



Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev meet in Tirana, May 16, 2025.

Pashinyan, Aliyev Talk During European Summit

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev spoke on the sidelines of a European Political Community summit held in Albania’s capital, Tirana, on Friday, May 16.

A short video of the conversation released by Pashinyan’s office showed the two men talking one-on-one in a conference hall lobby before being joined by their foreign ministers and aides. The office said they discussed an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty essentially finalized by the two sides in March.

“The parties discussed the current situation and emphasized the importance of continuing the process towards its signing,” it added in a statement.

Aliyev’s office and news agencies controlled by him did not immediately comment on the talks. Baku has repeatedly made clear that the signing of the treaty is first and foremost conditional on a change of the Armenian constitution which it says contains territorial claims to Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan denied the existence of such claims when he spoke to an Azerbaijani reporter in Tirana late on Thursday, May 15. The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry responded the following morning by accusing him of “again trying to mislead the international community.” A ministry spokesman said the Armenian constitution “poses a direct threat to Azerbaijan’s national security” and its change is a “fundamental condition for peace.”

While rejecting this precondition, Pashinyan has pledged to try to enact a new constitution through a referendum expected in 2026. His political opponents have vowed to scuttle its adoption. They say that Pashinyan’s appeasement policy only encourages Aliyev to demand more concessions from Yerevan.

The demands also include the opening of a land corridor to Azerbaijan’s Nakhichevan exclave which would pass through a key Armenian region. In January, Aliyev renewed his threats to open such a corridor by force.

Catholicos Karekin II Consecrates Belarus Church Despite Tensions Between Yerevan and Minsk

By Xandie (Alexandra) Kuenning The head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, has visited Minsk to consecrate the country’s first such church. It was his first visit to Belarus, which comes amidst tense relations between Armenian President Nikol Pashinyan and his Belarusian counterpart Aleksandr Lukashenka.

The first Armenian Apostolic Church in Belarus — Gregory the Illuminator’s Church — was officially consecrated and opened in Minsk on Sunday, May 18. The building was designed by Armenian architect Samvel Makyan, with construction beginning in August 2022 and ending in April 2025.

According to the Belarusian state-owned news agency BelTA, citing Armenian priest Sarkis, the church’s priest, the building was constructed using volcanic rock imported from Armenia, while the interior design used Armenian travertine stones as well. The icons were all imported from Armenia as well.

“It will always remind us of the Motherland,” Sarkis said.

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Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, attends the consecration of the first Armenian Apostolic Church in Belarus (Photo via BelTA)

Tehran Vows to Prevent ‘Harm’ to Armenian-Iranian Ties

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Iran will not allow anyone to undermine its relations with neighboring Armenia, Ali Akbar Ahmadian, the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, reportedly told his visiting Armenian counterpart Armen Grigoryan over the weekend.

Grigoryan visited Tehran to attend an international security forum held there. He also held separate meetings with Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi as well as Ahmadian.

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Armenia’s border with Iran, April 12, 2025

Pashinyan Goes into ‘Attack Mode’ Against Political Rivals

With his messaging about transforming Armenian society having trouble gaining traction, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is falling back on the time-honored political tradition of attacking his chief rivals.

Public opinion polling shows that Armenians have mixed feelings about Pashinyan’s “Real Armenia” strategy, which seeks to stimulate individual initiative to drive economic development, while fostering a new, forward-looking national identity. At the same time, his efforts to finalize a peace treaty with Azerbaijan, a prerequisite for implementation of his economic growth strategy, have stalled.

With parliamentary elections approaching next year, Pashinyan’s government appears to be making political moves designed to create a bit of separation between himself and his chief rivals, all of them former presidents.

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ARMENIA
Young Artsakh Photographer Has Exhibit in Yerevan



NEW JERSEY
TCA Megerdchian Theatrical Group Presents Chekhov Farce



Annual Summer Break

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* will be closed for two weeks for its annual summer break.

The last issue before the summer break will be that of June 28 and the first issue back will be that of July 19.

Happy summer!



ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Impeachment Proceedings against Pashinyan Begin

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Edmon Marukyan, leader of the Bright Armenia Party, on May 19, officially announced the launch of impeachment proceedings against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Former Civil Contract MPs Hovik Aghazaryan and Hakob Aslanyan have nominated Marukyan as their candidate for prime minister as part of the no-confidence motion against Pashinyan. The application to the parliament speaker stressed that the prime minister had significantly deviated from the government’s program.

Marukyan signed the nomination document and confirmed his willingness to stand as a candidate for prime minister. Both Aghazaryan and Aslanyan signed the no-confidence motion.

CSTO Hopes for Swift Signing of Peace Treaty, Says Secretary General

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) hopes for a swift signing of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace agreement, the CSTO Secretary-General Imangali Tasmagambetov said on May 19.

“There are certain positive developments in the Caucasus,” Tasmagambetov said during the meeting of the Council of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly in Bishkek, according to the CSTO press office. “These are statements by the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the conclusion of negotiations and agreement on the text of an interstate document on peace between the two countries. We express our hope that the document will be signed as soon as possible and expect that its realization will pave a reliable path to peace and stability.”

Armenia, officially a CSTO member, froze its membership citing the bloc’s failure to respond to the 2021 and 2022 Azeri invasions.

Residents Block Gyumri-Yerevan Road

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Inhabitants of Agarakavan and adjacent villages in the greater Talin community recently blocked the Gyumri-Yerevan highway.

They demanded that the Ministry of Territorial Administration and the Road Department Foundation ensure that the construction of the North-South highway does not result in the closure of the wide and well-maintained road connecting several villages.

“Now they are closing that road, directing us to a bridge, saying to walk a kilometer, then cross a dangerous intersection. A few days ago, an ambulance got lost. There is no obstacle; why are you closing this ready road,” residents complained.

The mayor of Talin has met with the residents. The protesters stated that if the issue is not resolved, they intend to continue their protest actions and block the highway again.

Cypriot Parliament Speaker Awarded Order Of Friendship by Armenian President

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — President of the Cypriot House of Representatives Annita Demetriou on May 20 visited Armenia. During the visit, President Vahagn Khachaturyan awarded her the Order of Friendship.

During a meeting in Yerevan, the President welcomed Speaker Demetriou’s visit to Armenia and said that the relations between the two nations are based on historic friendship, solidarity and mutual trust, the president’s office said in a readout.

Khachaturyan described Cyprus as a valuable and reliable partner for Armenia.

Khachaturyan lauded the level of cooperation between the Armenian and Cypriot parliaments, especially the active contacts between the friendship groups and foreign relations committees.

He said that more active cooperation in tourism and IT can further boost the development of economic ties between Armenia and Cyprus. In this context, the presence of direct flights between the two countries was underscored.

The sides attached importance to reciprocally opening resident embassies as a step strengthening the institutional foundation of cooperation. The partnership potential, as well as the effective and unobstructed cooperation in international platforms between the two countries was underscored.

They stressed the development of democratic institutions, commitment to democratic values, as well as the need for deepening cooperation in education, science and culture.

The smooth course of political dialogue on various levels, which contributes to expansion of bilateral ties, was lauded. The continuous development of parliamentary diplomacy as an important tool for bringing the peoples closer to one another was



President of the Cypriot House of Representatives Annita Demetriou with President Vahagn Khachaturyan

highlighted.

Later, in Agarak, Demetriou met with ten families who were forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh and have been living in various communities across the province. These families, through My Step Foundation’s Economically Sustainable Families initiative, have received greenhouses as a donation to support their economic stability and social reintegration.

Demetriou met with the NK forcibly displaced families who talked about their stories and hardships resulting from the displacement. Demetriou encouraged their diligence, extending words of support.

Demetriou underscored the Cypriot government’s readiness for continuous support to change the lives of numerous people through such programs.

My Step Foundation’s Economically Sustainable Families initiative is imple-

mented through a grant provided by the Cypriot government.

The “Economically Sustainable Families” initiative aims to enhance agricultural capacity and develop an entrepreneurial mindset among families forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023. The initiative seeks to empower these families to achieve financial independence, integrate into their new communities, and secure long-term residency in the Republic of Armenia.

Pashinyan Goes into ‘Attack Mode’ Against Political Rivals

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On May 12, the government’s chief prosecutor announced an initiative to recover a wide array of assets, including residences, vehicles, businesses, as well as cash and other valuables, belonging to former president Robert Kocharyan and his family members. Government officials contend the assets were obtained improperly.

The recovery efforts come several months after Kocharyan re-emerged as a vocal critic of Pashinyan’s foreign policy after spending the better part of the past three years out of the political limelight. “If we continue on this path, we risk losing everything,” Kocharyan said during a television interview, referring to the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process and Armenia’s pivot away from Russia.

Pashinyan earlier in May challenged his chief political rivals — Kocharyan, along with Armenia’s other former presidents, Serzh Sargsyan and Levon Ter-Petrosyan — to a live, televised debate on the key issues confronting the country. Pashinyan clearly believes he can run rhetorical circles around his opponents, discrediting their positions and giving the Real Armenia concept a boost.

“If you have something to say, let’s go and talk live. Stop saying something in dark corners,” Pashinyan addressed his chief rivals during an appearance in parliament.

“I honestly offer one against three,” said Pashinyan, who taunted his rivals to “collect your smart, stupid, wise and not very good thoughts and come (to a debate).”

(This article originally appeared on the website Eurasianet.org, May 14.)

Ruben Vardanyan’s Son Warns of Impending Danger for Father

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — David Vardanyan, son of imprisoned Armenian philanthropist Ruben Vardanyan, has expressed grave concerns over his father’s detention in Azerbaijan, describing it as part of a broader campaign of “ethnic cleansing.”

Ruben Vardanyan, a prominent figure known for co-founding the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative with George Clooney, faces 42 charges in Azerbaijan, which his son deems a “kangaroo trial” marred by due-process violations.

David recounted to GB News that the family learned of Vardanyan’s detention through social media on September 27, 2023, suggesting it was a deliberate act by the Azerbaijani government to intimidate Armenian Christians.

He emphasized that his father was apprehended while attempting to leave Nagorno-Karabakh amid a mass exodus of approximately 120,000 Armenians following Azerbaijan’s 2023 military offensive. David characterized this displacement, accompanied by the destruction of churches and Christian sites, as ethnic cleansing.

Despite the challenging circumstances, David noted that his father remains stoic, refraining from complaining about detention conditions to avoid diverting attention from the alleged illegality of the proceedings. Communication with Ruben has been sporadic, limited to brief calls once or twice a week. Previously, the family relied on video messages facilitated by the International

Red Cross, but the recent closure of its office in the country has further restricted contact.

David shared the personal impact of his father’s imprisonment, revealing that Ruben became a grandfather during his detention but has yet to meet his granddaughter. The family remains hopeful for a future reunion.

Human rights lawyer Jared Genser, speaking from Washington, highlighted that Ruben has been denied access to a Bible, contradicting Azerbaijani claims that the conflict is unrelated to religion. Genser criticized the lack of international media coverage on the issue, noting that global attention has been focused on other conflicts, thereby neglecting the plight of Christians in the region.

Genser also commended former U.S. President Donald Trump for his engagement in advocating for the freedom of Christian Armenians. He contrasted this with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s apparent disinterest in peace efforts. Genser recalled that in October 2023, Trump condemned the events in Nagorno-Karabakh as ethnic cleansing and pledged to protect persecuted Christians and restore peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

He further criticized both Azerbaijani and Armenian authorities for not prioritizing the release of prisoners like Ruben, suggesting that Aliyev views the situation as the culmination of longstanding efforts to ethnically cleanse the region.



