (News.am) — Siranush Sahakyan, the lawyer representing the Armenian prisoners' interests at the European Court of Human Rights, said in an interview on May 6, that an international independent researcher based in Baku has been denied access to the Military Court.

"The court building has been strictly monitored. Despite Azerbaijan's repeated claims that the hearings are open, the researcher has been denied access. He was informed that he can only enter the premises with the permission of the Prosecutor General's Office or the Supreme Court. In addition, during his stay in Azerbaijan, he was subjected to harassment. This tells you everything you need to know about the 'open trials' being held in Baku," she noted. Sahakyan added that international human rights defenders and NGO representatives have submitted official requests to Azerbaijan for permission to attend the sessions and enter the country, but their applications have been denied. "Diplomats accredited in Baku were also denied access to the sessions, despite having submitted applications in accordance with official procedures," she added.

"While Azerbaijani legislation aligns with international standards — guaranteeing the right of any interested party to attend open trials — we are, in fact, witnessing a situation where these legal norms are not being upheld."

Sahakyan expressed serious concern over Azerbaijan's demand for the withdrawal of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) from Baku, warning that such a move would pose significant challenges for Armenian prisoners. "I have information that the Red Cross has been unable to visit certain Armenian prisoners sentenced to imprisonment for the past two months. It remains unclear whether this is due to technical issues or stems from a formal notification regarding the suspension of the ICRC's activities in the country. However, it appears that restrictions have already begun," Sahakyan stated.

## Stepanakert Military Cemetery Vandalized



Gravestones overturned and some defaced (Artsakh Monument Watch photos)

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Azerbaijani forces have once again desecrated the military cemetery in occupied Stepanakert, according to footage released on April 21.

The video shows deliberate defacement of gravestones, particularly carvings of fallen soldiers' faces, with eyes and mouths gouged out. Some tombstones appear broken.

The cemetery, a significant Armenian war memorial, has faced continuous threats since Azerbaijan's full occupation of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). Numerous videos show Azerbaijani visitors calling for its complete destruction, the Artsakh Monument Watch reported.

Such acts of vandalism violate international law, including the International Court of Justice's 2021 ruling requiring Azerbaijan to protect Armenian cultural heritage. The European Parliament's March 2024 resolution also condemns the destruction and desecration of Armenian historical and cultural sites.

Furthermore, under Article 8 of the Rome Statute and the 1954 Hague Convention, the targeting of cemeteries and other cultural or religious monuments also constitutes a war crime.

## Armenian Ministers Visit Border Villages Under Fire

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The gunshots, which have damaged at least two local houses, reportedly began days after Azerbaijan started accusing Armenian troops of violating the ceasefire regime on a regular basis. The accusations denied by the Armenian military followed official announcements on March 13 that the two conflicting sides have bridged their differences on the text of an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty.

The Azerbaijani leadership has made it clear that it will not sign the treaty without securing more Armenian concessions. Armenian opposition figures say the cross-border gunfire is aimed at forcing Yerevan to make those concessions. They have criticized Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government for downplaying the significance of the truce violations.

Pashinyan ruled out on April 17 the possibility of a fresh Azerbaijani military attack



A view of Khnatsakh village, June 10, 2023

on Armenia. By contrast, his foreign minister, Ararat Mirzoyan, complained about the

Azerbaijani preconditions and suggested that Baku is "not going to build peace."

## INTERNATIONAL

## Azerbaijan Ends UNHCR Operations in The Country

YERVAN (News.am) — The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) confirms that it has received official notification from the government of Azerbaijan, and it is concluding its operations in the country, UNHCR Spokesperson Matthew Saltmarsh said on May 6.

Several years ago, the Azerbaijani authorities closed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) office in the country, and then, due to Baku's position, a consensus was not reached on the continuation of the operations of the OSCE office in Yerevan, and it was also closed. And recently, the Azerbaijani authorities have started talking about closing the office of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delegation to their country.

## Lavrov to visit Armenia

YEREVAN (News.am) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will visit Armenia in the near future, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Armenia informed in response to a request from Armenian News-NEWS.am, on May 6.

Ani Badalyan, a spokesperson for the Armenian MFA, noted that the MFA will announce the exact date of Lavrov's visit at a time closer to this visit.

## Neo-Nazi Attack in Russia Leads to Death Of Armenian Citizen

MOSCOW (News.am) — On May 4, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations reported a fire in an apartment in the Leningrad Region. Later, the body of a 37-year-old citizen of Armenia was found in the apartment, and a 24-year-old woman was found in severe condition, *Fon-tanka* newspaper reported.

On that day, neo-Nazis from the "Russian Community" movement had broken into this apartment, the owner of the apartment said.

According to her, unidentified persons, who presented themselves as police officers, tried to enter the apartment. They broke down the door, "blew gas on the victim and shocked him with electric shocks." Also, these unidentified persons tried to break down the door of the room where the resident's acquaintances were hiding, after which a fire broke out.

The owner of the apartment said that when she arrived at the scene, she saw a large number of men with symbols of "Russian Community" and masks on the stairs.

Activists of this ultra-right movement told the *Moika78* newspaper that the residents of neighboring apartments heard screams, and the owner of the apartment allegedly contacted the "Russian community" to have neo-Nazis accompany her. They claim that pepper spray was used to protect the woman, and the fire was caused by the deceased citizen of Armenia.

# Congressional Hearing Showcases Azerbaijan's Outrageous Human Rights Record

By Haykaram Nahapetyan

Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent

WASHINGTON — The Congressional Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held a hearing called Human Rights in Azerbaijan since the COP 29 UN Climate Change Conference on April.

Rep. Christopher Smith (R-N.J.), the co-chairman of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of the Congress, began by presenting several pieces of evidence of growing oppression against reporters in the lead-up to and following the COP29 climate change conference in Azerbaijan. "Meydan TV reported in February a total of 357 political prisoners in Azerbaijan," noted Smith, referring to an opposition Azeri Internet source and adding that this figure represents a significant increase in recent years. One of the detainees had worked for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which is funded by the United States. "I hope the executive branch recognizes that the US government owes this man the same vigor and seriousness of effort to secure his release that we show for US citizens in similar circumstances," added the congressman.

The panel featured Artak Beglaryan, the former prime minister and ombudsman of Artsakh; Jared Genser, Rouben Vardanyan's American lawyer; Miriam Lansky, senior director for Russia and Eurasia at the National Endowment for Democracy and Andrea Parsow, executive director of Freedom Now.

"I have come before you not only as a human rights defender, but also as a survivor of a people who in 21<sup>st</sup> century have faced complete eradication of their history and their culture in their own homeland" noted Beglaryan at the start of his statement. He suggested imposing targeted sanctions like travel bans or asset freezes against those Azeri officials who were responsible for the atrocities. "Stop any kind of any military supplies to Azerbaijan and condition any assistance to Baku until measurable human rights improvement, including the release of the Armenian hostages," he added.

Beglaryan highlighted the right of the people of Artsakh to return to their lands and pointed out that after destruction of the



From left, at front row, Artak Beglaryan, Jared Genser, Miriam Lansky and Andrea Parsow

Armenian presence in Artsakh, Aliyev's regime is threatening the sovereign land of the Republic of Armenia with new atrocities and territorial occupation. He referred to investigations by Freedom House and the International Association of Genocide Scholars, which assessed the attacks against Armenians as ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Genser, citing other notable international organizations, added, "According to Freedom House's 2025 report on political freedoms, Azerbaijan received a total score of 7 out of 100, placing it between Afghanistan and Belarus."

"It has been more than 18 months since my client Ruben Vardanyan, a devout Armenian Christian and respected philanthropist and businessman, was detained by Azerbaijan. His actual crime? Simply advocating for the dignity and the rights of self-determination of the Armenian Christian people of Nagorno Karabakh, a region that Armenians call Artsakh," added the lawyer.

Per Genser, the nearly 40 outrageous fabrications by the court of Azerbaijan might result in life in prison for Vardanyan. "Ruben has been repeatedly denied his access to the Bible," underscored the attorney, whose meetings with Vardanyan have also been constrained by Baku. He reminded about President Donald Trump's

social media posting prior to the elections, that if elected he would stand with the persecuted Armenian Christians.

But dictators never release prisoners because they are asked to do so, but only when they have to, reminded the lawyer at the end of his speech. Rep. Smith echoed this when he said, "Rouben couldn't have a more effective advocate than you."

Lansky, one of the participants in the Human Rights in Azerbaijan since the COP29 hearing at the Human Rights Commission of Congress, noted that Luca Volontè, an Italian politician and member of PACE (the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe), was sentenced to four years in prison by the Court of Milan for accepting bribes from Azerbaijan. She warned of a "sophisticated set of diplomatic tactics to deflect international criticism of its kleptocratic and repressive system" employed by the authorities in Baku.

Expanding on "caviar diplomacy," Lansky explained that Baku has become sophisticated at offering gifts and favors to foreign officials to influence policy. Similar investigations into Azerbaijan's activities within PACE contributed to Baku losing its seat in the organization.

The event marked the second appearance of Andrea Parsow, director of Freedom Now, before the Human Rights Commission.

## Netanyahu 'Postpones' Baku Trip amidst Reports of Turkey Blocking Airspace

By Yousef Bardouka

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has cancelled an upcoming visit to Baku, with his office citing "developments" on Israel's border and other reports suggesting that Turkey refused to allow him through its airspace.

The Israeli prime minister was scheduled to go on an official visit to Baku between May 7-11.

According to the *Times of Israel*, Netanyahu's office cited "developments in the Gaza Strip and Syria" and a "tight political and security schedule" as reasons behind the delay, adding that the visit would be rescheduled at a "later date."

However, the *Times of Israel* has also cited Israeli news outlet *Walla* as saying that the Israeli prime minister had postponed his trip because Turkey "would not allow Netanyahu's plane to fly through its airspace" and that "alternative routes" through Greece and Bulgaria would have "doubled the length of the trip."

Turkish daily *Milliyet* cited the Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesperson Öncü

Keçeli as saying on May 4 that reports of Turkey barring Netanyahu's plane from flying over its airspace were not true.

"The allegations that the Israeli Prime Minister's plane was not given permission to overfly are absolutely untrue. There has been no request conveyed to us in this regard," Keçeli reportedly said.

Reports of Turkey barring Netanyahu's plane from entering its airspace come off the heels of several similar reports; Al Jazeera has cited Israeli media as reporting that Turkey barred an Israeli military aircraft from crossing its airspace into Azerbaijan in April.

In November, Israeli news site *Ynet* wrote that Israeli President Isaac Herzog's trip to Azerbaijan to take part in November's COP29 climate summit was also cancelled because Turkey refused to allow his plane into its airspace. Herzog's office had officially said that the trip was cancelled due to "security concerns."

After news surfaced of Netanyahu shelving his trip, Israel's security cabinet unanimously approved a plan for "conquering Gaza" and tasking private security contrac-

tors protected by the Israeli army with delivering aid to the strip. Al Jazeera has cited AFP as reporting that the plan would involve "moving the Gaza population south for their protection."

While Turkish-Israeli relations have often been strained, tensions between the two have peaked several times over the past few years, as Ankara remains critical of Israel's war on Gaza and its targeting of sites in Syria.

On Sunday evening, i24NEWS reported that Turkish and Israeli fighter jets "faced off" in Syria's airspace, with Turkish fighters sending "warning messages" to Israeli planes involved in waves of strikes against pro-Turkish militias in northern Syria.

Azerbaijan and Israel enjoy friendly relations, with Israel supplying Azerbaijan with arms, while Azerbaijan supplies Israel with oil.

According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, a US-based data visualization platform, Israel imported around 43 percent of its crude petroleum from Azerbaijan, valued at \$1.39 billion in 2023.

(This story originally appeared on the website [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on May 5.)