ARMENIA

One Camera, a Thousand Memories: Young Artsakh Photographer Has Exhibit in Yerevan

By Anzhela Sedrakyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN —The Dallan Gallery in Yerevan recently hosted an exhibit of photographs by Artsakh-born photographer Nare Arushanyan. The exhibition, which ran May 10-20, was titled “Echoes of Home,” and featured depictions of life in Artsakh and the harrowing displacement.

All proceeds from the sale of the photographs will be donated to organizations supporting displaced Artsakh families, name some of them.



Nare Arushanyan

Nare is 17 years old. With a bright and joyful gaze, she was born and raised in Stepanakert. Her story is a testament to the inspiring strength that can emerge even under the harshest conditions.

Since December 2022, from the moment the blockade of Artsakh began, Nare joined a charitable initiative founded by philan-

thropist Ruben Vardanyan, called Front-line, as a volunteer. Every day, she visited fellow citizens with health issues such as what, delivering their daily bread — at a time when bread had become scarce in Artsakh.

“Everything is different now. When I wake up in the morning, that same sense of mission is gone. My life has completely changed,” Nare shared.

She started getting interested in photography at age 14. She was inspired by the work of several photographers and students from Artsakh’s TUMO Creative Center. In Artsakh, Nare had been accepted to the Tumo Creative Center to study photography in the upcoming year, which of course did not happen. Using money she had received as birthday gifts, she bought her first camera.

She was 15 when the blockade happened in December 2022. Thus, she began documenting the reality of Artsakh — both through a photographic lens and with a journalist’s eye. She was frustrated by the international media’s silence and decided to serve as witness to her own story.

Nare captured nearly everything: from civil disobedience protests and bread lines to the daily life of volunteers. She translated her captions into English and shared her photographs on social media, doing everything she could to bring awareness of Artsakh’s fate.

Walking through the gallery this week, Nare presented some of the photographs on display. The first is an image of Martuni’s mayor, Aznavur Saghyan, taken at Yerablur military cemetery. Her expression darkened: “Aznavur is a true hero to me. When the Azerbaijani army surrounded the village, he protected the villagers at the cost of his life — and was killed in that very



moment.”

Next, she showed receipts from the bread lines, photographs of vehicles loaded with belongings. She recounted how peo-

ple waited long hours at checkpoints, and how she managed to document moments of displacement in the midst of it all.



One photograph stood out — a scene from the village of Shahmasur. It depicts a serene domestic scene; against the backdrop of the mountains, white linens hang from a line in a backyard. Its contrast is found in another image: a red car filled with neatly packed white linens belonging to another displaced resident during the forced evacuation in October 2023.

Nare was born and raised in Stepanakert, as were her parents. She is now attending Avedisian School in Yerevan, where she

with the “301” media platform as a photo-journalist.

She said that life in Artsakh was peaceful and calm, even though the threat of aggression was constant. Still, she had adapted to that way of life. Nare and her family were forcibly displaced from Artsakh in 2023. What she misses the most is a deer she left behind. During the displacement, they were unable to take it with them, so they let it go into the nearby forest from their home.

Nare had hoped to raise \$1,000 through the exhibition-sale, but so far, only a few photos have been sold, and she has raised \$500.



INTERNATIONAL

Aliyev: Armenia Will Eventually Accept Azerbaijan's Conditions

BUDAPEST (Panorama.am) — Armenia will sooner or later accept the conditions put forward by Azerbaijan for the conclusion of a bilateral peace agreement, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said at a joint press conference with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Tuesday, May 20.

“There are two key conditions for concluding a peace treaty. Armenia will eventually have to accept them,” the Azerbaijani media quoted Aliyev as saying.

He reiterated the conditions set by Azerbaijan: “Armenia must change its constitution and the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] Minsk Group must be dissolved.”

Armenia Wins Four Medals at International Biology Olympiad

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenian students earned four bronze medals at the first-ever Open International Biology Olympiad in Sochi, Russia, May 10 to 17.

The event brought together 75 high school students from 15 countries, the Armenian Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports reported.

Students Sara Hakobyan and Levon Hayrapetyan from Heratsi High School, Anahit Hunoyan and Babik Sargsyan from Photon College, Milena Hayrapetyan from YSU STEM High School and Lilia Karapetyan from Yerevan High School No. 184 represented Armenia.

Bronze medals were awarded to Sara Hakobyan, Anahit Hunoyan, Milena Hayrapetyan and Lilia Karapetyan.

The Armenian team was led by Ruzanna Adamyan, a researcher at Yerevan State University.

Swiss Peace Initiative For Karabakh to Launch in Bern

BERN (Panorama.am) — On May 26, 19 parliamentarians will launch actions in support of the Swiss Peace Initiative for Nagorno-Karabakh will be launched in Bern, the Christian Solidarity International reported.

The Initiative is being launched to support Switzerland's commitment to “facilitate an open dialogue between Azerbaijan and representatives of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian people, conducted under international supervision or in the presence of internationally relevant actors, to negotiate the safe and collective return of the historically resident Armenian population.”

The inaugural event of the committee will take place on May 26 at the Hotel Kreuz in Bern. The committee, which has broad cross-party support, is led by National Councilor Erich Vontobel (EDU, Zurich) and National Councilor Stefan Müller-Altermatt (The Center Party, Solothurn).

Armenia Denying Existence of Peace Treaty Provision to Close Russian Military Base

A new knot is being added to the already tangled efforts of getting an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty finalized.

Both sides have acknowledged that the treaty text is ready for signing, but an authoritative version has so far not been published. Azerbaijan has set several preconditions it says must be fulfilled before a signing ceremony can take place. Baku's chief concern is a need for Armenia to amend its constitution to unequivocally recognize Azerbaijan's sovereignty over the long-contested Nagorno-Karabakh territory.

On May 17, state-connected Azerbaijani media outlets floated a potential bombshell revelation — that one of the treaty's provisions bars foreign (i.e. Russian) troops from being based on the territory of either state. That message was repeated by Hikmet Hajiyev, a presidential foreign policy adviser, in comments first published by the Iranian news agency Tasnim.

“External forces are trying to impose their views,” Hajiyev is quoted as saying. “Baku and Yerevan must determine the path to stability themselves.”

If accurate, a ratified treaty would seem to spell the end of the Russian 102nd military base outside the Armenian city of Gyumri. The current lease agreement runs until 2044.

“It remains unclear how this will be implemented in practice, considering that the base in Gyumri was created in 1995 on the basis of an intergovernmental agreement,” a commentary published by the Azerbaijani 1News outlet stated.

Armenia officials are vigorously denying the existence of any such treaty provision. When queried by journalists in Yere-

van during a press conference, parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan responded: “It's absurd, I hear it from you for the first time.”

“This is not discussed and cannot be discussed,” Simonyan added, referring to the basing issue.

Understandably, the reported presence of an expulsion clause in the treaty received lots of attention in Moscow, with Russian media outlets amplifying Armenian denials.

The timing of Azerbaijan's purported revelation coincides with another spike in tension between Baku and the Kremlin. The latest burst of mutual rancor occurred after Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev snubbed his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin by deciding to skip Victory Day celebrations on May 9 in Moscow. The festering hostility is rooted in Russia's refusal to take responsibility for the accidental shoot-down of an Azerbaijani civilian airliner last December in the skies over the Russian province of Chechnya. The supposed treaty-provision announcement, then, could be just another way for Baku to tweak Russia.

The Azerbaijani move also potentially complicates Yerevan's efforts to improve ties with Russia. Over the past 18 months, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government has moved to diversify the country's geopolitical options by strengthening relations with the United States and European Union, vexing Russia, Yerevan's traditional ally, in the process. Of late, however, Pashinyan has sought to mend fences with Moscow, seemingly out of a desire to augment Armenia's political leverage to get Azerbaijan to sign the peace treaty.

Despite Yerevan's denials, the claimed basing provision in the draft peace treaty

could raise concerns in Moscow about a possible Armenian double-cross. Russia is eager to maintain a strong security presence in the South Caucasus that the Kremlin can potentially use as a lever of political influence.

Azerbaijan lately has sent multiple signals that it wants to diminish Russia's strategic presence in the region. On May 19, Azerbaijani Defense Minister Zakir Hasanov traveled to Israel to meet Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz, with both affirming the two states intend to enhance security cooperation.

And on May 18, Iran and Azerbaijani began four-days of joint military drills in Karabakh, marking a rare display of bilateral security cooperation. The exercises also signify a jab at Yerevan, which has long maintained strong ties with Tehran.

During a May 17 meeting in the Iranian capital with Armen Grigoryan, the secretary of Armenia's Security Council, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi “called for the swift conclusion of a long-awaited peace treaty,” Tasnim reported.

(This article originally appeared on www.eurasianet.org on May 20.)

Tehran Vows to Prevent ‘Harm’ to Armenian-Iranian Ties

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According to Iranian news agencies, Ahmadian described relations between the two neighboring nations as “strategic” and said they should be expanded “without restrictions.”

“Comprehensive cooperation between the two sides is in the interest of regional peace and stability,” he said.

Tehran will therefore not allow its “enemies” to cause any harm to Armenian-Iranian ties, added Ahmadian. He spoke in that context of unnamed outside powers that are “not interested in lasting peace in the region.” It is not clear whether he referred to the United States or other Western powers with which the current Armenian government has been seeking closer ties.

The Mehr news agency cited Grigoryan as saying in that regard that the deepening of Armenia's relations with Iran is “not linked to the will of others.”

The two countries last month held a first-ever joint military exercise on their border amid what many in Armenia see as a lingering risk of an Azerbaijani invasion aimed at opening a land corridor to Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan exclave through Syunik, the only Armenian province bordering Iran. Earlier this year, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev renewed his threats to forcibly open such a corridor also sought by Turkey.

Incidentally, the Azerbaijani and Iranian militaries began over the weekend similar joint drills along a section of the Azerbaijani-Iranian border just south of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Iran has repeatedly warned Azerbaijan as well as Turkey against attempting to strip it of the common border or direct transport links with Armenia. Araghchi reaffirmed Tehran's strong opposition to the so-called “Zangezur corridor” when he visited Yerevan on March 25.

Speaking at the Tehran forum, Grigoryan was reported to say that Yerevan is not discussing the Azerbaijani demands for the corridor in its peace talks with Baku.

Gyumri Musicians Tour Germany, Austria

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Gyumri is known informally as the cultural capital of Armenia and for good reason. In addition to its traditional excellence in the visual arts, it hosts several outstanding music schools as well as a Conservatory, the Gyumri branch of the Komitas State Conservatory in Yerevan. Their symphony orchestra has reached a new level of excellence thanks to the efforts of musician and director Prof. Aram Badalian, who teaches at the Detmold College of Music in Germany. A violinist who has performed in various symphonic orchestras in Germany, Badalian has been travelling to Armenia at least 3-4 times a year to work with the Gyumri orchestra, with remarkable results.

This year the orchestra was invited to Germany and Austria for a concert tour, under Badalian's artistic direction. In the view of Alexan Ter-Minasyan, Honorary Consul General of Germany in Gyumri, this “is a significant step toward decentralizing cultural life in Armenia, as most cultural events typically take place in Yerevan; and, it could serve as a valuable example and be extended to other areas of culture.”

The tour opened in Vienna on April 24, under project leader and moderator Gayane Mirzoyan, and artistic director Badalian, and featured soloists Arevik Ivanyan (violine), Meruzhan Gevorgyan (Viole), Gayane Mirzoyan (Viola), and Karine Mikayelyan (Soprano). In addition to the Gyumri Conservatory, support for the concert came from the Armenian Apostolic Church community in Austria, the Arme-



Aram Badalian

nian Embassy in Austria, and Armas Shirt.

Badalian had his first violin lesson at age 7 and went on to study at the P. I. Tchaikovsky Conservatory for talented youth in Yerevan. Following graduation, he continued study at the Koninklijk Muziekconservatorium in Brussels with Valery and Igor Oistrakh. In 2004, he was the Artist in Residence at the Queen Elisabeth Music chapel, where he studied with Augustin Dumay and Tatiana Samouil. He concluded his violin education at the State College for Music in Karlsruhe, under Prof. J. Rissin. He graduated with honors in soloist studies in 2018, went on to win several prizes, and played as a soloist with various orchestras. Performing with various ensembles, he has made guest appearances in renowned festivals around the world.



INTERNATIONAL

Catholikos Karekin II Consecrates Belarus Church

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He additionally noted that services would be organized every Sunday, with daily prayers in Armenian potentially organized in the future.

According to the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin, during the consecration ceremony, Karekin II highlighted that relations between Armenians and Belarusians “are anchored on the common values of Christian identity, friendship, traditional perceptions of homeland and family, as well as the precious memories of joint struggles and feats,” while sharing his hope that through Armenians living in Belarus, the ties between the two nations would further strengthen.

He also noted that the construction of the church became possible “thanks to the

goodwill of the authorities of Belarus,” adding that it would bring “new vitality to the national and ecclesiastical life of the community.”

In turn, Belarusian Commissioner for Religions and Nationalities Aliaksandr Rumak told BelTA that Armenians make up the sixth largest ethnicity in Belarus, with a population of over 9,500.

“Belarus is a country of peace and accord. People of different confessions and ethnicities live here. There are no disagreements and contradictions between them,” Rumak said, adding that “our country can be an example for other states, where, as we know, many conflicts start precisely because of religious contradictions.”

In addition to consecrating the church, Karekin II also laid flowers at the Victory



The first Armenian Apostolic Church in Belarus, Gregory the Illuminator's Church. (photo via Public Radio of Armenia)



Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, laying a wreath at the Victory Monument in Minsk, Belarus (photo via social media)

Monument in Minsk, noting that it was a “great honor” for him.

“Belarus endured a difficult trial and suffered immense losses [in World War II], yet it also made a significant contribution to the victory over fascism. Over 50,000 Armenians participated in the battles on the Belarusian front,” News.by reported Karekin II as saying.

The opening of an Armenian church in Belarus comes amidst steadily deteriorating ties between Armenia and Belarus.

Most notably, in June 2024, Pashinyan declared that no Armenian officials would visit Belarus while Lukashenka was in power, due to the latter's support for Azerbaijan during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Shortly after, Politico published a report based on leaked documents detailing the

alleged supply of advanced military hardware from Belarus to Azerbaijan between 2018 and 2022.

During this period Azerbaijan launched the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and finalized its military victory after Nagorno-Karabakh's surrender in September 2023.

Several other major clashes took place on the Azerbaijan-Armenia border in 2021 and 2022 in which Azerbaijan gained control over 150 square kilometers of territory inside Armenia, according to Yerevan.

Relations between the Armenian government and the Armenian Apostolic Church have also been rocky since Pashinyan came to power in 2018.

(This story was originally published on the news website www.oc-media.org on May 17.)

Russia Sentences Prominent Election Expert to 5 Years in Prison

By Nataliya Vasilyeva

MOSCOW (*New York Times*) — The head of Russia's only independent election watchdog was sentenced on May 14 to five years in prison after being convicted of working with an “undesirable” organization, according to his attorney, charges that rights groups have criticized as politically driven.

Grigory Melkonyants, a co-founder of the Russian election monitoring group Golos, was jailed in 2023 after President Vladimir V. Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine and led a broad crackdown at home. Charged with “organizing the activities of an undesirable organization,” Melkonyants, 44, pleaded not guilty when his trial opened last September.

On May 14, he was convicted in a Moscow court and sentenced to five years in a prison colony, his lawyer, Mikhail Biryukov, told the *New York Times*. Biryukov said he planned to appeal, calling the verdict “politically motivated.”

“Don't worry, I'm not losing hope,” Melkonyants told supporters and the press in the courtroom after the verdict, the independent Russian news outlet Mediazona reported.

Golos, which was founded in 2000 and documented widespread election fraud, was labeled a “foreign agent” by the Russian authorities in 2013. But the charges against Mr. Melkonyants relate to the group's past affiliation with the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations, which the Russian authorities declared “undesir-

able” in 2021 — making any association with it a potential crime. Golos has said it terminated its participation with the association following the decision.

Want to stay updated on what's happening in Russia? Sign up for Your Places: Global Update, and we'll send our latest coverage to your inbox.

The “undesirable” label has been used to outlaw unwanted groups, including NGOs and media organizations, and crack down on dissent. But Melkonyants was apolitical, Roman Udot, a longtime colleague who lives in exile, said.

He noted that while countless civil activists fled Russia following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Mr. Melkonyants insisted on staying put and focusing on his expertise, without taking sides.

Golos — which means “vote” in Russian — documented extensive voting irregularities during the 2011 parliamentary elections. Anger about those violations sparked the biggest protests to date against Mr. Putin's rule and spurred a broader opposition movement led by the late Aleksei A. Navalny.

Leonid Volkov, a close associate of Navalny, on Wednesday condemned the verdict.

“Golos gave rise to a massive election monitoring movement in Russia in 2011, then the protests began which gave Putin quite a scare: So many years have passed — and he still seeks revenge,” he wrote on social media.

After mounting pressure from the Russian authorities, Golos was designated a

foreign agent in 2013. Three years later, Russia's Justice Ministry used the designation to force Golos to shut down, although it restarted under a new legal entity. After the war in Ukraine began, the Russian authorities cracked down harder on the group.

Human rights officials and organizations were quick to condemn Wednesday's verdict as politically driven. Britain's human rights ambassador, Eleanor Sanders, said it served as “another reminder of the Kremlin's repression,” while Norway's Foreign Ministry said it demonstrated the

“continued authoritarian path” in Russia.

Amnesty International — which had listed Melkonyants as a prisoner of conscience — said the verdict was “appalling” and called for the conviction to be quashed.

“Melkonyants has committed no crime — his only ‘offense’ was defending the right to free and fair elections in Russia,” Marie Struthers, the organization's director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, said in a statement. “This is nothing more than a brazen and politically motivated clampdown on peaceful activism.”

Azerbaijani Youth Sentenced to 18 Years For Talking with Armenian Historian

YEREVAN (News.am) — A young man in Azerbaijan on May 20 was sentenced to 18 years in prison for communicating with an Armenian historian.

The trial in the case of Igbal Abilov, who is accused of “high treason and collaboration with Armenian special services,” has concluded, according to Azerbaijani media.

At the final court session, the verdict was read out, according to which the defendant was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

Abilov was arrested by the State Security Service of Azerbaijan in July last year.

According to preliminary data, while residing in a third country, he “carried out the instructions of representatives of Armenian special services and participated in activities aimed at inciting interethnic hostility in Azerbaijan.”

The role of the “Armenian special services,” however, was played by an Armenian historian. During the court hearing to select a preventive measure, Abilov's secret Skype conversations with Garnik Asatryan — head of the Faculty of Iranian Studies at Yerevan State University and Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University — were made public.



INTERNATIONAL

Azerbaijan: ‘Great Return’ Numbers Not Looking So Good

There’s something funny about the numbers involved in Azerbaijan’s “Great Return.”

An item published May 15 by the government-connected outlet Caliber.az examines the repatriation process of Azerbaijani internally displaced persons (IDPs) to territories reconquered by Baku during the Second Karabakh War.

The article states that as of the start of May, the population of Nagorno-Karabakh and the East Zangezur region, territories long occupied by Armenian forces, stood at almost 43,000. The vast majority, over 28,000, were classified as temporary residents involved in reconstructing infrastructure and building new housing stock to accommodate tens of thousands of expected returnees. There are also 1,150 students at educational institutions in the region.

The report adds that 13,745 individuals who could be counted as IDPs have returned to the regions. That total marks a sharp jump in the repatriation pace from

late 2024, when officials pegged the returnee number at about 8,000.

A decree issued by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and adopted in late 2021 established a reconstruction plans for the Karabakh and East Zangezur “economic zones” that included a repatriation program, dubbed the “Great Return.” The first phase of the repatriation plan set of goal of accommodating 140,000 IDPs by the end of 2026.

It would seem, given the Caliber-reported numbers, the government is going to be challenged to meet that target.

But that’s only part of the story.

Azerbaijan’s repatriation figures don’t align with figures published by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council on overall IDP numbers. Data published by the center indicates that Azerbaijan’s overall number of IDPs has actually risen slightly over the past four years.

The center’s latest report on global in-

ternal displacement fixes the number of Azerbaijani IDPs at 658,000 in 2024, most of whom were forced to leave their homes during the decades-long struggle over Karabakh. That total is marginally higher than the 655,000 IDPs recorded in Azerbaijan in the center’s report on 2021 IDP totals. The reports are based on government-reported numbers, according to IDMC.

In a 2019 fact sheet on Azerbaijan, IDMC put the overall number of IDPs in the country at 651,458, divided roughly evenly into two categories: those with “outstanding” housing needs and those “reported by the government as having been relocated to temporary housing.”

Regardless of the discrepancies in IDP numbers and trends, the Azerbaijani state is spending heavily on developing the territories. The reconstruction and “Great Return” program initially envisioned expenditures of 32 billion manats (roughly \$18 billion). Over the past four years, the government has allocated about \$10.3 billion

for reconstruction and repatriation.

It’s important to note that after completing the reconquest of Armenian-held areas in September 2023, Azerbaijani forces pressured Armenian residents to leave in what some watchdog groups have characterized as ethnic cleansing. Roughly 100,000 Armenians became refugees, most of them going to Armenia proper.

An International Court of Justice ruling issued in late 2023 called on Azerbaijan to “refrain from taking any actions directly or indirectly aimed at or having the effect of ... preventing the safe and expeditious return to their homes of [Armenians] displaced” following the end of the Second Karabakh War. So far, no Armenian refugees have been documented as returning to Karabakh, and many now residing in Armenia are skeptical that they will ever return to their homeland.

(This article originally appeared on the website www.Eurasianet.org on May 16.)

Moscow Outraged by Armenian Official’s ‘Pro-Nazi’ Comments

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The Russian ambassador in Yerevan on Friday, May 16, strongly condemned a senior Armenian official for claiming that Nazi Germany planned to create a “united Armenia” in case of defeating the Soviet Union in the Second World War.

Artsrun Hovannisyan, who holds a high-level position at Armenia’s main military academy and is known as a supporter of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, made the claims in a May 9 interview with state television timed to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the Soviet victory in the war.

Hovannisyan described as a “myth” Armenian and Russian historians’ dominant view that Turkey would have invaded Soviet Armenia and liquidated it had the Germans prevailed in the 1942-1943 Battle of Stalingrad. He said Adolf Hitler’s army itself would have occupied not only the entire South Caucasus but also eastern Turkey and restored a “united and historical Armenia.”

Armenian Nazi collaborators hoped to facilitate the realization of that “program,” said Hovannisyan. He offered no proof of his claims that caused outrage among Armenian opposition politicians and historians.

Speaking in the Armenian parliament

on Monday, May 19, a senior lawmaker from the main opposition Hayastan alliance, Artsvik Minasyan, accused Hovannisyan of “distorting the whole history.” Minasyan demanded a criminal investigation into the scandalous comments which he said are designed to “justify Nazi Germany and Hitler’s regime that committed crimes against humanity.”