# Community News

## University of Michigan's 'Shared Memories' 2025: Stories, Objects, and a Community United

ANN ARBOR, MI — On April 24, 2025, the University of Michigan's Center for Armenian Studies, in partnership with the Armenian Students Cultural Association and the Multi-disciplinary Workshop for Armenian Studies, hosted the Third Annual "Shared Memories: The Armenian Experience Through Objects and Stories." This unique and heartfelt event served as a communal commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, offering space for remembrance, storytelling, and intergenerational connection.

Held at Weiser Hall in the heart of Ann Arbor, the gathering brought together a diverse crowd.

In contrast to traditional lectures or vigils, the format of this event embraced informality and openness. Attendees were invited to bring an object and share the story behind it — family photographs, jewelry, backgammon tables, books, paint-



Armenian Studies Program Director Dr. Gottfried Hagen

ings, coins, and more. Each item became a portal into a lived Armenian experience, whether rooted in historical memory, diasporic identity or Michigan's own Armenian-American narrative.

One of the most memorable aspects of the event was the array of ethnically diverse Armenian foods, generously catered by local businesses.

Though April 24 marks the commemoration of a tragic past, this year's event was also a moment of connection and healing. The day coincided with Holocaust Remembrance Day, further emphasizing the importance of remembrance, testimony, and solidarity in the face of historical trauma.

"Shared Memories" has quickly become an annual tradition at the University of Michigan, one that goes beyond solemn reflection to offer an intimate, participatory, and communal space for honoring Armenian heritage. The Center for Armenian Studies extends its gratitude to all who contributed stories, objects, and presence, helping to transform a day of mourning into one of meaning, memory, and togetherness.



The reconfigured abstract monument at the Armenian Heritage Park (Ken Martin Photo)

## Karnig Kerkonian Speaks at Heritage Park Commemoration

By Ken Martin  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BOSTON — On April 27, the Armenian Heritage Park, on the Rose Kennedy Greenway, was the site of an outdoor commemoration of the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

The event, hosted by Michael Demirchian, featured as keynote speaker international attorney Karnig Kerkonian.

Kerkonian spoke about the current litany of cases against Azerbaijan in world courts and centers of justice, all valid cases of human rights abuses by the military and leadership under the rule of the dictator of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev. Azerbaijan holds an unknown number of Armenian prisoners of war as well as the leadership of the Artsakh Republic, ethnically cleansed by Azerbaijan in September 2023.

Kerkonian emphasized also that the current Armenian government's acts of appeasement to Azerbaijan since the loss of the 44-Day War in 2020, under the leadership of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, is not the way to negotiate with a dictator like Aliyev. He said that unless the dictator has something to fear then more war should be expected. Azerbaijan already illegally has troops on Armenia's territory strategically placed near important Armenian national assets that could be snatched away instantly when war begins. Kerkonian said he believes that only prosecuting the cases against the Azerbaijani dictatorial regime and strengthening Armenian military defenses will war be prevented. He also expressed his disagreement with Armenia dropping all legal cases against Azerbaijan.

Newly appointed chairman of the Armenian National Committee of America George Aghjayan, and former co-chair of the Armenian Assembly of America Anthony Barsamian also spoke about the work being done by their organizations toward justice for the Armenian people and for the Armenian residents of Artsakh.

Armenian-Canadian singer-songwriter Zara, a senior at Berklee College of Music, performed several songs.

Armenian-American composer and multi-instrumentalist Samuel Sjostedt performed *Kroonk*, by Komitas, on oud.

Alla Petrosyan and Saro Iskenderian performed also.

Little Anahid Melkonian, recited Paruyr Sevag's poem, "We are Few, but We are Armenians."

A color guard procession was led by the Homenetmen scouts with the gathered clergy and a prayer led by Very Rev. Hrant Tahanian of St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church.



Karnig Kerkonian (Ken Martin Photo)

## Swiss Eyewitnesses Of the Armenian Genocide Remembered by TCA Metro Los Angeles Chapter

BURBANK, Calif. — On Sunday, April 27, the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter organized a *kinetson* (book dedication) at the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church in Burbank, CA for Dr. Dora Sakayan's *Death Marches Past the Front Door: Clara and Fritz Sigrist-Hilty, Swiss Eyewitnesses to the Armenian Dante-Inferno in Turkey (1915-1918)*.

In his welcoming remarks, master of ceremonies and TCA Metro LA Chapter board member, Mihran Toumajan, praised the National Council of Switzerland, which represents the people of Switzerland, for recognizing the Armenian Genocide on



The Honorable Franco Zimmerli, Honorary Consul of the Consulate of Switzerland in Los Angeles

December 16, 2003. Toumajan remembered Swiss eyewitnesses, diplomats, physicians and missionaries by name, who helped save the lives of orphaned Armenian children, in particular. He also highlighted the names of organizations, such as the Conference of Swiss Armenian Aid, the Cantonal Aid Committee for Armenia, and the Swiss Aid 1915 for Armenia, which mobilized the people of Switzerland to raise significant relief funds — amounting to hundreds of thousands of Swiss francs — not only during the genocide, but also, in the case of the Conference of Swiss Armenian Aid, during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895-96 and the Cilician Massacres of 1909.

Sakayan's book was presented by co-editor and keynote speaker Prof. Barlow Der Mugerdechian of Fresno State University. Der Mugerdechian noted that two Swiss eyewitnesses, civil engineer Fritz Sigrist, who worked on the Berlin to Baghdad Railway, and his wife, Clara Hilty, a nurse, chronicled the unfolding of the Armenian Genocide. The mass deportations literally passed by their front door in Cilicia for three years. Fritz Sigrist unsuccessfully appealed to German and Turkish authorities in an attempt to save the lives of Armenians, some of whom worked on the construction of the railway. Der Mugerdechian credited the couple for saving the life of Haigazun Aramian, the railway's warehouse manager.

see EYEWITNESSES, page 12





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Programs at Yale University Commemorate Genocide

NEW HAVEN, Conn. — Several events marking the Armenian Genocide took place at Yale University on April 24 and 25.

The first was a candlelight vigil held on April 24 at the Women's Table outside the iconic Yale Sterling Memorial Library under the auspices of the Yale Armenian Network (YAN)

Father Untzag Nalbandian of the Armenian Church of the Holy Ascension in Trumbull conducted a prayer service. Assisting in the service were Kit Kaolian, Ara Mnatsakanian and Anie Mnatsakanian

The Yale Armenian Network is an undergraduate student association that fosters and promotes Armenian culture and heritage to the Yale community. Consisting of

Its officers are: Victoria Mnatsakanyan, co-president and treasurer, Derek Esrailian, co-president and Dr. Sharon Chekijian, staff advisor.

Mnatsakanyan said of the vigil: "The annual Armenian Genocide Candlelight Vigil at Yale is one of our most heartfelt events of the year. It serves as both a solemn remembrance of the profound tragedies our people have endured — and continue to face — and a meaningful opportunity for Armenians across Connecticut to come together in community. We are especially grateful to Father Untzag Nalbandian of the Armenian Church of the Holy Ascension for leading the service each year with such care and compassion. We welcome all who are able to join us, regardless of their personal connection to Armenia."

Harry Mazadoorian, a longtime member of the Connecticut Genocide Commemoration Committee and a graduate of Yale College and Yale Law school stated that "he applauded the efforts of the Yale Armenian Network for organizing the moving vigil, keeping the memory of the Armenian Genocide brightly burning and focusing on Armenian issues at Yale and beyond. These young people are a credit to their heritage"

The second event at Yale was a presentation on April 25 by Artak Beglaryan, president of the Union for the Protection of Interests and Rights of the Artsakh People, sponsored by the Yale Program on Genocide Studies.

Beglaryan is the Former State Minister and Former Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh).



From left, Dr. Sharon Chekijian, Artak Beglaryan and Dr. Armen Marsoobian at Yale

He also was the keynote speaker at the Connecticut Genocide Committee annual Commemoration at the State Capitol on April 26.

David Simon, Director of the Yale Genocide Studies Program welcomed the attendees.

Founded in January 1998, the Genocide Studies Program at Yale University's MacMillan Center conducts research, seminars and conferences on comparative, interdisciplinary, and policy issues relating to the phenomenon of genocide.

Prof. Armen Marsoobian of Southern Connecticut State University introduced Beglaryan as a heroic figure. Marsoobian said: "Artak Beglaryan has been a tireless advocate for the Armenians of Artsakh for decades. As minister in the last Republic of Artsakh government he survived the 2023 genocidal blockade by the Azerbaijani regime, while most of his fellow ministers are now held hostage in Baku. He continues his advocacy work for his people de-

spite his exile from his homeland."

The third event was a panel presentation on April 25 together with a light supper. The discussion centered on "The right of Return and the Artsakh Armenians." Beglaryan and Karnig Kerkonian, international lawyer, participated with Lucine Abovyan, Yale World Fellow, serving as moderator. The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) and the YAN joined the MacMillan Center's Genocide Studies Program and its European Studies Council and co-sponsored the events.

Marc Mamigonian, director of academic affairs at NAASR, said of the programs: "We're honored to be part of these two important programs, both featuring Artak Beglaryan, who has dedicated his life to human rights and justice for the Armenians of Artsakh in particular. The voices of advocates like Beglaryan and Karnig Kerkonian need to be heard, and we're grateful to Yale for providing these forums."



Some of the participants and organizers outside Yale Law School

members across Yale College, the graduate schools and affiliate institutions, YAN is an organization that seeks to support and amplify the underrepresented Armenian culture at Yale.

## Bergen County Marks Genocide Anniversary with Remembrance Ceremony

HACKENSACK, N.J. — Bergen County Executive Jim Tedesco and the Board of Commissioners joined local Armenian American leaders, elected officials, and members of the public on Monday, April



County Executive Jim Tedesco laying a rose

28, 2025, to commemorate the 110th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide during a solemn remembrance ceremony held at One Bergen County Plaza.

The program, organized in partnership

with the Knights and Daughters of Vartan, featured remarks from County Executive Tedesco, County Commissioner Dr. Joan M. Voss, Armenian National Committee of America Eastern Region Legislative Affairs Director Nairi Diratsoouian, and community leaders including Hunan Arshakian, Grand Commander of the Knights of Vartan, and Nancy Berberian Thompson, Grand Matron of the Daughters of Vartan.

"These were not casualties of war, but innocent civilians killed simply for who they were," said County Executive Tedesco. "It's not enough to remember — we must speak the truth. This was a genocide. Failing to call it that doesn't just deny the past; it allows the seeds of hatred to take root again. Bergen County will always stand for truth, for justice, and for the dignity of every community."

The event began with a presentation of colors by the Bergen County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard and included performances by vocalist Seta Bairamian of St.



County Executive Tedesco and county officials presenting proclamations to Hunan Arshakian, Grand Commander, Knights of Vartan and Nancy Berberian Thompson, Grand Matron, Daughters of Vartan

Leon Armenian Church in Fair Lawn. Attendees participated in a solemn laying of flowers and flag-raising ceremony, with a Service of Prayer led by Armenian clergy.

"Commemorating the Armenian Genocide is not only about honoring those we lost, but also about standing up for truth, justice, and human dignity," said County Commissioner Dr. Joan M. Voss. "Bergen

County is proud to stand with our Armenian American neighbors to ensure that the legacy of this tragedy is never denied or forgotten."

County Executive Tedesco also presented an official proclamation recognizing the Armenian Genocide and reaffirming Bergen County's commitment to preserving historical truth.



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Winchester Hospital Trains Armenian Nurses as Part of Healthcare Reform

NURSES, from page 1

School of Nursing, explained that AUA soon realized that as part of their training, its students needed to be able to apply what they were learning in a suitable workplace setting or a healthcare system, but that setting does not exist in Armenia currently.

The inaugural class of ten nursing students was set to go to Beirut in fall 2024 for this purpose, but the Israeli invasion of the country and the broader war in the region had escalated while their host institution, the American University of Beirut (AUB) Medical Center, had to deal with the injured from across the country. Consequently, for safety and other considerations, a different location was necessary, Barsamian said. As the students were to graduate this academic year (2026), there was not much time left to make arrangements.