Russian Ambassador Sergei Kopyrkin added his voice to the condemnations in an open letter to Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan. He said Hovannisyan’s “historically false and blasphemous statements” are an attempt to “desecrate the memory of our heroic ancestors.”

“It was especially painful to hear such statements from a person who currently heads the Command and Staff Institute of the Military Academy of the Armenian Ministry of Defense, which bears the name of a famous commander of the Great Patriotic War, twice Hero of the Soviet Union Marshal [Ivan] Bagramyan,” said Kopyrkin.

Hovannisyan earned notoriety in Armenia during the 2020 war with Azerbaijan when he worked as Defense Ministry spokesman and held news briefings on a virtually daily basis. He for weeks denied serious territorial losses and other military setbacks suffered by Armenian forces.

The scale of those losses became known only after the six-week hostilities were stopped by a Russian-brokered ceasefire.

Nevertheless, Hovannisyan was subsequently promoted to the rank of colonel and appointed to his current post. Unlike other senior military officials, he has openly supported and promoted Pashinyan’s policies on social media.

The Armenian government has not publicly commented on Hovannisyan’s comments aired just hours after Pashinyan attended a Russian military parade in Moscow dedicated to the Soviet victory anniversary. Opposition leaders as well as pundits critical of the government believe that the comments were ordered by Pashinyan as part of his efforts to weaken

Russian presence in Armenia and reorient his country towards the West.

The Second World War victory anniversary has remained a public holiday in Armenia since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Some 320,000 residents of Soviet Armenia, then a republic of just 1.3 million people, were drafted to the Soviet army during the bloodiest war in the history of mankind. The total number of its ethnic Armenian participants from various Soviet republics is estimated at more than 500,000. About half of them were killed in action.

More than 100 Armenian soldiers of the Red Army received the highest state award, the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Armenian-Russian Humanitarian Response Center Hosts Joint Rescue Drills

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — International demonstration exercises were held at the Armenian-Russian Humanitarian Response Center in Balashovit to mark its 10th anniversary, on May 20. As part of the event, an exhibition of fire-fighting and rescue equipment was also organized.

Russia’s Deputy Minister of Emergency Situations, Vyacheslav Butko, toured the center’s logistical and technological infrastructure alongside the head of Armenia’s Rescue Service, Kamo Tsutsulyan. They also spoke with staff from the operational management unit and representatives of rescue divisions, Armenpress reported.

“The Armenian-Russian Humanitarian Response Center is fully equipped with all necessary technical and technological

tools, offering truly high-level capabilities. It plays a crucial role in enhancing the skills of Armenian rescuers. After personnel recruitment, structured training is carried out, some of which takes place at the center itself. The professionals trained here are highly experienced,” said Kamo Tsutsulyan.

Vyacheslav Butko also shared his views, emphasizing that while the center has only been active for ten years, the results are remarkable—in terms of lives saved, the scale of humanitarian aid delivered, and the quality of trained specialists.

In addition to Armenian and Russian personnel, representatives from 12 other countries that are part of the International Civil Defense Organization participated in the exercises.



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Community News

NY Governor Hochul Proclaims April 24 Armenian Remembrance Day At Armenian Bar Association's Public Servants Dinner

NEW YORK — The Armenian Bar Association hosted its annual Public Servants Dinner on April 30 at the Yale Club of New York City, bringing together distinguished members of the legal, governmental, and Armenian-American communities. The evening celebrated public service and two outstanding public servants whose careers exemplify dedication to public good and the preservation of democratic ideals: Governor Kathy Hochul, the 57th governor of New York, and Ken Khachigian, the senior advisor and chief speechwriter to President Ronald Reagan.



Honoree Ken Khachigian, at far right, holding his award, with from left, Souren Israelyan, Richard Hartunian and Lucy Varpetian

Frank Caruso, president of the Association of the Supreme Court Justices of the State of New York, and Deborah H. Karalunas, administrative judge of the New York State (NYS) Fifth Judicial District and a former honoree of the Public Servants Dinner, gracefully guided the event as the masters of ceremonies. They are both descendants of survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

In her opening statement, Karalunas noted: "We are in unprecedented times. The future of worldwide democracies is challenged. Assault on the judiciary, the rule of law, and the administration of justice are at an all-time high. But even in the midst of these tumultuous times, we have much to celebrate. Tonight, we tear down the walls that divide us, and we stand united as one body sharing history, culture, food, laughter, faith, and hope. Yes, hope. Because hope is alive, and hope always wins."

Lucy Varpetian, the chair of the Armenian Bar Association, delivered the welcoming remarks, recognizing Hochul "as the trailblazer and the first woman to lead the State of New York, with her unwavering commitment to equity and justice, particularly for immigrant and minority communities which resonates deeply with the mission of the Armenian Bar Association," and Khachigian who "has shaped moments of national consequence with conviction and vision, and in doing so he has elevated the Armenian voice with accuracy, dignity, and strength."

see PROCLAMATION, page 11



From Left: Sarkis Barkhoudarian, Daniel Sahakian, Nune Avetisyan, Laura Atoian, and Councilman Adrin Nazarian. (Karine Armen photo)

Salmast Heritage Group Celebrates Centennial

By Karine Armen

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GLENDAL — On May 1, the Salmast Heritage Association (SHA) celebrated its 10th anniversary at the Glen Arden Club. The association honored many Armenians with Salmast heritage, including Los Angeles City Councilman Adrin Nazarian and photojournalist Alexandra Avakian. The association remembered its late Advisor, Khoren Salmassian, and recognized several individuals for their commitment to the organization. They were the SHA founder Sarkis Barkhoudarian, supporter Daniel Sahakian and head of research Marco Brambilla, PhD.

SHA is a non-profit organization whose mission is to research, document and disseminate information about the rich heritage of Salmast, the largest province of Historic Armenia. The association has academic affiliations with UCLA's Narekatsi Chair of Armenian Studies and several prestigious universities, such as the Politecnico di Milano, Yerevan State University, the University of Tabriz, Cambridge University, and the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy.



Karen Israyelyan, PhD, the Consul General of Armenia in Glendale (Karine Armen photo)

event. Israyelyan emphasized the importance of its members' work, and cited it as relevant to all Armenians. He said, "I am proud to have ancestors who emigrated from Salmast's Haftvan village to Artashat, Armenia." He also shared his experiences studying Persian literature and spending two years on a diplomatic mission in Iran.

Prof. Peter Cowe, the Narekatsi Professor of Armenian Studies at UCLA, addressed the assembled in Armenian. He is a researcher, author and an honorary board member of the Salmast Heritage Association. Before inviting Barkhoudarian to the stage, Cowe said of him, "Sarkis Barkhoudarian has spent many years keeping the heritage of Salmast alive, and he has beautiful memories of Salmast."

Atoian presented Barkhoudarian with a commendation from Sen. Adam Schiff and an award honoring him as SHA's founder.

Speaking next was Los Angeles City Councilman Adrin Nazarian. Nazarian was born in Tehran, Iran. He is married and has three children. Nazarian was one of the founding members of the Generation Next mentorship program, which helps young gang members live healthier lifestyles.

see SALMAST, page 8

Joseph Kanimian Re-Elected Board Of Trustees Chair At Ararat Home Of Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES — Ararat Home announced the re-election of Joseph Kanimian, Esq., as chair of the Board of Trustees of Ararat Home of Los Angeles, Inc., which continues to uphold its mission of providing care to the elderly in the Armenian community in southern California.

In his remarks upon re-election, Kanimian expressed his appreciation to the board and the community: "I am grateful for the opportunity once again to chair the board of our beloved Ararat Home. With the collective efforts of all trustees, auxiliary groups, and with community-wide support, the board will work to solidify the foundation of Ararat Home to ensure its bright future."



Joseph Kanimian

He also extended appreciation to the outgoing chair, Sinan Sinanian, acknowledging his leadership during a challenging period. Ararat Home looks ahead with a commitment to excellence in care, growth, and community engagement.

Ararat Home CEO Derik Ghookasian stated: "I congratulate Mr. Joseph Kanimian on his re-election as chairman of the Ararat Home Board of Trustees for a third term." He expressed his sincere appreciation for Kanimian's unwavering dedication and hard work for the benefit of the organization.

Ghookasian also extended his gratitude to Sinanian for his service and leadership over the past three years at the helm of the organization.

Sinianian, in turn, stated: "Serving on the Ararat Home Board since 1986 — and as chair for the past three years — has been an incredibly meaningful and fulfilling experience. It's been an honor to support the Home's mission of compassionate care and cultural preservation. I'm proud of what we've achieved together and have every confidence that the Home will continue to flourish under Joseph Kanimian's capable leadership."



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Genocide Commemoration Takes Place in Providence, R.I. With Prof. Henry C. Theriault and Ani Avetyan

PROVIDENCE — On Sunday, April 27, the Armenian Martyrs’ Memorial Committee of Rhode Island commemorated the 110th Anniversary of the 1915 Armenian Genocide at the Martyrs’ Monument, North Burial Ground.

A service in Remembrance of the Holy Martyrs was held where a large procession commenced with flag bearers, clergy, invited guests, and wreath presenters surrounded by able-bodied honor guards from the Armenian Masonic Degree Team, Home-netmen Scouts, and Knights of Vartan Arax Tahlij.

A beautiful hymn was sung by choir

Armenian Church, and Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church.

It began with “The Lord’s Prayer” (“Hayr Mer”) being recited by the clergy and all those present; readings from St. Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews and the Holy Gospel according to St. John; the Litany of The Saints; and concluded with the singing of “The Lord’s Prayer” by the choir and congregation. In addition, soloist Joanne Mouradjian sang a beautiful rendition of *Hrashatsan Bagootsmamp* to the Holy Martyrs.

Brett Smiley, the 39th mayor of Providence, welcomed the community to Providence, where the Martyrs’ Monument standing 29 feet tall is located. Dr. Henry C. Theriault and Ani Avetyan served as keynote speakers providing diverse perspectives but a consistent message to the attentive audience. Each delivered a sad commentary on the current affairs in Armenia; Avetyan spoke of the Syunik Region where Azerbaijan and Turkey have desires of taking

over more territories. Theriault is associate provost at Worcester State University (WSU). He coordinated WSU’s Human Rights Center from 1999 to 2007. With a background in radical social and political as well as continental philosophy, he researches genocide denial, genocide prevention, post-genocide victim-perpetrator relations, reparations, and mass violence against women and girls.



Prof. Henry C. Theriault

Avetyan is a senior news anchor at Alpha News, a leading Pan-Armenian channel, where she focuses on critical issues affecting Armenia, including the occupation of Artsakh, the denial of the Armenian Genocide, and the foreign policies of Turkey and Azerbaijan. Her special project, “The Real Turkey,” delves into the complexities of Turkey’s political landscape and its historical and contemporary policies, emphasizing that Turkey and Azerbaijan are not invincible forces.

The advice given by both Theriault and Avetyan was to continue to tell the story of the 1915 Armenian Genocide with a reminder of history repeating itself with the 2023 Ethnic Cleansing of Armenians in Artsakh and even today in the Syunik Region.

Following the guest speakers and much to the delight of the audience of approximate-

ly 300, the young students of the Saints Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church and Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church Armenian school performed, singing *Hayastan* under the able direction of Director Raffi Rachdouni accompanied by Konstantin Petrossian. Armenians continue to live through their faith, culture, and long-standing traditions, but in this case, the talented voices of our precious youth shined! Next, Pauline Getzoyan, co-chair of the RI Branch of the Genocide Education Project, presented the Genocide Educator of the Year. This year’s recipient was Jennifer Sapolsky of Barrington High School, who teaches a Genocide elective class where one of her focal points is the Armenian Genocide. There were a few elected officials invited to speak at the Commemoration, including Gov. Dan McKee, Sen. Jack Reed; and RI Senate Majority Whip David Tikoian.