Barsamian is an adjunct professor at AUA, so she was teaching a course there and she also serves as a mentor/preceptor to a couple of the students working on their capstone projects. The university told her of the situation, and she offered to find a suitable location. Back in Boston, Winchester Hospital, part of the Beth Israel Lahey Health healthcare system, hosted the Armenian American Medical Association (AAMA) and Armenia healthcare providers of Boston for a networking event in early September 2024 to explore the Armenian healthcare field and possibilities for collaboration.

When Karen Keaney, Chief Nursing Officer and Vice President of Patient Care Services at Winchester Hospital, found out that Winchester President Al Campbell was going to this event, Keaney said that she told Campbell she wanted to go too because she was Armenian. There the two spoke with a number of people, including Barsamian, about clinical rotations for nursing students from Armenia.

Soon, a series of weekly virtual meetings began in October of a group including Keaney, Winchester Executive Director of Human Resources Beth Taylor, Winchester Clinical Educator Josephine Keane, Barsamian, AUA lec-



The nurses from Armenia with their instructor and Dr. Nancy Barsamian, sixth from left in center

that those nursing students actually can do clinical care under supervision and direction. There are also practicum students from American nursing schools who are assigned preceptors here. The main difference is that the Armenian students are not allowed to practice in the US.

Keaney and Keane worked on what they wanted the visiting students to see, both leadership and observation of clinical practice. Keaney said, "We wanted them to see the health care system, not just the hospital." So the students were invited to observe leaders in the hospital's meetings at work, including patient safety meetings and some nurse practice council meetings.

Within the hospital, the Armenian students went for observation to the operating room, labor delivery, the mother baby unit, the pediatric unit, the critical care unit and medical surgical floors. Many of them were also sent to some of Winchester's off-site facilities. Winchester's system includes, in addition to the hospital itself, an ambulatory care facility, a breast care center, a wound care center and an urgent care center, Keaney said.

At first, Keaney said they tried to send the students off-site two by two, because they weren't sure how comfortable they would be alone, but as time went on, some went off alone too. Keaney said that they found out about the specialties of the students from their instructors ahead of time so tried to both make sure they learned about that in the US, as well as get exposed to things they didn't know about.

Barsamian arranged a visit to the Hebrew Rehabilitation Center in Roslindale to see what she called the gold standard in geriatric care and also because there were Russian-speaking nurses and patients there who could easily communicate with the visiting Armenians.

They also went to Boston Medical Center, the main teaching affiliate of the Boston University Chobanian and Avedisian School of Medicine, where Barsamian said nurse practitioner and research coordinator Arlene Dermovsesian gave them a tour of the Alan D. Solomont and Susan Lewis Solomont Clinical Simulation and Nursing Education Center. This is where the nurses and doctors train at that hospital.

Keaney declared at the end of the practicum, "I think what was eye-opening for them was the degree to which we empower nurses here. Nurses have a voice and we listen to them, especially the nurses at the bedside – what's going

well, what's not going well, what do we need to improve on. I think that is not their norm in their country. That's what they tell me. I hope that they are inspired by that and I hope they are able to go back to their country and make some changes in the future because our model really supports the best patient care possible."

## Nurses Give Their Impressions

In a round-table discussion with the *Mirror-Spectator* on their last day at Winchester Hospital, the nurses confirmed Keaney's words, and all only had positive things to say about their experiences during their practicum. They pointed to the advanced equipment which made work much easier, whereas there is a lack of sufficient equipment in Armenia. Blood samples, for example, could be quickly analyzed unlike in Armenia.



Ani Mikayelyan, Winchester Hospital Chief Nursing Officer Karen Keaney, Tatevik Givargizyan, Ann Tilley (ICU Nurse Manager), Anahit Arakelyan, Liana Nahapetyan

Compared to Armenia, there are a large number of workers. In Armenia, a nurse has to do all kinds of tasks, many of which are unconnected to nursing, such as compounding medicines, and has insufficient time to do patient assessments. The division of the emergency room into children's and adult's sections in Winchester made care easier, said a nurse from the Muratsan Emergency Clinic. Drug boxes were opened here with id cards, and specified for each patient, which leaves less opportunities for nurses to make mistakes. Patients had identification bands, unlike in

*continued on next page*



Five of the Armenian nurses at their Winchester welcome luncheon, with, standing from left, Dr. Shant Parseghian and Dr. Nancy Barsamian of AAMA, Dean Carucci, Community Divisional President for Beth Israel Lahey Health, and Winchester President Al Campbell and Chief Nursing Officer Karen Keaney

turer Vicky Hergelian, and Nour Alayan, associate professor and the inaugural chair of the Nursing Program at the Turpanjian College of Health Sciences at AUA.

AAMA was fully supportive of the initiative, Barsamian said. Funding for the program was obtained through the former, the Pan Armenian Council of New England, AUA, as well as donors Carolyn Mugar and Sandra Shahinian, aside from some modest financial support from Winchester Hospital itself.

Barsamian later reflected about Keaney's key role, declaring: "I don't think we would have been able to get this expedited in any other place had it not been for her." Barsamian also noted that her colleague Dr. Pat White, an associate professor at University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School, guided and supported her throughout the entire process.

Keaney said that during her years at Winchester, they had never done an international program, and there were complications about getting the students the necessary visas, including the necessary contracts, liability insurance, vaccinations, housing.

Moreover, the practicum had to be different from programs for American nursing students. Keaney explained





## COMMUNITY NEWS

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Armenia, and an electronic health record system was used which, among other things, prevents errors due to handwriting.

The teamwork and cooperation between doctors and nurses were specifically noted by many of the nurses as particularly praiseworthy, as was the close communication with patients. Ani, from the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of St. Gregory the Illuminator Hospital in Yerevan, said that hierarchy was not very emphasized in Boston, so that you would not necessarily see who is the doctor and who is the nurse at first glance, and people were very friendly with each other.

Simple things taken for granted in the US, like hand hygiene for nurses, which is important in order not to transmit infections to others, were appreciated.

Natalie, from the ICU of the Nork-Marash Medical Center in Yerevan, observed that unlike in Armenia, nurses in the US have a lot of authority to work on their own, which makes patients look at nurses with more trust. In addition, physicians understand that giving authority to nurses makes their work easier so it will improve patient outcomes. When she returns to Armenia, she hopes this approach can be implemented there.

Lilit from the Yeolyan Hematology and Oncology Cen-



Ann Tilley, ICU Nurse Manager, with students Liana Nahapetyan, Ani Mikayelyan, Anahit Arakelyan

ter in Yerevan said that only doctors in Armenia, not nurses, are allowed to do patient assessments, unlike in the US. She hoped that in the future it would be possible for nurses to do it in Armenia too. She also noticed that QR codes are used to provide information to nurses about each patient.

Liana, an ICU nurse from St. Gregory the Illuminator Hospital in Yerevan, said she liked the positive atmosphere and smiles on the nurses' faces. She said, "It works and I will also change myself. I smile but not that much. I will smile more." The leadership style at Winchester led her to think of how she could be a leader in the future in Armenia, she said.

One of the visitors said that in Armenia nurses would have to do sometimes two or three 24-hour shifts within a



The nurses meet on their last night, March 21, at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research with Armenian American Medical Association sponsors of the trip and other Armenian colleagues training in the Boston area as physicians

week, which takes a punishing toll on the body. In the US, the maximum a shift can last is 12 or sometimes 16 hours. Therefore, she said that their group will try to work to lower the shifts in Armenia.

Datev, from the Pediatric Department at Wigmore Women's and Children's Hospital in Yerevan, said that though they had studied how things work in the US and Europe,



The Armenian nurses with certificates they were given after the completion of their practicum, together with Winchester staff, Nancy Barsamian and Vicky Hergelian

to come here and see for oneself is different. She said that though unfortunately many things don't exist in Armenia she was sure that everyone will go back to Armenia full of new knowledge and experience that they will use. She said, "I am very thankful and grateful to have this chance to come to Winchester Hospital and see and meet such welcoming people."

#### Possible Changes in Armenia

AUA instructor Vicky Hergelian, who accompanied the nurses' group to the US, said that not only did everyone welcome the group in a nice way, as well as treat one other positively, but the Armenian visitors got to see how the role of nurses is recognized in the US. This was all previously only theoretical for the students. She thought that since the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia has accepted the granting of BSN degrees for the first time, it will also help somehow to bring about changes in the Armenian healthcare system.

Nurses there are neither well paid nor respected, therefore by giving them more education and showing they can be leaders who can make decisions themselves, the field will be seen as a more attractive profession, she said.

Barsamian said that changes are happening in Armenia, and the government is supportive of upgrading the education and role of nurses there. According to a recent study, she said there is almost a 47-percent decline in the number of nurses getting educated. Universal health care is coming to Armenia in 2027 according to the Ministry of Health, so it will be even more critical that the hospitals will have a high quality of care. People will then be able to choose where they get their health care, she said.

The level of care will improve, Barsamian said, when nurses do more work involving higher-level, critical thinking, patient-centered actions, becoming professionals with developed skill sets and improved communication and empathy skills. Nurses might still be doing "lower-level" basic tasks, she said, but the development of a position like a certified medical assistant or nursing assistant in Armenia could relieve them to do more. As the latter position does not exist right now, the person cleaning a hospital room also changes bedpans and other things that nurse aides do, but without the training of the nursing assistant.

Fortunately, Barsamian said, the AUA program is expanding. There are 10 more in the junior class and 20 more in the sophomore class coming up and there are others just studying English at the moment to prepare for entering the program. She also said she had heard that another hospital in Armenia is considering starting a college of nursing to provide baccalaureate degrees too after seeing what is pos-



Nancy Barsamian, left, and Karen Keaney

sible at the AUA program.

Barsamian was excited about the women who had come to Winchester: "These nurses are up against all odds. The pay is not great, the work is really difficult, but each of these nurses are these unique and really compassionate women who know that what they are doing is making a difference. They are really and truly pioneers and leaders in this field. I don't think that they themselves even realized how important it was until they came here, and saw the impact and the professionalism — where nurses can be, how well respected they can be, what a difference they can make."

Keaney said, "What we didn't expect was what a great experience it has been for all of us. It has been wonderful... I would say the best part of this program — there are so many great parts to it — is that they're lovely. You never know what you are going to get with a group of students. You never know if you are going to get people who just want to check the boxes and say they have completed their course requirements. This was a group very interested in everything — learning, the clinical piece, the administrative piece, the social dynamic."

She said, "They are good people. I told them that they make me proud of my heritage."

Keaney said that they knew right out of the gate that one of the things most of them are looking for is mentorship, and now, she said, "We are all willing to keep in touch with them. We encouraged our team to keep in touch. Mentorship can be in any form."

When asked whether Winchester Hospital might host another such group from Armenia, Keaney did not hesitate to state: "If there was a need we would be willing to support that need. It's been that great of an experience for all of us."

## COMMUNITY NEWS

# 110<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Armenian Genocide

COMMEMORATION, from page 1

recognition. He also expressed regrets that Mary Vartanian, a Genocide survivor turning 111 this August, was feeling under the weather and unable to be present, but hoped that she would join the State House commemoration the next year.

Rep. Dave Rogers (24<sup>th</sup> Middlesex County District) recognized the guests, elected officials and human rights groups present, including Rep. Joe McGonagle, Rep. Priscila Sousa, Rep. Mike Soder, former Rep. Rachel Kaprielian, former representative and current Middlesex County Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian, former Rep. James Cantwell, former Governor's Councilor Marilyn Devaney, Didier Moise, the president of Belmont against Racism and Cindy Rowe, the president and CEO of the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action.



Rep. David Muradian (photo David Medzorian)

Rep. Steven Owens (29<sup>th</sup> Middlesex District), wearing a tie with the colors of the Armenian flag, read the proclamation of Gov. Maura Healey of Massachusetts designating April 24, 2025, as Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day.

State Sen. Will Brownsberger, the president pro tempore of the Senate, presented joint resolutions commemorating the achievements of the Armenian-American community of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Armenian Heritage Foundation, the Friends of Armenian Heritage Park, and Kaprielian and Koutoujian.

## Keverian Scholarship and Sen. Markey's Message

Owens invited George Keverian to present the Honorable Speaker George Keverian Public Service Scholarships on behalf of the Keverian family. Keverian related how his great-grandfather's family managed to survive the Arme-



Keverian Scholarship recipients Peter C. Koutoujian, far left, and Trévon "Tré" Carrington shake hands with Rep. Steve Owens and to his right, Rep. David Muradian, as George Keverian, far right, observes (photo Jirair Hovsepien)



George Keverian (photo David Medzorian)



Armenian clergy praying at the State House (photo Jirair Hovsepien)

nian Genocide thanks to the assistance of a close Turkish farmer friend, who smuggled them from Aintab to Aleppo. When guards discovered what this farmer had done on his return home, they shot him in the head. The surviving Keverians owed their lives to the selfless act of a friend.

Keverian said that today the family could be considered refugees or even illegal immigrants. When we read about so-called illegal immigrants being rounded up and sent away, we should remember, he stressed, that many of us survived because people helped.

Keverian then declared that his uncle and namesake, a former Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives (1985-1991) also had that kind of unshakeable moral courage. He gave the Republican caucus a voice in the legislative process, as he believed that democracy only works when everyone is heard and people come before politics. Keverian rhetorically asked the audience, "Is this imaginable today in our country?"

He quietly stepped up to help people in trouble, without any desire for publicity or acclaim. Keverian gave two examples. Once his uncle saw a man in Logan Airport who had missed the last bus home to New Hampshire and he went several hours out of his way to drive him home. Another time, he saw a woman and her two young children sitting on the curb outside his favorite Dunkin' Donuts on Revere Beach Parkway who were cold and homeless. He didn't take them to a shelter. He brought them to his own home, where they lived with him for months until he could find housing for them.

Keverian then said that in the spirit of that farmer who gave his life to save

his friend's children, he would present two \$5,000 scholarships. The first went to Peter Cerda Koutoujian, a political science major at Bridgewater State University who is a 2025 Dean's List honoree, a 2024 AmeriCorps member and an intern with the Armenian Assembly Terjenian-Thomas program in Washington. The second went to Trévon "Tré" Carrington, a standout student at Everett High School, the city the former speaker loved, with a 4.0 GPA. Carrington gives back to his community through food pantries, clothing drives, city events and church outreach, including Zion's Community-in-Unity Block Party and the annual Thanksgiving dinner that serves over 900 people.

Both recipients thanked the Keverian family for the scholarships.

Cantwell, who now serves as Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey's state director, read a message from the scheduled keynote speaker Markey, who could not participate in person because he had left for the funeral of Pope Francis. Markey after speaking about the Genocide, called the unprovoked Azerbaijani attacks on Karabakh (Artsakh) and the displacement of its Armenian population a continuation of the very genocide being remembered in the State House.

Markey wrote that he went to COP29 (the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) last year in Baku and called for the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian political prisoners and the safe return of all ethnic Armenian civilians (to their homes). Markey in his statement reaffirmed Artsakh's right of self-determination under international protection and called for sanctions on those in Azerbaijan responsible for human rights abuses and war crimes

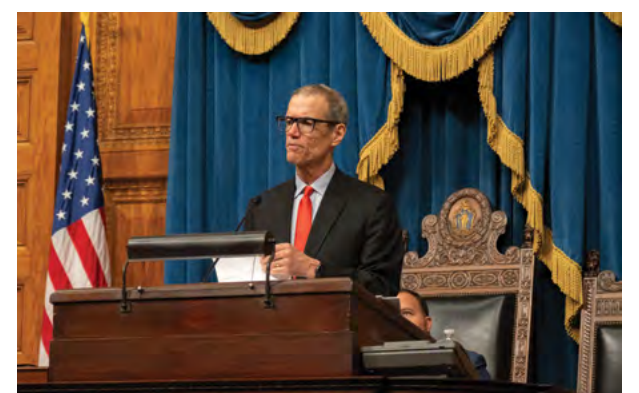
## Djerejian Calls for Strengthening Culture, Identity and Armenian Nation

Brownsberger introduced keynote speaker Amb. Edward P. Djerejian, who has served in the Foreign Service of eight US administrations, from John F. Kennedy to William J. Clinton. Among his many positions, he was

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Near Eastern and South  
*continued on next page*



Amb. Edward Djerejian (photo Ken Martin)



Sen. Will Brownsberger (photo David Medzorian)



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Commemorated at the Mass. State House

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Asian Affairs (1986-1988). Djerejian served both President Reagan and President Bush as US Ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic (1988-1991). He then served under President Bush and President Clinton as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs (1991-1993). He was appointed by President Clinton as United States Ambassador to Israel (1993-1994).

Following his almost 30-year tenure as founding director of Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy (1994 to 2022), Djerejian joined Harvard Kennedy School's Middle East Initiative as a residential Senior Fellow. He is also the author of several books, including *Danger and Opportunity: An American Ambassador's Journey through the Middle East* (2009).

Following his almost 30-year tenure as founding director of Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy (1994 to 2022), Djerejian joined Harvard Kennedy School's Middle East Initiative as a residential Senior Fellow.

Djerejian said that his career in foreign service was directly connected to the Armenian Genocide. He and his brother were born in New York as the children of genocide survivors. In his high school years, he said that he realized that the survival of his family was a gift of life and he wished to repay the United States, which gave safe haven to his parents and so many other Armenians, by serving it abroad and representing all the principles of democracy and human rights that the US is so fond of.

He said in his opinion the best way to commemorate the Armenian Genocide is to move from victimhood to action. By that, he said, he meant how the Armenian survivors can advance and strengthen the Armenian identity, culture and religion, and the Armenian nation as Ameri-



From left, Rep. Steve Owens, Rep. David Medzorian, and Sen. Will Brownsberger during the US Pledge of Allegiance (photo David Medzorian)

diplomacy, he declared, and not coercion and aggression. Diaspora and Armenia must work together to address the plight of the refugees from Artsakh, Djerejian said, and liberate the political prisoners who are unjustly incarcerated in Baku.

Djerejian urged a sober, self-critical approach to avoid geopolitical and moral existential crises, stating: "Armenians must avoid revenge-driven maximalist demands and support regional peace, stability and cooperation. We need to conduct diplomacy that is underpinned by a coherent strategy and informed by a nuanced understanding of the geopolitical landscape. This is indispensable. The South Caucasus today are in a very vulnerable position." In other words, he deemed effective statecraft, leadership, governance and post-conflict stabilization critical for Armenia's future.

"And when we make our case in Washington as Armenian Americans," Djerejian said, "the first words out of our mouths — be it a Democratic or a Republican administration — are not underscoring the ills we are undergoing, but stating upfront, we believe it is in the national security interests of the United States for this administration to support Armenia," after which Armenians must underscore what those national interests are that bring the United States and Armenia together in common goals.

Musical Program and Closing  
Rogers introduced Dr. Marina Margarian, pianist, composer and educator, who is the founder

and director of the Do Re Mi School of Music and the organist and music director at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church. She performed her composition *Artsakh* as well as a short medley of music by Komitas.

Muradian gave closing remarks, recognizing the presence of leaders of the Knights and Daughters of Vartan Avak Sbarabed Hunan Arshakian and Avak Dirouhie Nancy Berberian Thompson. He called for action to stand up against hatred and injustice, inspired by the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. This was followed by an order of intercessory prayer performed by the Armenian clergy present, and an informal reception at the Great Hall of Flags with food from Arsenal Catering.



Proud father Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian photographs his son, Peter C. Koutoujian, receiving the Keverian Scholarship (photo Ken Martin)

cans of Armenian origin. Armenians in the diaspora, he continued, have the responsibility and obligation to formulate a vision and a strategic approach that supports an Armenia living in peace and security with all its neighbors.

Diaspora policy must align with the interests of the Republic of Armenia as, he declared, the latter remains the best hope for preserving Armenian language, culture and statehood. Armenian sovereignty and security can be strengthened with a democratic Armenia governed by rule of law, Djerejian said, while diasporan Armenians should join to help it.

In this collaboration, transparency and respect of mutual interests are essential. Djerejian specified that "namely, the Armenian government does not govern the diaspora, and the diaspora does not govern the Armenian government, but our goals are the same."

In foreign policy, Djerejian expounded that Armenia's potential must be leveraged to become a cultural economic and technological hub in the South Caucasus, a bridge between different areas. He stressed that Armenia must prioritize normalization of relations with its neighbors to minimize the threat to its existence, reduce dependence on foreign powers and secure stable borders. A just and durable peace agreement with Azerbaijan, and normalizing relations with Turkey, are critical to Armenia's survival. Territorial and other disputes must be resolved through



Dr. Marina Margarian (photo David Medzorian)



Students from St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School and Erebuni Armenian School sing anthems conducted by Maro Arakelian (photo Jirair Hovsepian)



## COMMUNITY NEWS

## Connecticut Armenians Hold Genocide Commemoration



From left, Atty Harry Mazadoorian, State Rep. James B. Sanchez, keynote speaker Artak Beglaryan, Prof. Armen Marsoobian

HARTFORD—The Connecticut Commemoration of the 110th anniversary of the beginning of the Armenian Genocide took place in the magnificent and historic Hall of the House of Representatives at the Connecticut State Capitol in Hartford on April 26, 2025.

John C. Geragosian, Connecticut State Auditor, served as master of ceremonies.

Dian Erikian and Susan Shabazian offered stirring renditions of the American and Armenian national anthems and Father Haroutiun Saboujian of the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection gave the invocation.

The keynote speaker was Artak Beglaryan, president of the NGO Union for Protection of the Interests and Rights of the Artsakh People. He was introduced by Prof. Armen Marsoobian who referred to Beglaryan's efforts as heroic.

Beglaryan's talk focused on the recent history of Artsakh (Karabakh) and concluded with seven specific steps which

all could take moving forward to a just resolution and restoration of the rights of those seeking return to their homeland. State Rep. James B. Sanchez and Attorney Harry Mazadoorian congratulated the speaker and made presentations, including a Citation by the General Assembly and a proclamation by Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont.

Haig, Armen and Raffi Arakelian provided stirring captivating music to those in attendance.

Attorney Gregory Norsigian and Committee Treasurer Diana Dagavarian Colpitts led the assemblage in a moment of silence and candle lighting.

The program ended with the Martyrs' Service, which was created in 2015 on the occasion of the centennial of the Genocide and the canonization of the Martyrs. Rev. Untzag Nalbandian, Rev. Voski Galstyan and Rev Haroutiun Sabounjian led the service.

A reception followed.

## Swiss Eyewitnesses of the Armenian Genocide Remembered by TCA Los Angeles Chapter

EYEWITNESSES, from page 5

With Turkish gendarmes searching for Aramian's whereabouts, Aramian was able to escape certain death by finding refuge in the Sigrist-Hilty's home, and specifically under Clara's bed during the latter's pregnancy. In that era, it was anathema for Turkish men to enter the bedroom of a pregnant woman.

Der Mugrdechian stated that Clara recorded the atrocities, first in her journal, and later as a memoir or special eyewitness

account. On his part, Fritz wrote two stories and a letter about the atrocities. Der Mugrdechian commended the author, Sakayan, for meticulously deciphering Swiss archival documents. He stressed the importance of her research and translations of the Sigrist-Hilty couple's written testimony from Gothic and Old German to English. Der Mugrdechian dedicated his presentation to the Swiss and Armenian people.

Counselor of the Consulate General of Armenia in Los Angeles Nazeli Hambard-

zumyan provided brief remarks in Armenian and English. She noted the importance of the book, and the heroic deeds of Swiss eyewitnesses and humanitarians in saving lives and providing relief assistance to Armenian survivors. Retired Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia Valery Mkrtumyan, a former consul general of Armenia in Los Angeles, also attended the *kinetson*.