Ani Avetyan

members from the three local Armenian churches under the direction of Konstantin Petrossian. Officiating clergy Rev. Kapriel Nazarian, Rev. Kapriel Mouradjian, Rev. Nigoghos Aznavourian, Rev. Dr. Ara Heghinian and Rev. Hagop Manjelian conducted a service for the Holy Martyrs with the able assistance of deacons and service participants from the Armenian Evangelical Church, Saints Sahag and Mesrob

Salmast Heritage Group Celebrates Centennial

SALMAST, from page 7

Inspired by Cowe’s remarks in Armenian, Nazarian spoke in Armenian. He said, “Armenians have dispersed all over the world due to the Genocide and other wars. But we have a strong community in Los Angeles.” He continued, “We need to be more organized and politically stronger.”



Professor Peter Cowe of Armenian Studies at UCLA spoke in Armenian (Karine Armen photo)

Nazarian presented certificates from the City of Los Angeles to SHA members and all the honorees. In turn, he received a certificate of commendation from Schiff and an award for his dedication to public service.

Attendees then watched a video clip from *National Geographic* photojournalist Alexandra Avakian, of her pilgrimage to Haftvan and heard her express love for her Salmast

roots. Her father was filmmaker Aram Avakian. Avakian lives in Washington, D.C., and was unable to attend the event.

Members of the SHA expressed their appreciation for Daniel Sahakian’s decade-long support with a plaque and commendation from Schiff. Sahakian played a pivotal role in his plans to establish modern industrial startups in 20th-century Iran and is dedicated to philanthropy and education at home and in Armenia.

Marco Brambilla was honored for his ten years of commitment and unwavering willingness to advance all aspects of research, documentation, and dissemination.

Salmast was also represent in various artistic forms. Watercolors by the late Khoren Salmassian’s watercolors were on display while his granddaughter, Emma Khodadadi, played the guitar in his memory. In addition, Hasmik Harutunyan sang two songs by Komitas.

Nune Avetisyan read a passage from Salmast’s native son’s Raffi’s *Khachagoghi Hishatarakaneh* and recited poems by Gevork Emin. She said, “I am proud to be part of this excellent organization. Keep up the great work.”

The program finale was a slide show about the organization presented by Laura Atoian. She was joined by Dr. Garni Barkhoudarian, who discussed awareness of one’s cultural background and called for the community’s support for SHA’s future steps. A reception followed.

For more information about the group, visit <https://salmastheritage.org/>

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church ‘Honoring Our Nonagenarian Members’

A special note: Alice Vartanian, a beloved mother, grandmother and great grandmother, is the mother of Christine Vartanian Datian, a longtime contributor to the Armenian Mirror-Spectator. In May, Alice celebrated her 96th birthday in Fresno with her family and friends. Alice is a native of Lowell, MA, and the daughter of the late Levon and Peppy Sarkisian of Adana, Turkey.

FRESNO — “The theme for the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church Ladies’ Guild February luncheon was ‘Honoring Our Nonagenarian Members.’ It was a special gathering to honor our beloved members who are 90 years old or older,” said Sophia Mekhitarian, chair lady of the event.

“Upon doing some research, we discovered we have 12 current members who have reached 90-plus years, also known as nonagenarians. It seemed fitting to invite these ladies and their families to our luncheon to celebrate their outstanding contributions to our church, and to thank them for their legacy that is being carried on by the next generations.”

“Families submitted short biographies and photographs of the honored guests and a keepsake program booklet was created. As the honorees arrived, each received beautiful corsages. After a social hour of California wines and delicious mezze, 94 attendees were welcomed by chairwoman Janet Williams. The Very Rev. Ashod Khachadourian led the group in a prayer and extended his congratulations to each of the honorees. Vocalist Hratch Gaydzagian serenaded the audience during the lunch served by our youngest members.”

“Following the lunch, chair lady Sophia spoke of the importance of this special acknowledgment and gave each honoree an



From left to right Gladys Melikian, Hasmig Aronian, Anoush Chamlian, Alice Michigian, Briske Barsamian, Jessie Rizzi, Iris Sahatdjian, and Alice Vartanian. Not present were Vars Gaston, Marian Habib, Queenie Marsoobian, and Jessy Shahbazian.

opportunity to say a few words of wisdom and advice. The afternoon concluded with the serving of a congratulatory cake and more socializing. It was an unforgettable event for all, and we were honored to be a part of this exclusive celebration, a first of its kind.”

“The luncheon committee thanks our dedicated staff, volunteer photographer Alain Ekmalian, and all Guild members not on the committee, as well as the children and grandchildren of the honorees for their help and cooperation in making this a successful and memorable event,” added Williams.

“The Ladies’ Auxiliary was organized in

1914, the year the new church was built. This supporting membership of 68 young ladies was dedicated to the church in all areas — visiting the ill and shut-ins, and was the only major fundraiser for many years. They taught the Armenian language classes on Saturdays to all age students. These pioneer members had a significant role in church Christian life. In later years, these senior members were responsible for preparation and serving the memorial (hokejosh) luncheons.”

“The Trinity Guild was formed in 1949 with the goal of improving Sunday School attendance. The Holy Trinity Ladies’ Guild was formed in 2011 as a result of combining the Ladies’ Auxiliary and Trinity Guild. The purpose and objectives of the Ladies’ Guild are to promote and perpetuate the Armenian Apostolic faith and to encourage all members of the church and its community

and Bazaar.”

Membership is open to anyone who is 18 years of age or older and a dues-paying member of Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church. Ladies’ Guild membership dues are \$25 a year. Monthly meetings are on the first Tuesday of each month, with no meetings held in July and August. April through October are dinner meetings and November through March are lunch meetings.

The Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church of Fresno is the oldest Armenian Apostolic church in the Western United States. The first Holy Mass-Badarak was officiated by Rev. Aharon Melconian in 1895. The church is registered as a National Historic Site in downtown Fresno. The church was added to the National Register of Historic Places on July 31, 1986. It is currently one of the six Armenian churches in the Fresno area. See: <https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/86002097>

Historical significance

The Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church was the first church built in the tradition of Armenian church architecture in the United States. It additionally is the first designed by an Armenian architect, Lawrence Karekin Cone (Condrajian). Cone was Fresno’s first Armenian architect. Although there are older churches in the United States used for Armenian services, these facilities either were existing church structures not built for Armenians, or built by Armenians with no reference to Armenian church architecture. It is rumored that during construction, placed within its foundation was a handful of soil from an ancient Armenian church in present-day Turkey — historic Armenia. The church was located at the center of “Old Armenian Town,” a ten to twelve-block area in downtown Fresno. Old Armenian Town is a large area of Downtown Fresno where most Armenian immigrants settled in Fresno. Most of the following historic sites were once part of Old Armenian Town. Some important parts of this area are still standing, such as the

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

Armenian Mirror-Spectator Seeks Summer Intern

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

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

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

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

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



Some of the talented Holy Trinity Ladies’ Guild members who worked to make this event possible

to join and participate in church activities. The Ladies’ Guild offers financial support to the church and its affiliated groups and promotes the social, educational, and spiritual wellbeing of church members.”

“The fundraisers evolved into the Annual Bazaar. Yearly service activities include working for the lunch delivery in the spring, hosting a joint dinner meeting with the Men’s Society, participating in the April 24th Commemoration as well as baking and cooking throughout the year to prepare for the Annual Grape Blessing Picnic

Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church and Valley Lahvosh Baking Company. Because of the war effort in the 1940s, prejudice, and the expansion of the highway system, the Armenian population moved from Old Armenian Town toward the edge of the city or parts of the countryside. A set of houses and buildings stood as a historical site and monument to the legacy of the area. This area remained predominantly Armenian until the mid-1950s, when many Armenians there became financially and socially successful and moved out.

ADVERTISE IN THE MIRROR



COMMUNITY NEWS

Yerevan Clinical Pharmacist Sahakyan Compares American and Armenian Systems

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Visiting pharmacist from Armenia Melanya Sahakyan gave a lecture at the Baikar Center on April 14, providing a comparative look at clinical pharmacy in Armenia and the United States. The talk was sponsored by the Armenian American Pharmacy Association and the venue provided by the Tekeyan Cultural Association.

Sahakyan was completing an eight-week clinical pharmacy observership at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. She previously completed her pharmacy education at Yerevan State Medical University (YSMU), obtaining a bachelor's degree after four years of study and a master's degree after one further year. She also did a two-year clinical pharmacy residency. At present she works at the Yeolyan Hematology and Oncology Center of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia in Yerevan. Sahakyan said that this hospital treats all pediatric cancer and hematology patients in Armenia, as it is the only hematology center in Armenia, and is considered one of the best hospitals in the country.

At this hospital, she is the head of the drug provision department, with responsibilities including the purchase and management of medicines, medical supplies and laboratory reagents.

She noted that her program of study in Armenia provided only theoretical knowledge, without the opportunity to do visitations or be involved in the work of a healthcare team. Moreover, in her current hospital job, while she works closely with doctors and medical teams, she is not directly involved with the healthcare of patients as clinical pharmacy is not yet utilized in Armenia's hospitals.

This means, she said, that prescription checking, patient counseling, and the administration of medication are not part of



Melanya Sahakyan (photo Aram Arkun)

the burden on Armenian doctors and nurses. (On recent attempts to reform nursing practices in Armenia, see "Winchester Hospital Trains Armenian Nurses as Part of Healthcare Reform," Mirror-Spectator, May 8, 2025.)

She ascribed this situation to the current education system for pharmacists, who lack practical training. She said that the low level of cooperation with doctors is because they do not trust the pharmacists, declaring: "I don't blame them, because we don't have enough education [in clinical practice]." In addition, the government does not require the presence of clinical pharmacists in hospitals for the latter to obtain their licensing.

The lack of this appropriate education means that there is no demand from hospitals for students in this field, and students consequently are not interested in studying

In the 5 years before the creation of the Meliksetyan Foundation, there were only 10 students of clinical pharmacy. After its establishment, Sahakyan said, in part due to its giving scholarships and working with students, the number in the next four years jumped to 22 students.

More than 41 million drams (\$106,100) was invested in education and research in addition to the scholarships and tuition it provided, and it sponsored professional training abroad. The foundation conducted large-scale research to identify the prospects for the development of clinical pharmacy in Armenia.

Though requiring 7 years of study, Sahakyan said, the salary for clinical pharmacists is not very high, making it an unattractive field. In 2020, she said that when she was accepted into her residency program, before the Artsakh war, she was the only student working in a hospital who had relations with the physicians' team. She wanted to continue learning and saw how doctors would go abroad to get training. She looked for programs in cancer hospitals and applied to Dana-Farber, with little hope it would accept her as an observer.

The Meliksetyan Foundation stepped in and succeeded in establishing a connection with Houry Leblebjian, senior manager of Clinical Pharmacy Services at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. Last year, the Meliksetyan Foundation director visited the United States, Sahakyan said, and helped make the observership possible.

She saw at Dana-Farber that all pharmacists are actively integrated into interdisciplinary care teams and contribute to clinical decision-making. With oncological expertise, they review and manage chemotherapy regimes, assess potential drug interactions, and ensure treatment adherence. They provide comprehensive counseling to educate patients on oral chemotherapy, supportive care measures, side effects, and medication safety, and collaborate with the medication safety team to evaluate and improve practices.

Pharmacists, she continued, play an essential role in multidisciplinary rounds, offering expertise on pharmacotherapy decisions. They have real-time access to patient records, lab results, and imaging, which allows them to make informed, evidence-based decisions. They are also actively involved in research, protocol development and safety initiatives.

All this is very different from the situation in Armenia. Consequently, Sahakyan proposed that Armenian pharmacy education be reformed to include clinical training, and international observerships be made available, in part through support from organizations like the Meliksetyan Foundation. To do this, awareness must be raised among healthcare leaders in Armenia, she said.



Melanya Sahakyan (photo Aram Arkun)

When she returns to Armenia, Sahakyan said she will share what she learned at Dana-Farber, and support the next generation of pharmacists through teaching, guidance and real-world exposure. She will work towards the gradual implementation of clinical pharmacy roles in selected departments and attempt to promote international partnerships to keep growing and sharing best practices.

Sahakyan thanked Sossy Yogurtian and her family for hosting her in Boston; the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for providing a travel grant, the Armenian American Medical Association for an additional financial contribution, the Armenian American Pharmacy Association for organizing this presentation, and Houry Leblebjian for all her help.

She took a series of questions from the audience and revealed further issues in the utilization of prescriptions in hospitals in Armenia at present.

To learn more about the work of the Vahe Meliksetyan Foundation see <https://meliksetyan.org/>.



Pharmacists, doctors and other guests with Melanya Sahakyan (photo Aram Arkun)

the pharmacist's role. Instead, the functions of clinical pharmacists are mostly performed by doctors and nurses, while some functions are not performed at all, Sahakyan observed. For example, chemotherapy preparation is carried out by nurses, she said, often without appropriate safety measures or specialized training, which increases the possibility of errors. The fact that nurse practitioners and physician assistants also do not exist in Armenia increases

clinical pharmacy in the university.

In an attempt to rectify this situation and advance clinical pharmacy in Armenia, the Vahe Meliksetyan Foundation was founded in 2021 by Sargis Meliksetyan and was registered in the US the following year. It attempts to fulfill the professional vision of Sargis's brother, Vahe, a clinical pharmacist, scientist and YSMU lecturer, who died in the 2020 Artsakh war.

There has been some degree of progress.



COMMUNITY NEWS

NY Governor Hochul Proclaims April 24 Armenian Remembrance Day

PROCLAMATION, from page 7

Domenick Napoletano, the president of New York State Bar Association, reminded the audience “how the nations of – Armenia and Italy – have been bounded together by threads of history, spirit, and shared civilization.”

Robert H. Tembeckjian, the administrator and counsel to the NYS Commission on Judicial Conduct, a former honoree of the Public Servants Dinner, delivered remarks on Public Service, stressing the significance of independence of the judicial branch. “[O]ur *system* of checks and balances is fragile, and to endure, it requires respect *by* each branch of government *for* each branch of government. When that respect is abandoned, and one branch impetuously tramples another, we risk the end of the great American Experiment – the dream that inspired so many of our ancestors to risk everything to get here.”

Caruso introduced the honoree, the first woman governor of the State of New York: “I submit to you that Kathy Hochul embodies the Armenian spirit. . . . Kathy Hochul has never turned her back or closed doors to those in need.”

In her recognition speech, Hochul said:



Governor Kathy Hochul at far right holding proclamation of April 25, 2025 as Armenian Remembrance Day, with Souren Israelyan, Lucy Varpetian and Frank Caruso

“You cannot forget what happened 110 years ago, you cannot forget that, because if you forget it, we are doomed to repeat it. And those signs are out there. Those winds are blowing. The ones we felt could never resurface again. And, yet they are here. If you have ever called to stand up to do what is right, it is this moment now.” She announced a “call to action” to protect the rule of law, independence of judiciary, and

immigrants. “We are judged by this moment now.” Hochul issued a proclamation declaring April 24, 2025 as the Armenian Remembrance Day in the State of New York.

Richard S. Hartunian, former US Attorney for the Northern District of New York, and a prior honoree of the Public Servants Dinner, introduced Khachigian, “whose personal and professional journey really reflects the best of the Armenian American experience. It is no exaggeration to say that his remarkable career and contributions helped to shape the course of the American political history.”

In his recognition speech, Khachigian recounted how words, books, radio and music had played role in his upbringing and how they helped “contribute to changes in our political, economic, and cultural landscape.” Quoting William Saroyan, he said that “the soul, which makes me write, is Armenian. This means, I am an Armenian writer and deeply love the honor of being a part of the family of Armenian writers.”

“Writing, communication and books have been in the soul of the Armenian culture through the millennia. Networks of writing, education and books have always bound our people together.”

The closing remarks were delivered by Claire Chadirjian Cecchi, US District Court Judge for District of New Jersey, and a pri-

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Governor Kathy Hochul, right, receives framed award from Souren Israelian of the Armenian Bar Association

or honoree of the Public Servants Dinner. She told the story of her grandparents, the survivors of the Armenian Genocide, who had worked with the determination “to better themselves, their communities and help build the country.” “My story is not a new one, it belongs to all of you, to every immigrant family in the United States. It is a story of hope, determination, hard work, resilience and love.”

The musical performance was by Joel A. Martin.

The annual Public Servants Dinner continues to be a cornerstone of its mission: To honor exemplary public service and to strengthen the enduring ties between the Armenian-American community and the principles of American democracy.



NYS proclamation of April 25, 2025 as Armenian Remembrance Day



COMMUNITY NEWS

Lt. Gergerian Wants to Get to the Root of the Problem

By Araz Havan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WINTHROP, Mass. — Lt. Sarko Gergerian is driven by a singular goal: to take care of people. In his 15 years of service with the Winthrop Police Department, Gergerian's commitment to his community is based on being proactive, rather than reactive. Currently, he is the most senior-ranking lieutenant.

"I distinctly remember thinking how I would like to get close to an acute emergency and be able to lend a helping hand when it was actually happening, not afterwards," he said in a recent interview, remembering his mindset years before joining law enforcement.

This was the case even when he was a college student studying philosophy, psychology, and religion at Northeastern. When it was time to look for a co-op work assignment which is a hallmark of Northeastern, Gergerian told his co-op advisor that he wanted to work as security in the Boston nightlife scene.

"This is what I'm compelled to do, I want to be around humans and keep people safe," he told his advisor. That decision led to a decade-long journey in nightlife and safety, and the progression for Gergerian to eventually join law enforcement was a natural one.

Initially, when he was a patrol officer with the Winthrop Police Department, Gergerian noticed a pattern as people called 911 for help. Whether the calls were for drug related reasons, overdoses, well-being checks, mental health challenges, or other stressors, Gergerian wanted to know more about the root cause of the calls rather than treat the symptoms.

"You see this month after month after month. And what are we doing with this information from the dispatch logs, other than responding to the emergency and handling the incident? If we know that 'Joe' is suffering from depression and became suicidal, we show up and make sure he doesn't harm himself or others, drive him to the hospital, 'Joe' is going to come back," said Gergerian.

"What a missed opportunity for the police to not go back, meet 'Joe,' check in on him, see if there's anything missing that he needs to be calm and stay well and make sure he gets it."

As part of his plan to support his community, Gergerian investigated the reasons behind why people needed to call the police.

"The reaction at first, over 10 years ago, was disinterested. They didn't know what I was doing, and they didn't seem to care. It didn't impact anyone other than me. I had the Police Chief's blessing to search for, find, and connect on a heart level with anyone I flagged in the police data set (dispatch logs and police reports) who warranted follow-up to have an honest discussion with. I would do this during my patrol shift."

"I'm not investigating to discover a crime to take a bad person to court," Gergerian adds. Instead, a primary focus is to "slow down to finding a community member, getting them to trust me, and getting them to open up so that I could help them."

This personal approach eventually evolved into Winthrop's Community and Law Enforcement Assisted Recovery (CLEAR) Team. Gergerian's initiative uses the information from dispatch logs and incident reports to proactively reach out to affected community members and connect them with resources that can help. The CLEAR program involves a network of community resources, recovery coaches, social workers, resource navigators, case managers for domestic violence and sexual assault, the Winthrop Police Department, and the Winthrop Public Health Department. Years after Gergerian initially looked into community outreach, the program has grown and evolved.

"We now have officers at the initial emergency call for service getting verbal consent to get the CLEAR Team involved right at the initial call. We have officers putting in their police reports that the person being helped wants the CLEAR Team to follow up. It's important to do something like this for long enough while collecting data to truly see, learn, and adjust."

As Winthrop's first police lieutenant to be assigned concurrently to Public Safety and Public Health, Gergerian sees that bridging police work and public health is a way to respond to the needs of the community.

"We are called to service and protect people," he said. With CLEAR, Gergerian aims to support people who live with mental health or substance use challenges toward recovery and well-being. Instead of making unnecessary

arrests or ineffectively responding to 911 callers, the goal is, ultimately, to be proactive. "We could be helping someone not die and helping someone not get put in a cage," he explained.

A turning point for Gergerian was when he met Dr. Rick Doblin, the founder of the Multidisciplinary Association of Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), at the International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference in Florida in 2018. Doblin was presenting his case on the clinical trials on the efficacy of MDMA assisted therapy to help heal posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"When I saw the findings, I jumped on stage and introduced myself to him. I said, 'my name is Sarko, I'm a police officer and a therapist, and I need to help in any way shape or form that I can.' He invited me in to be trained as an MDMA assisted therapist in the MAPS training protocol," he recalled.

MAPS sponsored clinical trials to explore the potential risks and benefits of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy in chronic PTSD participants. That training led to an invitation to be a part of a federally sanctioned research protocol for Gergerian to actually take MDMA. When he did, he saw that the possible positive outcomes for MDMA-assisted therapy are not accessible for many people who may benefit from it.

He explained, "I realized what people don't have access to, the tragedy connected to it, the injustice connected to it, inappropriateness connected to it."



Lt. Sarko Gergerian

Part of the issue for Gergerian lies in the fact that the drugs used in this research are Schedule I substances. According to the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), "schedule I drugs, substances, or chemicals are defined as drugs with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse."

Gergerian finds that this categorization limits the medicinal potential of a drug like MDMA while drugs that have known addictive and harmful effects are accepted in medical use.

"Schedule I is where MDMA is, but that's not where fentanyl is," he says. For Gergerian, the inconsistencies across the DEA schedules have major effects in many communities. Highly addictive substances such as fentanyl, oxycodone, and methamphetamine can be prescribed and administered to patients, while substances such as cannabis, LSD, and MDMA are not allowed to be "prescribed, dispensed, or administered." Gergerian is not condoning or encouraging people to take addictive drugs, but he understands that is the reality for some people. Community members who are struggling with addiction can benefit from holistic policing, according to Gergerian and the CLEAR program.

"There's a proper and not so proper, a safe and a not so safe way to approach it. It's time for adults to have access, it's time for first responders to have access."

Getting to the root of the cause and getting community members what they need to be better would be more useful than making arrests or other high stakes police situations.

"People who decide to use drugs, they aren't criminals. Self-directed behavior isn't a real crime. This is leading to community police mistrust, high stakes police

and community member interactions, which is leading to trauma, which is leading to explosive situations that we might never have needed to be participating in the first place," he says.

While explosive situations are harmful for community members, Gergerian highlighted another effect: the harm on police and first responders.

He said, "Police action has a consequence on the individual officer. What are we policing? People should have access to whatever they need to be well. Police officers and first responders should have access to whatever they need to be well."

Taking care of the community should also include taking care of the police force, stresses Gergerian. "What comes to mind is moral injury, and the police suicide rate is through the roof. Clinical depression, anxiety, marriages falling apart, officers who pass away 5-10 years after retirement...we could be doing something better."