Franco Zimmerli, the honorary consul of the Consulate of Switzerland in Los Angeles, was recognized at the event as an "honored guest" by the TCA Metro Los Angeles Chapter. In his remarks, Consul Zimmerli praised the book's author, Sakayan, and co-editor Der Mugrdechian for publishing the book and making it accessible to the public. Consul Zimmerli stressed that the deaths of 1.5 million Armenians was "a dark chapter in history," and how inspiring it was to read about the heroic deeds of the Sigrist-Hilty couple to sacrifice their own lives, in order to save several Armenians, including Aramian, during their time in Cilicia.

During the program, Rev. Fr. Njteh Keshishyan, pastor of Armenian Church of North Hollywood, represented Archbishop

Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of America. Fr. Keshishyan praised Der Mugrdechian for his informative presentation, and commended the TCA Metro Los Angeles Chapter for organizing the evening event. Fr. Njteh directed his concluding remarks



Co-editor and keynote speaker Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian of Fresno State University

at Zimmerli by expressing his gratitude to the Swiss people for their contributions in aiding Armenians during the genocide.

The program concluded with the *kinetson* itself led by Fr. Njteh.

Also participating were retired Prof. Levon Marashlian and the director of the Ararat-Eskijian Museum and Research Center Maggie Mangasarian-Goschin.

### 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](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com) and [alin.gregorian@gmail.com](mailto:alin.gregorian@gmail.com).



The *kinetson* [dedication of the book with wine] at the conclusion of the program



# Arts & Culture

## Haik Kazazyan Wins 2025 Classic Violin Olympus International Competition

DUBAI (The Violin Channel) — The inaugural Classic Violin Olympus International Competition recently ended in Dubai, UAE. The final round is available to watch on The Violin Channel.

Haik Kazazyan, 42, from Armenia won the first prize on April 28, consisting of €200,000 (\$226,000) and a Stradivari model violin specially crafted by the violinmaker Fabio Piagentini.

“This is really unbelievable, like a dream,” Haik said onstage upon receiving the reward. “Thank you for appreciating my playing and my art. I feel a big responsibility to everyone who believed in me today to continue my own constant improvement.”

During the final round, the 12 violinists competed in a six-phase program designed to bring out varying skills — including a performance with the Armenian State Symphony



Haik Kazazyan

Orchestra and the Madrid Philharmonic Orchestra, solo performances, and a Q&A with the jurors.

The remaining 11 finalists were awarded €10,000 in prize money.

Additionally, the 25-member jury board of preeminent conductors and directors of acclaimed orchestras, festivals, and concert series will each offer a number of finalists the opportunity to perform live at one of their upcoming concerts.

The 2025 jury comprised Pavel Vernikov (Artistic Director), Facundo Agudin, Vicente Alberola, Giselle Ben Dor, Mauro Bucarelli, Epifanio Comis, Damiano Cottalasso, Mischa Damev, Dražen Domjanić, Jurek Dybał, Umberto Fanni, Jean-Baptiste Fra, Robert Hanč, Eleanor Hope, Konstantin Ilievsky, Daye Lin, Tigran Mikaelyan, Lucas Macías Navarro, Marios Papadopoulos, Christoph Poppen, Sergey Smbatyan, Anu Tali, Christiane Weber, Christopher Widauer, and Lena-Lisa Wüstendörfer.



## Imola Lázár With Transylvanian Hungarian-Armenian flavors

By **Artsvi Bakhchinyan**

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

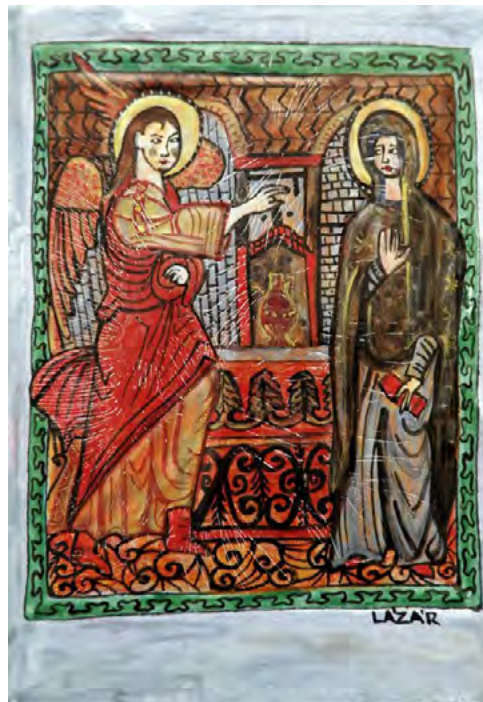
YEREVAN/BUDAPEST — Lázár Imola is a Hungarian artist specializing in enameling who has been connected to the arts since childhood. She was born in Reghin, Transylvania (Romania) and currently lives in Budapest. Imola completed teacher training, then studied law, and later, during an interior design course, she mastered enameling. Her works has been exhibited in the cities of Hungary, Romania, France, Slovakia, Germany, Austria.

**Dear Imola, you specialize in a rare art — enameling. Hungarian enameling has been an important part of the country’s artistic heritage since the Middle Ages. The International Enamel Art Symposium in Kecskemét is well known. What modern trends are shaping today’s Hungarian enameling art?**

Dear Artsvi, I do not follow modern trends. I apply enamel in a unique way. For example, I combine my enamel wallpapers with nanotechnology development, test how enamel behaves in aquatic environments, or even apply it to lingerie and motorcycles. Whatever comes to my mind — that is the trend for me. This is how I function because this is how I feel good.

**I assume you have introduced new elements with your Armenian motifs, blending historical craftsmanship with modern artistic innovations. It is wonderful to see that two Armenian-born artists in Hungary are reinterpreting medieval Armenian painting in new ways — Ermone Zabel Martaian through glass painting and you through enamel art. What Armenian-themed works have you created so far?**

At school, we initially created only small pendants and jewelry. My first significant work came in my second year when the Armenian National Autonomy of Hungary commissioned me to create an Armenian Bible in enamel. Being of Armenian origin myself, I gladly accepted the challenge, resulting in a series of fifty enamel paintings. This artistic direction has remained with me ever since — later, I created the Armenian alphabet, now housed in the National Széchényi Library, followed by a series on Armenian kings and the coats of arms of Armenian cities. One of the images from my Armenian Bible is in Echmiadzin, at the Armenian Religious Museum, and the other one is in the Vatican.



Imola Lázár Bible

## 2025 Armenian Night at the Pops To Feature cellist Ani Aznavoorian

BOSTON — The Friends of Armenian Culture Society will present the 72nd annual Armenian Night at the Pops on Saturday, May 31, at 7:30 p.m. at Symphony Hall. Cellist Ani Aznavoorian will be the guest soloist appearing with the Boston Pops Orchestra.



Cellist Ani Aznavoorian

She will join the orchestra and Music Director Keith Lockhart in performances of select works for cello and orchestra by John Williams. The evening will feature music by Williams and the composers who inspired him throughout his career.

The orchestra and Lockhart will also perform the *Hayr-Mer* (Lord’s Prayer) by Magar Yegmalian, arranged by Rouben Gregorian.

*Strad* magazine describes Aznavoorian as having “scorchingly committed performances that wring every drop of emotion out of the music. Her technique is well-nigh immaculate, she has a natural sense of theater, and her tone is astonishingly responsive.” She is in demand as a soloist and chamber musician with some of the most recognized ensembles, and she has appeared with many of the world’s leading orchestras including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Pops, the Tokyo Philharmonic, the Helsinki Philharmonic, the Finnish Radio Symphony, the International Sejong Soloists, the Belgrade Philharmonic, the Juilliard Orchestra and the Edmonton Symphony.

As a first-year student at the Juilliard School, where she received both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees, Aznavoorian won first prize at the institution’s concerto competition, the youngest cellist in the history of the school’s cello competitions to do so. She received the Bunkamura Orchard Hall Award for her outstanding cello playing and artistry. Some of her other awards include first prizes in the Illinois Young Performers Competition (televised live on PBS with the Chicago Symphony), the Chicago Cello Society National Competition, the Julius Stulberg Competition and

see LÁZÁR, page 17

see POPS, page 15



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# ACEC and ANC-EM Screen 'My Sweet Land' in Armenian Genocide 110<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration

WATERTOWN — On April 25, the Armenian Cultural and Educational Center (ACEC) and the Armenian National Committee of Eastern Massachusetts (ANC-EM) co-hosted a community screening of the powerful documentary "My Sweet Land," directed by Sareen Hairabedian, in observance of the 110th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Those attending included State Sen. William Brownsberger, members of the clergy, representatives from various Armenian organizations and approximately 200 community members.

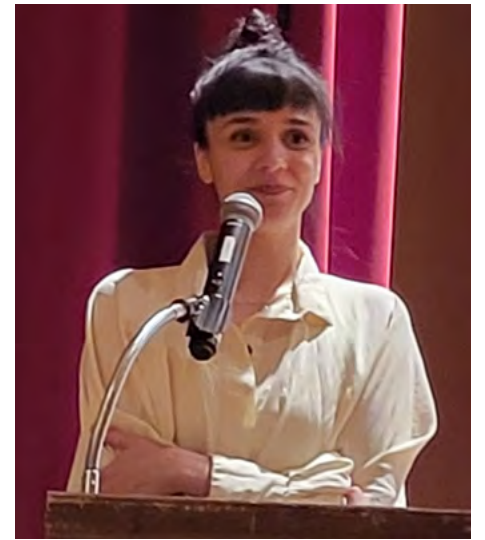
while highlighting the remarkable resilience of a people who continues to stand strong despite every attempt to silence their voices. At a time when the world's attention often shifts rapidly, this film invites viewers to pause and reflect on how conflict uproots lives and distorts histories, and how the scars of genocide are not confined to the past; they echo in every family torn from its home and every tradition at risk of being lost. Through its compelling storytelling, the film not only documents the tragedy but also honors the strength and spirit of those who endure.

often-unheard voices of those affected by conflict, the ACEC made the event free to the public, believing in awareness and education as powerful tools for change. By reaching a wide audience, the goal is to cultivate understanding and empathy for those impacted by war and injustice, fulfilling the Center's moral obligation and commitment to promoting storytelling through visual arts and educating both Armenians and non-Armenians about the issues presented in the film.

Seraderian thanked the ANC-EM for co-sponsoring the event, noting the shared commitment to raising awareness about the Armenian cause. He concluded that the film stands as a tribute to survival and a call for justice, peace, and recognition of the rights and history of the people of Artsakh.

Dr. Vazrik Chiloyan spoke on behalf of the ANC-EM, highlighting that this year marks the 110th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the Turkish government, as well as two years since the genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Armenians of Artsakh by the Azerbaijani government. He pointed out that, today, Armenians are struggling with the painful reality of unacknowledged and unpunished past crimes, alongside new crimes aimed at erasing their existence. He emphasized that similar films enable people around the world to learn about the Armenian struggle and understand the gravity of the crimes committed against them, illustrating that these struggles are not the result of mutual war, but that of genocide aimed at destroying our people.

Chiloyan shared a quote from the film's trailer spoken by the young boy: "How can you live with a neighbor that wants to take your country?" This highlights the constant fear endured by Armenians, particu-



Filmmaker Sareen Hairabedian

larly children growing up in Artsakh, and the constant worry their ability to return to their homeland. He urged to remain steadfast in the pursuit of justice and fight for recognition, reparations, and restoration of ancestral Armenian lands. He affirmed that there is no statute of limitations on genocide, and regardless of how long it takes, justice is on our side, and that we can succeed in our struggle only if we continue our fight. Dr. Chiloyan concluded by stating that a primary objective of the Armenian National Committee and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation is to foster public awareness and support for a free, united, and independent Armenia, noting how films like this serve as vital tools to broaden public awareness and develop empathy for the Armenian cause.

Following the screening, filmmaker Hairabedian engaged with the audience during a question-and-answer session, providing deeper insights into the film. The event concluded with a brief reception.