Gergerian advocates for MDMA-assisted psychotherapy because he experienced first-hand how it could be used in a positive way to help the community at large. He believes that keeping people safe can start by addressing people's emotional needs and a tool like MDMA should not be overlooked. He cites his own physician-monitored MDMA experience as evidence of the possible benefits.

"The impact of generational trauma in my lineage, a common point for Armenians, and the extent to which that has impacted every part of my life, all the way to the point that I felt like I had to continually put myself in more and more dangerous situations to help people. I got to see this in my psyche [with MDMA]. I felt safe within this energetic field of love that was permeating everything, and was able to go there without being overwhelmed. That's the power of MDMA, of psychedelics, to do hard work in the psyche, and come back to baseline reality with a new perspective. It's a gift, and there's nothing easy about it."

Gergerian hopes to speak to the injustice in keeping adults from psychedelic-assisted self-care and change the perception that it is "inappropriate, harmful, and immoral."

"I can extend hope to adults at their wits' end that there are states which have opened up access to life-saving, mystical experience-producing, and nature communing methods, like Oregon and Colorado. I wish Massachusetts had become the third state in the union to offer above-ground access to adults," he added.

Gergerian knows there's not a straightforward path ahead but he hopes to make an impact by being proactive. Through advocating for alternative therapies, increased trust in the community, and recovery-oriented policing, Gergerian shows an optimistic outlook as he continues to combine his beliefs and work. His program, CLEAR, emphasizes that recovery and well-being are something that anyone can achieve.

This line of work can be difficult and controversial, but fortunately for Gergerian, his family continues to be a solid support system. "My wife and kids know everything that I do. My wife has my back in a deep, loving way. My kids know that I believe, what I practice, and why. I'm sure you have heard the phrase, 'know your why?' I know mine. They also know I would expect them to know theirs if they are ever called to go into this territory."

He adds that he is proud to have his family witness his journey so far and to continue seeing his advocacy unfold.

"It was a joy to be able to have them see me do the work because of Michael Pollen's docuseries 'How to Change Your Mind' on Netflix. I am eager to have them see me doing the work in the upcoming documentary by Kerthy Fix and Paul Kloss titled 'Ecstatic.'"

Tellingly, Gergerian prefers the title of Peace Officer. The reimagining of the traditional title brings to mind a more gentle and holistic approach to a profession that has, in recent years, seen negative backlash from the public. Perhaps the efforts with recovery-oriented community policing could lead to increased community peace. Working towards keeping the community safe and healthy, keeping officers and first responders safe and healthy could lead to personal peace. Whatever his own interpretation is, Gergerian's motto remains: "I'm a Peace Officer. I show up to help."

(Gergerian's views are his own, and do not necessarily represent the Winthrop Police Department or the town of Winthrop.)



Arts & Culture

LibraryThing Interviews Author Nancy Kricorian

LibraryThing sat down this month with novelist Nancy Kricorian, whose work explores the experiences of the post-genocide Armenian diaspora. Her debut novel, *Zabelle*, published in 1998, has been translated into seven languages and adapted as a play. Her essays and poems have appeared in journals like the *Los Angeles Review of Books Quarterly*, *Guernica*, *Parnassus*, *Minnesota Review* and the *Mississippi Review*. Kricorian has taught at Barnard, Columbia, Yale and New York University, as well as with Teachers & Writers Collaborative in the New York City Public Schools, and she has been a mentor with We Are Not Numbers. She has been the recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, a Gold Medal from the Writers Union of Armenia, and the Anahid Literary Award. Her newest book, *The Burning Heart of the World*, follows the story of an Armenian family caught up in the Lebanese Civil War, and was recently published by Red Hen Press. Kricorian sat down with Abigail to answer some questions about her new book.

***The Burning Heart of the World* was published to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the Lebanese Civil War and the one hundred and tenth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, events which are central to the book's story. How did the idea for linking these events, and the more recent trauma of 9/11 come to you? What insights can be gained from thinking about these terrible episodes of history in relation to one another?**



Nancy Kricorian (James Schamus photo)

I am interested in the way that mass trauma events inform and shape people's life trajectories, and in the Armenian case the way that the genocide haunts families across generations. That haunting is often a silent or unspoken one, and all the more powerful for being so. In making these connections visible I hope to open spaces for repair and renewal. Sometimes going back to imagine and give shape to our forebears' traumas is also a way of building strength to deal with our present ones.

This new book, and your work as a whole addresses the experiences of the Armenian diaspora, of which see KRIKORIAN, page 15



From left, Harout Chatmajian, Armenak Kurusyan and Talar Zokian in "The Marriage Proposal"

TCA Megerdchian Theatrical Group Presents Chekhov Farce at St. Leon Armenian Church

FAIR LAWN, N.J. — The united effort of St. Leon Armenian Church and the Tekeyan Cultural Association Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group (TCA MMTG) drew close to 300 people to the presentation of Anton Chekhov's comic play, "The Marriage Proposal," directed by Harout Chatmajian.

It was a dinner comedy night which began with a cocktail hour, followed by food and entertainment. Not only was the Abajian Hall packed to capacity, more importantly it was the celebratory mood of the people that was most noticeable.

"There is a strong demand for these cultural/social events and it seems that collaboration between organizations spells success. It is about time we abandon isolationist policies and cooperate," said Vartan Abdo, director of the Armenian Radio Hour of NJ. "The highlight of the evening was a hilarious slide presentation by Professor Harout Chatmajian about the origins and evolution of marriage proposal. From the cavemen to medieval times and to the present, Harout educated us about the various acceptable norms of proposals and the challenges of married life that follows."

"The Marriage Proposal," a short one-act farce, is the story of a young man who comes to propose to his neighbor but they keep on fighting over various topics.

Chatmajian is a veteran actor and director.

Following the performance, Chatmajian commented, "Our idea for 'The Marriage Proposal' dinner theater event was to bring the community together – to create an elegant and friendly atmosphere where people can have drinks, dinner, mingle with friends, and then enjoy a light, funny and entertaining performance. 'The Marriage Proposal' play is a comedic, genius view of people's relationships and behavior. The surprise pre-show about the evolution of marriage and marriage proposals

gave me an opportunity to be creative, entertain and share insights about ancient, traditional and contemporary customs. The event reminded me of the *agoump* atmosphere we used to have back in the Middle East. This was all possible because of the collaboration between the Tekeyan Cultural Association Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group and St. Leon Armenian Church. We hope to bring similar events to the community in the future. As we all witnessed, there is strength in unity and it should be contagious."



"Professor" Harout Chatmajian delivering his lecture on the "evolution of marriage proposals"

Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island Marks 70th Anniversary With Concert

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — The Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island will celebrate its 70th anniversary with a Gala Concert on June 28, at 7 p.m. at the Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson St.

Since its inception, hundreds of volunteers have devoted their time and talent to the Armenian cultural heritage through their music. Their aim is to keep burning the torch of the Armenian spirit and never forget their glorious past. Their contribution to the Armenian heritage in Rhode Island is enormous. In appreciation of their time and devotion, the Chorale is compiling a list of all its members since 1954 to be listed in the concert program. They deserve our thanks and encouragement. Week after week, the Chorale practices under the direction of composer and conductor, Konstantin Petrossian, accompanied by pianist Mari Panosian.

The Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island was founded in 1954, and was first known as the Armenian Community Chorus of RI. Its founder was Rouben Gregorian, conductor, violinist and a professor at Boston Conservatory. Under his leadership, the Armenian Community Chorus reached great heights; its performance at Lincoln Center, New York, where the group sang Armenian Sharagans (hymns) and music from Gomidas, was received with great appreciation. Michael Kroian, a teacher at Warwick Veterans High school, and a graduate of the University of Rhode Island, assisted Gregorian on many occasions. Gregorian continued his services until 1986.

After a hiatus of a few years, the Chorale resumed its activities in 1995 under the direction of Konstantin Petrossian, changing its name to "Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island". Members of the three Armenian churches in the community constitute the roster of the present Chorale. They have performed Sharagans, works of many Armenian composers, and occasionally, American popular tunes upon request.

Artists of renown, such as Lily Chukasian, Lucine Amara, Ara Berberian, and others have performed with the Chorale, accompanied by the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra. Also, a memorable performance of the Anoush Opera with soloists from Armenia was an unforgettable experience.

Petrossian has cultivated Armenian heritage in Rhode Island by bringing Armenian music to the community, engaging well known Armenian soloists, dance groups, and above all, by cultivating the love of music in young children who have performed with the Chorale many times. In addition to its annual gala concerts, the Chorale has sung on Martyrs' Day, Christmas, and other special occasions. In addition to performing in Rhode Island, the Chorale has had invitations to sing in nearby states, sometime joining the local existing choral group.



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



The Art of Armenian & Middle Eastern Cooking’s Sweet Tahini Rolls (Kubez el Tahineh)

LONDON — This recipe is from *Falastin: A Cookbook* by Sami Tamimi and Tara Wigley. Tamimi is the executive chef and founding partner of the <<https://ottolenghi.co.uk/>> Ottolenghi restaurant group, and Tara Wigley, a long-time Yotam Ottolenghi recipe writer. They titled their cookbook, *Falastin* after the Palestinian newspaper that brought diverse people together. The more than 100 recipes celebrate the evolution of Palestinian cuisine, as seen through the lens of Tamimi’s childhood in Jerusalem. They draw from his recent travels with Wigley through the region to visit refugee camps, home kitchens, family farms, and tahini mills.

Falastin is a vision of a cuisine, a culture, and a way of life as experienced by one influential chef. The story of Palestine’s food is really the story of its people. When the events of 1948 forced residents from all regions of Palestine together into one compressed land, recipes that were once closely guarded family secrets were shared and passed between different groups in an effort to ensure that they were not lost forever.

Discover recipes such as “Buttery Rice with Toasted Vermicelli,” “Beet and Feta Galette with Za’atar and Honey,” “Chicken Shawarma Pie,” “Palestinian Bakewell Tart,” “Hassan’s Easy Eggs with Za’atar and Lemon,” “Fish Kofta with Yogurt, Sumac, and Chile,” “Pulled-Lamb Shawarma Sandwich,” and “Labneh Cheesecake with Roasted Apricots, Honey, and Cardamom.”

Tamimi retraces the lineage and evolution of his country’s cuisine, born of its agriculturally optimal geography, its distinct culinary traditions, and Palestinian cooks’ ingenuity and resourcefulness. He covers the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River-East Jerusalem and the West Bank, up north to the Galilee and the coastal cities of Haifa and Akka, inland to Nazareth, and then south to Hebron and the coastal Gaza Strip-recounting his upbringing with eleven siblings and his decision to leave home at seventeen to cook in West Jerusalem, where he met and first worked with Yotam Ottolenghi.

“The journey of these rolls can be traced through Lebanon to Armenia, where kubez el tahineh comes from. They are simple to make, impressive to look at, and loved by all. They’re a particular favorite with kids. Eat them as they are, or sliced and spread with dibs w tahini, the Palestinian equivalent of peanut butter and jam, where creamy tahini is mixed with a little bit of grape or date molasses.”

These rolls are enriched with tahini, an ingredient that works equally well in sweet and savory dishes. They are perfect for snacking on throughout the day or for enjoying at breakfast or brunch time.

INGREDIENTS:

Dough:

- 1 1/2 teaspoons fast-acting dried yeast
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 7 1/2 tablespoons whole milk, lukewarm
- Olive oil, for greasing
- 2 cups plus 6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- Salt
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 egg, lightly beaten

Filling:

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 7 tablespoons tahini

Topping:

- 1 egg yolk, beaten
- 1 tablespoon white sesame seeds
- Essential kit: You will need: a freestanding mixer with a dough hook.