Dr. Vatche Seraderian, ACEC President

In his opening remarks, ACEC President Dr. Vatche Seraderian described the film as a cinematic journey into the heart of Artsakh, revealing the brutal realities of war, forced displacement and ethnic cleansing

The ACEC is proud to host the screening and thanks Marga Varea from Twinseas Media for her outreach and support in showcasing this important film. Recognizing the importance of amplifying the




**AGBU LA Special Events Committee  
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**THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2025 AT 7:00PM**  
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 Reception to follow - Free Entry . Հիւրասիրութիւն - Մուտքը ազատ



Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter invites you to a

# Hampartsoum Luncheon

Cultural program plus entertainment  
Khorovadz beef/pork/chicken barbecue  
Mezze, wine, refreshments, dessert free

**June 1, Sunday, 1:30 p.m.**  
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No tickets at the door.  
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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Screening of 'My Sweet Land' at Villanova Organized by TCA Philadelphia Chapter, Armenian Student Organization

PHILADELPHIA — On April 12, the Villanova University Movie Theatre hosted a screening of the film “My Sweet Land,” a deeply moving narrative set during the Karabagh conflict. The event was organized by the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Philadelphia Chapter in collaboration with the Villanova University Armenian Student Organization. This occasion marked not only a cultural milestone but also the rebirth of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Tekeyan Cultural Association.

The evening commenced with a VIP reception, an intimate gathering that created an atmosphere of camaraderie and reverence for the Armenian heritage. The reception was attended by a group of clergy, the sisters from the Armenian Sisters Academy, and the film’s director, Sareen Hairabedian. This segment of the event offered an opportunity for guests to share their thoughts, connect with the creator of the film, and celebrate the thriving Armenian culture in the Philadelphia area.

Vahe Hovsepian, chairman of the Tekeyan Cultural Association Philadelphia Chapter, welcomed the attendees during



Vahe Hovsepian opening remarks

his opening remarks. He shared his gratitude for the overwhelming support and expressed his excitement for the chapter’s renewed activities. His remarks set the tone for an evening that was both reflective and forward-looking.

“My Sweet Land,” a film that tells a poignant tale of resilience, loss, and hope. The movie focuses on the life of Vrej, an 11-year-old boy living in Artsakh during its tumultuous conflict with the indigenous people and the Azerbaijani government.

Through Vrej’s eyes, the audience is transported into a world of innocence juxtaposed with the harsh realities of war. The film delicately portrays Vrej’s struggles, dreams, and the bond he shares with his family and community amidst the chaos surrounding them. Hairabedian’s direction captures the raw emotions of the Karabagh conflict, bringing to life the human stories that are often overshadowed by the political narratives. The film resonated deeply with the audience, leaving a lasting impression on all who attended.

After the film, Stephanie Ayanian moderated a question-and-answer session with Hairabedian. Ayanian is herself a film producer and director living in the Philadelphia area. Her feature documentary, “What Will Become of Us,” on Armenian Americans navigating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, was broadcast on PBS stations across the country and in film festivals. Her newest film, “Whatever Dreams They Had,” is about a priest helping Syrian Armenians resettle in Los Angeles.

An Evening of Community and Reflection, A New Period for TCA Philadelphia

The screening drew an impressive audience of over 165 people, ranging from students and faculty to members of the Armenian community and beyond. The turnout highlighted the strong cultural ties and



Sareen Hairabedian, left, discusses her film, with moderator Stephanie Ayanian

interest in Armenian history and arts, as well as the success of the event’s outreach efforts.

For many, it was an emotional experience — a chance to reflect on the struggles faced by those in Artsakh and to honor the resilience of the Armenian people. The film served as a reminder of the importance of preserving and sharing such stories to ensure they are never forgotten.

The event was particularly significant as it marked the first organized activity by the resurrected Philadelphia Chapter of the Tekeyan Cultural Association.

Vahe Hovsepian, in his role as the chairman, emphasized the chapter’s commitment to fostering cultural, educational, and artistic endeavors. He expressed his hope for future collaborations and events, aiming to further engage the Armenian community and beyond. Plans for upcoming activities were hinted at, leaving attendees excited about what’s to come.

The new leadership team of the TCA Philadelphia Chapter reflects the chapter’s renewed vigor and dedication. Vahe Hovsepian serves as chairman, with Ara Mouradian as vice-chairman, Sira Albarian as recording secretary, and Vicken Bazarbashian as treasurer. Together, they bring a wealth of experience and passion,

charting a course for the chapter’s promising future. Plans are already underway to expand the executive staff, ensuring that the chapter continues to grow and thrive.

Looking Ahead

The collaboration between the Tekeyan Cultural Association Philadelphia Chapter and the Villanova University Armenian Student Organization was a resounding success. It underscored the power of partnerships in bringing cultural events to life and creating spaces for meaningful connection.

As the evening concluded, guests left with a sense of inspiration — not only from the film’s message but also from the vibrant energy of the community that had gathered to celebrate it. The screening of “My Sweet Land” was more than just a film event; it was a celebration of heritage, a call for resilience, and a step toward a brighter future for the Philadelphia Armenian community.

The TCA Philadelphia Chapter has set a high standard for its future endeavors, and with its passionate leadership and supportive community, its journey ahead looks promising. The evening proved that art, culture, and storytelling have the power to unite, inspire, and illuminate even the most challenging realities of history.

## 2025 Armenian Night at the Pops to Feature cellist Ani Aznavoorian

POPS, from page 13

the American String Teachers Association Competition. She was a top prizewinner in the 1996 International Paulo Competition, held in Helsinki, Finland.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Lockhart serving at the helm of the Boston Pops. To celebrate this milestone and to express appreciation for the relationship he and the orchestra have fostered with the Armenian community, the Friends of Armenian Culture Society will pay tribute to Lockhart at a reception following the concert on May 31. (Please note that special tickets are required for the reception.)

For tickets and information, visit [www.FACSBoston.org](http://www.FACSBoston.org).



Pops Conductor Keith Lockhart

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**ST. LEON ARMENIAN CHURCH**  
&  
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MHHER MEGERCHEAN THEATRICAL GROUP  
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ANTON CHEKHOV'S  
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A Comedy Directed by  
HAROUT CHATMAJIAN

\*Performed in Armenian  
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\*SURPRISE PRESHOW\*

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MAY 10, 2025**

COCKTAILS @ 7:00PM  
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**ST. LEON ARMENIAN CHURCH  
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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



## Avocado and Lentil Fritters with Lemon Avocado Yogurt Sauce

“With strong evidence supporting the Mediterranean-style Diet’s health benefits, this eating pattern is now recommended in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and by the American Heart Association. It’s easy to understand why. The scientific support for eating more fruits, vegetables, legumes, seafood, olives and nuts is robust and the heart-healthy avocado, which contributes naturally good fats, fits perfectly into the Mediterranean style of eating,” says Wendy Jo Peterson, a culinary trained nutritionist with the California Avocado Commission.

As a dietitian for nearly 20 years, Wendy Jo has been trained to challenge the norm, search the science, and move forward with an evidence-based approach. As a culinary trained nutritionist, she embraces the slow food movement and relishes the old world ways of cooking, from sourdough to homemade pasta. She is an award-winning author of *Born To Eat*, *Bread Making For Dummies*, *Mediterranean Diet Cookbook For Dummies*, *Adrenal Fatigue For Dummies*, *Air Fryer Cookbook For Dummies*, and *Instant Pot® Cookbook For Dummies*. You can find her sharing tips and tricks as a regular contributor with *Taste of Home Magazine*.

“California Avocados are a heart-healthy superfood. The Mediterranean Diet is one that is proportionately high in healthy fats, such as monounsaturated fats, making avocados a perfect fit. There’s more to fresh California Avocados than great taste. Learning about avocado nutrition facts can inspire you to find more ways to incorporate this healthy super fruit into your healthy diet. California Avocados are a nutritional powerhouse. Add to smoothies, soups, salads, bowls, burgers and more for a creamy, buttery taste you crave and the nutrition your body needs. Nutrient-dense foods are those that provide substantial amounts of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients with relatively few calories.”

“One-third of a medium avocado (50 g) has 80 calories and contributes nearly 20 vitamins and minerals, making it a great nutrient-dense food choice. California Avocados are naturally sodium-, sugar- and cholesterol-free. Avocados can act as a ‘nutrient booster’ by helping increase the absorption of fat-soluble nutrients such as vitamins A, D, K and E. One-third of a medium avocado (50 g) has 80 calories and contributes nearly 20 vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients, making it a heart-healthy choice to help meet nutrient needs. Although phytonutrients are not essential, research suggests they may promote human health.”

“The Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the American Heart Association recommend eating less nutrient-poor foods and limiting the amount of saturated fat, trans fat, added sugars and sodium consumed. The majority of fats in one’s diet should be heart-healthy monounsaturated or polyunsaturated; more than 75% of the fat in avocados is unsaturated, good fat. Why naturally good fats? Because the body needs some dietary fat in moderation to help with absorption of nutrients. Good fats, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, do not raise LDL (‘bad’) cholesterol levels.”

“Wendy Jo’s plant-forward recipe is perfect for a Meatless Monday dinner, a warm lunch, or anyone looking to embrace the Mediterranean Diet. The recipe is packed with 57% DV dietary fiber from favorites like lentils and avocados. Make these fritters into a sandwich, stuff into your favorite pita or serve as an appetizer at your next party.”

### INGREDIENTS:

#### Sauce:

1 cup whole fat Greek yogurt  
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice  
1/2 ripe Fresh California Avocado, peeled and seeded  
1/4 cup parsley  
1/2 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste

#### Fritters:

1 1/2 cups cooked brown lentils  
1 ripe Fresh California Avocado, peeled and seeded  
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice  
1/4 cup chopped onions  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
1/4 cup parsley  
1/2 teaspoon za’atar, or ground coriander  
1/2 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste  
1/4 cup all-purpose flour  
1 1/2 cups bread crumbs  
1 cup extra-virgin olive oil, for frying

#### Salad:

4 cups arugula, or shredded Tuscan kale or fresh spinach  
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice  
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil  
1/4 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste  
1/4 ripe Fresh California Avocado, peeled, seeded and chopped  
1 teaspoon sesame seeds, optional

### PREPARATION:

Add yogurt, lemon juice, avocado, parsley and sea salt to food processor. Blend for 30 seconds, scraping down the sides as needed. Test for flavor and add salt as needed.

Rinse food processor to make the fritters. Add lentils, avocado, lemon juice, chopped onions, garlic and parsley to the food processor. Blend ingredients for 1 minute, frequently scraping down sides. Add za’atar, sea salt, flour and bread crumbs; pulse for 30 seconds to incorporate the bread crumbs.

Using a cookie scoop or tablespoon, form 2 tablespoon patties. Patties will be about 2 1/2 inch circles and 1/2 inch in thickness.

In a heavy cast iron skillet or heavy skillet, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Pan fry the fritters for 2 minutes on one side and 1 to 2 minutes on the other or until lightly golden brown in color. Transfer cooked fritters to plate and cover with paper towels. Cook fritters in 3 to 4 batches. In a separate mixing bowl, toss greens with lemon juice and massage in olive oil and sea salt.

To plate, place 1 cup greens on each plate. Place 4 fritters around the bed of greens and drizzle or dollop with the lemon and avocado yogurt sauce. Add chopped avocado, and for optional garnish sprinkle with sesame seeds.

\*Large avocados are recommended for this recipe. A large avocado averages about 8 ounces. If using smaller or larger size avocados adjust the quantity accordingly.

**Serving Suggestion:** If you can’t find za’atar, you can use cumin or coriander instead. If you don’t have sesame seeds on hand try chopped walnuts or other nuts.

**Beverage Pairing:** Cucumber and lemon infused sparkling water would make for a refreshing beverage, but if you’re craving a crisp glass of wine opt for a Sauvignon Blanc that highlights citrus notes.

For this recipe, go to:

<https://californiaavocado.com/recipe/avocado-lentil-fritters-lemon-avocado-yogurt-sauce/>

<https://californiaavocado.com/recipe/avocado-lentil-fritters-lemon-avocado-yogurt-sauce/print/print=1>

Learn how to enjoy a healthy Mediterranean Lifestyle with avocados at: <https://californiaavocado.com/lifestyle/the-mediterranean-lifestyle-with-california-avocados/>

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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## Imola Lázár: With Transylvanian Hungarian-Armenian flavors

LÁZÁR, from page 13

**You mentioned that you have Armenian ancestry. One of the heroes of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 was Lázár Vilmos. Are you related to his family?**

Yes. Colonel Vilmos Lázár and Lieutenant General Ernő Kiss — both martyrs of Arad from 1848 — were cousins. I am a descendant of both of them. They were related to the Lázár noble family living in Transylvania. Thanks to our noble family, among other things, the Armenian church in Gyergyószentmiklós was built. Our coat of arms is still on the church wall today.

Countess Maria Lázár, had the ancestors I mentioned. In my childhood, she told me a lot about the Armenians. When I showed her how I constantly drew vines and plant motifs, she smiled and showed me embroidery featuring the same designs, saying: “It’s no coincidence — it’s in your blood,” and then she started telling stories. Even the seasoning of her food contained the Armenian flavor. If I can put it this way, we ate a different taste than others — Transylvanian Hungarian-Armenian flavors.

**I know that the descendants of Hungarian Armenians prepare *angadjapur* — a special festive dish, that has survived only among them and as I assume, comes from the kingdom of Ani.**

Among other things, it was precisely the *angadjapur* soup that was one of the “clues.” I still make it to this day. The *hurut* (fermented dried yogurt) blocks were lined up on the shelf in the pantry. Naturally, the *töltike* (stuffed grape leaves — *tolma*) couldn’t be left out either, with plenty of garlic. Yummy. Divine flavors. And this was just the tip of the iceberg. But it was enough to look at us — our features and temperament gave it away. I am proud of that.

**How is life for a Hungarian artist today, how much demand is there for it today and how do you share your work with the world?**

It is difficult, like the life of any artist in general. But I chose it because I love it. One could say

it’s a form of satisfaction, but somehow, I would feel much better if I were financially appreciated. There is something to draw from. I would like to sell works from my Armenian Bible series. I see that today, when social media is booming, almost everyone buys things online. But this material cannot be subjected to that. I believe in personal communication between people — presentations, auctions, conversations.



Imola Lázár Bible

I will never forget when we first talked on a video call, and I showed you Mount Ararat from my window — you couldn’t hold back your tears. Without possessing the language, religion, Armenian traditional names, habits, you, Hungarians with Armenian roots still keep the historical memory. How this is possible after so many centuries to keep certain Armenian identity?

On my maternal side, my grandmother,

## Armenian Museum of America Celebrates Opening of ‘Fragments of Memory’ Exhibition

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Museum of America opened its latest exhibition, “Fragments of Memory: The Art and Legacy of Varujan Boghosian,” on April 26, with a memorable evening honoring the life and work of the Armenian-American artist. Curated by Ryann Casey and sponsored by the Alan and Isabelle Der Kazarian Foundation, the exhibition features 45 works spanning Boghosian’s career, showcasing his poetic mastery of mixed media, collage, and assemblage.

“We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who joined us for the opening, including over 100 members and guests, among them the artist’s daughter, Heidi Boghosian, of the Law and Disorder Radio podcast, Christopher Lydon of WBUR’s ‘The Connection,’ and Sara Boghosian of the Whistler House Museum of Art,” said Executive Director Jason Sohigian. The opening was also enjoyed by many students from Boston University, Northeastern University and the Berklee College of Music.

The exhibition was made possible by the loans of artworks from the Berta Walker Gallery in Provincetown and Heidi Boghosian.

Boghosian’s work is held in major public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum, the New York Public Library, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Fragments of Memory offers a rare opportunity to explore the elegant, lyrical world of an artist whose vision continues to resonate across generations. The exhibition runs through August 10.



Christopher Lydon and Heidi Boghosian

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

**MAY 15** — The Armenian American Medical Association presents the inaugural **Aram V. Chobanian Medicine and Humanities Program**. “Music, Emotion and Brain Health,” presented by guest speaker **Aniruddh D. Patel**, professor of psychology, Tufts University, with remarks by **Justin Casinghino**, assistant professor of music, Fitchburg State University, and visual artist **Kevork Mourad**, in collaboration with **Haig Hovsepian** and **Evan Johanson** on violin, **Cara Pogossian** on viola and **Dilshod Narzillaev** on cello. **Dorothy and Charles Mosesian Center for the Arts, 321 Arsenal St., Watertown.** Reception 6 p.m., program 7 p.m. Admission free. Advanced reservations suggested by May 10 to [bit.ly/AAMAmay](http://bit.ly/AAMAmay) or inquiries to [info@amaaboston.org](mailto:info@amaaboston.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.

**MAY 31** — 72ND Annual Armenian Night at the Pops! Featuring cellist **Ani Aznavoorian** and the Boston Pops Orchestra, performing works by **John Williams**, **Keith Lockhart** conducting. Saturday, 7:30 p.m., Symphony Hall, Boston. Presented by the Friends of Armenian Culture Society. Post-concert reception to pay tribute to Maestro Lockhart. Visit <http://www.FACS-Boston.org> for more information.

**JUNE 1** — The Tekeyan Cultural Association will host a **Hampartsoum Luncheon** cultural program plus entertainment. Program to feature **khrovadz** (beef, pork and chicken), and **mezze**, wine, refreshments and dessert. Sunday, 1:30 p.m. **Baika Building, 755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown.** (Use Norseman Avenue door.) Tickets \$50 for adults, \$35 for students. Children 10 and under free. No tickets at the door. Contact **Sossy** at 617-281-1647, or [syogurtian@comcast.net](mailto:syogurtian@comcast.net).

### 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](mailto: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.**

### 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](mailto:alin@mirrorspectator.com) or [alin.gregorian@gmail.com](mailto:alin.gregorian@gmail.com). You can also visit our website, [www.mirrorspectator.com](http://www.mirrorspectator.com), and find the “calendar” section under the heading “More” or mail them to the Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472. All calendar entries must be received by noon on Monday before publication.

## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**

SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

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# China Gains Momentum, Just Not in Armenia

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

As the US reduces its soft power influence, such as through foreign aid cuts via USAID and other institutions, China gains momentum. For three decades, the US was a primary aid provider in the South Caucasus, particularly to Armenia and Georgia, funding local media, NGOs, business projects, state institutions, human rights initiatives, education, etc. Washington used soft power to maintain a regional presence, balancing against Russia and countering Iran. But Donald Trump's return to the White House has shifted Washington's foreign policy, drastically reducing aid to the world, including South Caucasus countries. This approach has created a power vacuum, and Russia's constraints have offered China an opportunity to increase its own influence in the region, as Washington is not interested in the South Caucasus and Moscow is busy with its own problems. China is skillfully leveraging its momentum.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev concluded a state visit to Beijing days ago. Azerbaijan signed a comprehensive strategic partnership with China, as Beijing views Azerbaijan as a key partner linking China to Europe through Central Asia and the South Caucasus as a part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Baku and Beijing agreed on strengthening cooperation in energy, infrastructure, and digital technologies. Beijing secured investments in the Azerbaijani economy, especially in transportation infrastructure.

By joining the initiative, Azerbaijan will attempt to justify to the international community why it needs the "Zangezur Corridor" and why the interests of all major stakeholders align with its realization. It will likely emphasize Armenia's opposition to the BRI to justify Armenian sovereign territory.

Azerbaijan is seeking to become China's primary partner in the South Caucasus, demonstrated by its increasing engagement with de facto China-led BRICS (Brazil, Russia, Indian China and South Africa) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Moreover, following news of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's planned visit to Azerbaijan, the "Zangezur Corridor" has become the central focus of Baku's media concerning expectations for the visit. Indeed, Iran continues to assert its firm position against this corridor. In his recent interview the Iranian president stated, "Iran is providing Azerbaijan with a route to Nakhichevan through its territory. Work on this matter is already underway, and an agreement has been reached." Despite this ostensible agreement, Azerbaijan

still insists on opening the Zangezur corridor.

In its turn, Georgia, having lost strategic partner status with the US, now seeks the same opportunity with China. By signing a strategic partnership with China, Georgia aims to attract investment, particularly in strategic infrastructure projects. This move signals a shift from a pro-Western orientation to a balanced foreign policy, engaging with both China and regional players like Russia.

Armenia remains the only South Caucasus nation lacking a strategic partnership with China and demonstrating limited engagement with the Belt and Road Initiative. At the end of April, China appointed a new ambassador to Armenia after a nearly year-long vacancy but the ambassador's copies of credentials were accepted by a deputy of the Armenian minister of foreign affairs. This seemingly ceremonial gesture emphasizes China's lack of importance for the Republic of Armenia.

Typically, in such cases, copies of the credentials of ambassadors from UN Security Council member states are accepted by the minister, not a deputy minister. Even if the Armenian minister was on a trip in a foreign country, he could have accepted these copies later to indicate that China is an important partner for Armenia.

Yerevan continues to look toward Washington. However,



Washington does not appear to be reciprocating, despite the strategic partnership document signed a few months ago. It seems that this document holds little significance for Trump. Furthermore, in his April 24 statement, he deliberately avoided using the term "genocide" thereby provoking the anger of the Armenian-American community.

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

## Iranian-Armenian Relations Run Deep

By Arsen Nazarian

The Armenian Genocide coincided with the years of World War I and the reign of Ahmad Shah Qajar in Iran. During the reign of this Qajar king, the constitutional government of Iran was at its weakest and the overall situation in Iran was chaotic and messy. Ahmad Shah was unable to defend his citizens against the aggression of foreign armies, let alone pay attention to the genocide that was taking place in the neighboring country.

In any case, Iran, despite declaring neutrality in the war, was attacked by foreign powers: Russia from the north, Britain from the south and the Ottomans from the northwest. With the entry of Ottoman army into the northwest of the country, the Armenian and Assyrian populations of those areas suffered greatly. Of course, Muslim citizens too were not spared.

Numerous Iranian witnesses at the time have testified to the occurrence of the

Genocide, including: Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, writer and translator, Reza Ali Divanbeigi, politician, Yahya Dolatabadi, poet and writer of the Constitutional era, Abdolhossein Sheibani, nicknamed Vahid-ol-Molk, writer and legislator, and many others.

It is interesting to note that before the revolution, there was no official talk of the Genocide in Iran. The issue of the Armenian Genocide began to be raised after the revolution of 1979 and has been the subject of attention and investigation by Iranian political society and civil activists, especially in the last two or three decades.

After the revolution, Iranians of Armenian descent were allowed to hold protest marches to the Turkish Embassy in Tehran on the day of April 24 and publicly hold ceremonies in commemoration of the martyrs of the heinous crime.

Numerous calls have been issued by Iranian political organizations and human

rights activists, such as the Iranian National Front and the Pan-Iranian Party, for the government of the Islamic Republic to recognize the fact of the Genocide.

Finally, it is worth recalling that in 2002, a bill requesting the recognition of the Genocide in question by the government of the Islamic Republic was submitted to the parliament by two Armenian representatives in the Islamic Consultative Assembly. There is no information about the fate of this bill. However, several high-ranking Iranian officials including two ministers and the former and current ambassadors of Iran to Armenia, have paid personal tribute to the victims of the Genocide and laid flowers at the Martyrs' Monument in Yerevan.

## Current Situation

The 44-day war, the defeat of Armenia, the continued aggression of the Republic of Azerbaijan against Armenia, its western

*continued on next page*



## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Helpful Advice To Armenia After Hiring An American Lobbying Firm

In a rare move, the Republic of Armenia recently hired an American lobbying firm to promote Armenia's interests in the United States.

Several years ago, the Armenian government hired another Washington lobbying firm, but only for a short period. Due to a lack of appreciation or understanding of the value of such firms, Armenia's leaders have been unwilling to invest the necessary funds in retaining one.

Even in the United States, most people, including Armenian-Americans, have little awareness of the crucial role lobbying firms play in policymaking. Wealthy Armenians usually prefer to donate to tangible community institutions, such as schools, churches and cultural centers which are often named after them. However, if they fund a PR firm, their name does not get etched on the wall of a building, making such contributions less appealing.

I know the value of lobbying firms, having twice arranged their hiring for Armenian organizations -- despite the fact that both contracts were prematurely terminated.

Meanwhile, the governments of Azerbaijan and Turkey have spent tens of millions of dollars over the years to retain dozens of leading American lobbying/PR firms. In a particularly unexpected and disturbing move, the Turkish government even hired in 2017 an Armenian — Ronn Torossian, President of the 5W Public Relations firm in New York City, to do PR for Turkey.

Turning to the present, the Armenian government, through its embassy in the United States, signed a month-to-month contract that starts on April 1, 2025, with Washington-based Mercury Public Affairs at a cost of \$50,000 per month running until March 31, 2026. Mercury's assignment: "providing strategic consulting, lobbying, public affairs, and government relations, including outreach to U.S. officials."

Surprisingly, neither the Armenian government nor its embassy in Washington has announced this hiring. The American media revealed the information last month after the contract was filed on April 8, 2025, with the US Department of Justice, as required under the Foreign Agent Registration Act.

Why Armenia chose Mercury over hundreds of other Washington firms remains unknown. Armenia has offered no explanation for this selection.

Aram Hamparian, executive director of the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), reacted to the hiring of Mercury on LinkedIn: "In a city (DC) with dozens of major lobbying firms, Pashinyan picked one with Turkish money in its bank account and Armenian blood still on its hands."

He further asked: "Is it a coincidence that Pashinyan and Erdogan hired the same lobbyist?"

Hamparian was referring to Mercury's 2018 contract with Turkey, which the firm terminated in October 2020, after it came under intense public pressure for representing Turkey at a time when the country was militarily supporting Azerbaijan's invasion of Artsakh.

For decades, lobbying efforts for Armenian issues in the United States have been handled by two Armenian-American organizations in Washington: the Armenian Assembly of America and the ANCA.

However, given the lack of coordination between the Armenian government and these two organizations, Mercury's hiring will likely cause new conflicts, diminishing the lobbying firm's effectiveness. While the Armenian Embassy in Washington has some interaction with the Armenian Assembly, it maintains no contacts with the ANCA. Given Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's intolerance toward anyone who disagrees with his policies, it is not possible to have any degree of cooperation between the embassy and ANCA. As a result, the Armenian Embassy may issue political instructions to Mercury that conflict with the messages promoted by the two Armenian-American groups to US officials.

Most foreign governments have strong relations with their ethnic communities in the United States to maximize their influence in Washington. Regrettably, that is not the case with Armenia.

The contract signed by John Lonergan of Mercury and Armenia's Ambassador Lilit Makunts on April 1, 2025, outlines several services Mercury has agreed to provide to the Republic of Armenia:

- "Advocate on Client's [Armenia's] behalf before Congress and the administration.

- Highlight [Armenia's] geopolitical and strategic significance and role as an essential partner in the South Caucasus for US regional and global interests.

- Advance Armenia-US economic, trade, investment and technological cooperation.

- Position Client [Armenia] as an authoritative and trusted resource for administration officials as they analyze and discuss relevant issues.

- Engage the thought community on issues of interest to Client.

- Provide strategic communications and media relations services to Client."

A word of caution: PR and lobbying firms usually secure high-priced contracts after making grand promises to their clients. However, without strict oversight from the Armenian embassy regarding Mercury's daily activities, Armenia risks squandering its \$50,000 monthly payments. In order to impress their clients, these firms generate tons of paperwork indicating that they are in steady contact with various officials. To avoid such a pitfall, the Armenian Embassy must demand from Mercury specific and productive results, not just reports on meetings and phone calls.

from previous page

neighbor, then the ethnic cleansing of the Armenians of Karabakh (Artsakh), the betrayal of Russia, and the refusal of the Baku regime to sign a peace treaty with Armenia are factors showing that Armenia is still in a vulnerable position, as it was one hundred and ten years ago. In fact, Armenia faces a constant existential challenge.

The Turkish government and its ally, the Republic of Azerbaijan, continue to pursue the goal of weakening Armenia to the point of its destruction.

After the start of Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggression against Ukraine, Russia turned from the main ally of Armenia into its enemy. The value and importance of Armenia for Russia compared to the role that Turkey and Azerbaijan could play for him in the Ukrainian war, has actually reached zero. Putin has shown that in order to gain the support of the two named countries to dodge western sanctions, he is ready to give them any concessions they want to the detriment of Armenia — as was seen in the case of Karabakh (Artsakh). In fact, now the three countries of Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, despite having different and sometimes conflicting interests, pursue the common goal of weakening Armenia to the point of making it a dysfunctional state.

The Purposes of Their Policy

The purposes of their policy can be formulated as follows. First, they wish to seize Syunik province of Armenia and take possession of the so-called Zangezur corridor (Meghri Pass) to connect mainland Azerbaijan with its hinterland of Nakhijevan (and then Turkey). Syunik province is a 30-40 kilometer strip of land that separates

Azerbaijan from Nakhijevan and Turkey.

Second, they wish to place the control of the so-called Zangezur corridor, i.e. the "middle energy route" at the disposal of Russia. The current energy routes in the area include the Nabucco route of Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey and the Aras route of Azerbaijan-Iran-Turkey. The middle route of Azerbaijan-Armenia-Turkey, would be the shortest, smoothest and most economical route.

Russia and Turkey pursue the above goals through the Republic of Azerbaijan by encouraging and lending political, diplomatic and sometimes military support to it.

Russia does not have a common border with Armenia, so a direct Russian attack on Armenia is not possible. Regarding Turkey and its policy towards Armenia, two realities should be kept in mind. First, Turkey is facing serious economic problems, partly as a result of the terrible earthquake that occurred in 2023, and thus needs Western help. Second, the possible exit or withdrawal of United States from NATO has caused serious concern in Turkey, so that the country is now trying to gain another reliable shelter and at least gain entry into the European Union. The above factors have caused this country to refrain from the thought of an aggression against Armenia, as it would impose such high costs on it that would outweigh possible benefits. Therefore, the greatest danger that directly threatens the existence of Armenia comes now from the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The fall of Syunik, the southern province of Armenia, would actually be the beginning of the fall of the Armenian state and a disaster equal to the Genocide. In

addition, the severance of Iran's ties with the South Caucasus, the loss of its strategic depth by being encircled by the Turkic-speaking countries, will also be one of the consequences of such an event for Iran. Therefore, after the grave mistakes it made in its policy towards its two northwestern neighbors (Azerbaijan and Armenia) at the beginning of the 44-day war, the Islamic Republic has now turned to another policy for maintaining its weight and status in the South Caucasus. This approach implies the preservation of internationally recognized borders, including those of Armenia. We will return to this issue shortly.

### Armenia's Cards

What deterrents and resources does Armenia have against her existential security risks?

It is an independent state and is a member of the United Nations (at the time of the Genocide, there was no independent Armenian state)

It has a diaspora larger than the country's population, largely created by the Genocide.

It has a democratic system based on free elections and respect for human rights.

It has close relations with the European Union and the United States (collectively, the "West").

It has good relations with its historical neighbor, Iran.

Iran's policy towards the So-called Zangezur Corridor Issue

After the 44-day war, during which the Islamic Republic took a position to the detriment of Armenia and in favor of Azerbaijan, Iran's policy towards its two northwestern neighbors changed. At present,

Iran doesn't want Armenia to be too weak to resist further aggression from Baku. On the other hand, the West also has started to provide assistance and support to Armenia which includes political, diplomatic, military and financial spheres.

Recently, the Armenian and Iranian governments conducted "joint" military exercises on both sides of the border, the clear purpose of which was to send a message to the Baku regime not to undertake new adventures. The combat forces of the two countries simultaneously carried out military maneuvers and movements within their own territory and along their borders. It is said that these exercises were carried out with the knowledge and tacit approval of the European Union.

Recently, President Masoud Pezeshkian of Iran visited Baku with a large economic delegation. While meeting Azerbaijani officials including President Ilham Aliyev, he reiterated Iran's position in support of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and Armenia and on the unacceptability of changes to the internationally recognized borders.

One thing is clearly noticeable: both Iran and the West have a tacit understanding not to leave Armenia alone in face of any possible aggression from Azerbaijan.

Negotiations between Iran and the US

These negotiations, and how they will conclude, will be of vital importance not only for Iran, but especially for Armenia. It would be of importance in fact for the entire region and the world. For Armenia, it will be important in the sense that Azerbaijan will lose its playing card in the event of a possible attack by the US and Israel on

see IRAN, page 20



## Iranian-Armenian Relations Run Deep

IRAN, from page 19

In fact, the fruitfulness of the negotiations will mean a decrease in the likelihood of war in the region and a decrease in the strategic importance of Baku for the West. On the contrary, the failure of the negotiations and an increase in the likelihood of war will disrupt the relative stability of the region and will allow Baku to launch new attacks against Armenia, taking advantage of the preoccupation of Iran and the West with other matters.

From the perspective of the Baku regime, signing a peace treaty with Armenia will give the latter the opportunity to restore its economy and army in a short time and neutralize Baku's military-economic-political superiority. Therefore, this country is constantly thinking about striking at its western neighbor and further weakening its military-economic strength.

Possible Outcomes of Negotiations

*One:* The talks fail.

The negotiations reach a deadlock, the parties leave the negotiating table, and military action is on the agenda. This is the worst-case scenario that can result from the talks for all parties (and for Armenia as well). In this case, the entire region, and possibly the world, will be plunged into an Armageddon with long-term terrible disasters.

*Two:* The talks drag on and the parties (intentionally) stall without achieving tangible results.

In the two cases above, Armenia should act with full vigilance and, if possible, take the initiative at the right time. Given that Armenia has good relations with both the Islamic Republic and the United States, it can do its part to prevent the talks from failing definitively and, as a country where the interests of the parties intersect, step forward, encourage and even persuade them to continue the talks on its soil.

*Three:* The negotiations produce results.

The parties reach some kind of understanding and (long-term) agreement. The world breathes a sigh of relief, the door to trade with the West opens (even if initially with some restrictions). At the same time, sanctions are lifted from Iran, Armenia has a free hand in military cooperation with Iran and possibly the conclusion of a strategic agreement with it. With continued stability in the region, the communication lines are opened after many decades, the economic-military blockade of Armenia is lifted and the entire strategic setting of the region changes providing a long-term stability and opportunity for peaceful coexistence for the peoples of the region.

(Arsen Nazarian, a translator, researcher and activist, lives in The Hague, Netherlands. This article is a slightly edited translation of its Persian version published on May 1 in the London publication *Kayhan*, <https://kayhan.london/1404/02/10/375721/>.)

## Ruben Vardanyan's Son Appeals to Trump

VARDANYAN, from page 1  
national security adviser, Mike Waltz, urged Baku to "release the prisoners." Waltz's call contrasted with the US State Department's subsequent cautious comments on the issue cited by the Catholic News Agency.

Like Armenian opposition leaders and other domestic critics of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Genser has repeatedly accused Armenia's government of doing little to try to have the prisoners freed.

Pashinyan has said that his government will make only "proportionate" and "reasonable" efforts for that purpose. He has

also claimed that Yerevan will harm the prisoners if it acts more forcefully. Critics say that he is simply afraid of angering Baku.

Mane Tandilyan, a leader of an Armenian opposition party linked to Vardanyan, decried on Friday, May 2, the fact that a draft peace treaty finalized by Baku and Yerevan in March does not call for the release of the prisoners.

"With their behavior, the [Armenian] authorities demonstrate that they are not interested at all in the release of those people," Tandilyan told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.



Ruben Vardanyan stands trial in Baku, March 11, 2025.

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