PREPARATION:

First make the dough. Put the yeast, sugar and milk into a small bowl and mix to combine. Set aside for 5 minutes, until it starts to get frothy.

Meanwhile, put the flour and 1/2 teaspoon of salt into the bowl of a freestanding mixer, with the dough hook in place. Mix on a low speed, then slowly pour in the yeast mixture. Add the melted butter and continue to mix for about a minute. Add the egg, then increase the speed to medium and leave for 5 minutes, for the dough to get well kneaded. Using your hands, scrape the dough into a ball: it will be slightly sticky and elastic.

Place it in a lightly oiled bowl, turning it a couple of times so that the dough gets well-greased. Cover bowl with a clean towel and leave to rest in a warm place for about 1 hour, or until almost doubled in size.

Put the sugar and cinnamon for the filling into a small bowl. Mix well to combine, then set aside.

The rolled dough gets spread with the tahini first, then the cinnamon sugar.

The dough is rolled up, then sliced. Each slice is then flattened slightly.

On a lightly floured surface, roll out the dough into a large rectangle, about 50 x 35 cm (approx. 19.7 in x 13.8 in.). Drizzle tahini over the dough, then, using the back of a spoon or a spatula, spread it out evenly, leaving 1 cm clear of tahini at both the shorter ends. Sprinkle the sugar mixture evenly over the tahini and leave for 10 minutes, until the sugar looks all wet. (Note: 1 inch is exactly equal to 2.54 cm in the metric system).

Starting from one of the long sides, roll the dough inwards to form a long, thin sausage. Trim away about 2 cm from each end, then slice the dough into 10 equal pieces: they should each be just over 4 1/2 cm long. Sit each piece upright, so that its cut side is facing upwards, then, using your hands, gently flatten out to form an 8 cm-wide circle. Cover with a damp tea towel and leave to rest for 15 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 325°F.

Transfer each roll of dough to a large parchment-lined baking tray, spaced 2-3 cm apart. Brush all over - just the top and sides, not the base - with the egg yolk, sprinkle with sesame seeds, and bake on the middle shelf of the oven for 18 minutes, or until cooked through and golden. Remove from the oven and set aside for 20 minutes - you don’t want them to be piping hot - then serve. Perfect served with a cup of mint tea or hot black coffee.

Makes 10 rolls.

Authors Sami Tamimi and Tara Wigley

Sami Tamimi was born and raised in Jerusalem and immersed in food since childhood. He started his career as commis-chef in a Jerusalem hotel and worked his way up, through many restaurants and ethnic traditions, to become head chef of Lilith, one of the top restaurants in Tel Aviv in the 1990s. In 2002, he partnered with Noam Bar and Yotam Ottolenghi to set up Ottolenghi in Notting Hill. The company now has four stores and two restaurants, NOPI and ROVI, all in central London. As the executive head chef, Sami is involved in developing and nurturing young kitchen talents and creating new dishes and innovative menus. Alongside Yotam Ottolenghi, Sami Tamimi is the co-author of two bestselling cookbooks, Ottolenghi: The Cookbook and Jerusalem: A Cookbook. The latter has won many awards, including the International Book Award from the James Beard Foundation in 2013, and it has been credited with starting many cookbook clubs. Jerusalem: A Cookbook was also named the best cookbook of the year by the International Assn. of Culinary Professionals in San Francisco in 2013.

Tara Wigley spent a decade working in publishing before going to cooking school in Ireland. She has developed, tested, and written recipes for Ottolenghi’s weekly column in the *Guardian* magazine and monthly *New York Times* columns, as well as for his cookbooks. For *Falastin*, Tara travelled with Tamimi in Palestine and ate her body weight in chickpeas and tahini.

IACP AWARD WINNER * LONGLISTED FOR THE ART OF EATING PRIZE * NAMED ONE OF THE BEST COOKBOOKS OF THE YEAR BY Forbes * Bon Appétit * NPR * San Francisco Chronicle * Food Network * Food & Wine * The Guardian * National Geographic * Smithsonian Magazine * Publishers Weekly * Library Journal

Reviews:

“This is a beautiful book and I want to cook every single recipe in it.”-Nigella Lawson

“Sami Tamimi and Tara Wigley’s beautiful *Falastin* is a love letter to Palestine — its warm and hospitable people and its bright and mouthwatering cuisine. A cookbook should make you dream, it should invite you to an expanding table, and, more important, it should make you drop everything and head straight to the kitchen. This book does all that. One day I hope to visit Sami’s homeland; but until then, with Sami as my host and Tara as my guide, I’ll let the scents and flavors of the Palestinian kitchen take me there as I pull up extra seats at my table to share this colorful and soulful food with family and friends.”-Naz Deravian, author of *Bottom of the Pot*

“A stunning collection of recipes and stories that showcase the best of Palestinian culture. I want to eat everything in this book”-Yasmin Khan, author of *Zaitoun* and *The Saffron Tales*



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ARTS & CULTURE

Kristiina Davidjants

With a Different Perspective on Things

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN–TALLINN — Kristiina Davidjants (born in 1974, Baku) is an Estonian film director and producer and cinema journalist. In 2001, she earned a bachelor's degree in film and video direction (with a specialization in documentary filmmaking) from the Faculty of Cultural Studies at Tallinn Pedagogical University, and in 2023 she received an MFA in TV and Screenwriting. Her siblings — Jaana, Brigitta, and David Davidjants — are also active in the arts.

Kristiina, I remember your film, “The Intimate City,” which was screened at the inaugural Yerevan Film Festival and received the jury’s special prize. Since then, you’ve directed several other films, mainly documentaries. What subjects interest you most in filmmaking?

Probably, the people who don’t fit into the general pattern are the closest theme to me, which makes sense from a filmmaking perspective, since any internal or external conflict is the basis of storytelling. At the moment, I have been working more as a producer, focusing on documentary films, but as a director, my documentary film “Tallinn Is Burning” is expected to be released this fall. It explores punk music and its role in Soviet-era Estonia. Additionally, I am developing a feature film, although it is still too early to say much about it.

My most recent produced documentary, “Art and the Cold War,” follows a similar theme by telling the story of representatives of unofficial art in Tal-

linn and Moscow who, despite the Cold War, tried to express themselves and find a way to Western art enthusiasts. The film’s director, Sandra Jõgeva, comes from a family of artists herself, providing valuable insider insight.

In 2019, your book *Eesti filmi 100 aastat* [100 Years of Estonian Film] was published. How would you describe cinema as a cultural phenomenon in Estonia and its role in Estonian society?

Estonian cinema has gone through different periods. Until the Soviet occupation in 1940, films were made quite actively here, and reading the criticism from that time, it’s quite amusing to realize that the same complaints have persisted over the years: not engaging enough, budget too small, ambitions not matched by execution, and so on. During the Soviet era, we had some brilliant flashes, but the best period has definitely been the last 15-20 years, when the domestic audience has discovered Estonian cinema and our films have also gained widespread international recognition.

As a cinema historian, have you also discussed your own films in this book?

No, there’s no need.

I recall you had a documentary project about Hedwig Büll, the Estonian missionary who assisted Armenians during the Genocide. Has this project come to fruition?

The film is currently on hold but not abandoned. The shooting is completed, and I need to find resources, including mental strength, to finish it.



Your father, Artem Davidjants, was born in Baku. He was a longtime lecturer at Tallinn Pedagogical Institute, leader of the Armenian Cultural Society in Estonia, and chairman of the Estonian Armenian National Society. Could you share about your Armenian heritage and whether your family experienced or was affected by Armenophobia in Azerbaijan?

My sister Brigitta has just published a collection of stories on this topic. I think she should be the next Davidjants to be interviewed.

Your mother, Inge Davidjants, is of Latvian-Estonian origin. What role

does your Armenian background play in this mixed heritage, and how has it influenced your identity?

Any kind of mixed heritage gives a person a different perspective on things — a side glance, so to speak. This can be both a benefit and a drawback. I wouldn’t say that Armenian origin alone has influenced me; it’s all much more complex than that.

Do you currently have any projects related to Armenia?

Not at the moment, but I am open to different ideas. As a producer, I am always on the lookout for interesting stories.

LibraryThing Interviews Nancy Kricorian

KRIKORIAN, from page 13

you are a part. How has your own personal and familial history influenced your storytelling? Are there parts of *The Burning Heart of the World* that are based upon that history?

My first novel, *Zabelle*, was a fictionalized account of my grandmother’s life as a genocide survivor and immigrant bride. My next book, *All the Light There Was*, told the story of someone of my generation growing up in my hometown under the shadow of the unspoken familial and community experience of the Armenian genocide. *All the Light There Was*, which is set in Paris during World War II, went far beyond the scope of my personal and family history in a way that required extensive research, as did *The Burning Heart of the World*, but there are small details in both of those novels that are drawn from personal history as well as different elements of my main characters’ temperaments that are similar to mine.

Your story is told from the perspective of a young person living through these events, but chronicles their effect on multiple generations. Is this significant? Are there things that a youthful perspective allows you to do, that a more mature outlook might not?

I have had a long fascination with the *bildungsroman*, the novel of formation, which in its classical form is the story of

the growth and character development of a young man. In college I took a course on the “female *bildungsroman*” in which we read *The Mill on the Floss* and *Jane Eyre*, among other texts, and learned that the novel of development for women traditionally ended in either death or marriage. In all four of my novels, I write from the point of view of girls as they make their way towards adulthood. With Vera in *The Burning Heart of the World*, I wanted to show the Lebanese Civil War from a young girl’s perspective as she moves through adolescence. I am interested in centering the experience of girls and women in my work, with a particular focus on the way they manage and care for their families in times of great violence.

Did you have to do any research, when writing your book? If so, what were some of the most interesting and/or memorable things you learned?

I want the reader to be immersed from the first page in the time and place I am writing about — to be able to see, smell, and hear the world that the characters inhabit. It takes deep research and knowledge to build that world, and my favorite part of that work is listening to people who lived through the time I’m writing about tell their stories. I collect anecdotes and details in the way that a magpie gathers material to build a nest. So, for *The Burning Heart of the World*, I read over 80 books, both fic-

tion and non-fiction, and interviewed upwards of 40 people. I also made three trips to Beirut so that I could become familiar with the city and the neighborhood that Vera lived in.

Tell us a little bit about your writing process. Do you have a particular place you prefer to write, a specific way of mapping out your story? Does your work as a teacher influence how you write?

My writing process varies from project to project. For the last two novels, I have sat cross-legged in my favorite armchair with my laptop. Sometimes I make up rules for myself — such as I have to write one page a day, or if I’m busy with other commitments, I tell myself I must write for fifteen minutes a day. If I sit down for fifteen minutes, it will often turn into an hour or two, and if it’s only fifteen minutes, the piece I’m working on will stay in the front of my mind as I’m walking the dog or going to the subway. I have not been teaching formal university classes much in the past ten years but have moved to a one-on-one mentoring model that I enjoy a great deal. The careful attention that I pay to my mentees’ writing has made me more attentive to my own.

What is next for you? Are there other books in the works that you can share with us?

I’m currently working on a series of essays about my family that I think will be a memoir in pieces. I have written one essay about my relationship to the Armenian

language and my grandmother that’s called “Language Lessons,” and one about my father’s relationship to motor vehicles called “His Driving Life.” Next up is a piece about my Uncle Leo, who was an amazing character — as a teenager he was the Junior Yo-Yo Champion of New England and for many decades was a guitar player in an Irish wedding band, the only Armenian in the band but quite a rock star in Boston’s Irish community.

Tell us about your library. What’s on your own shelves?

In my study, I have shelves filled with books about Armenian history, culture, and literature. I particularly love and collect books of Armenian folk tales and proverbs. In the bedroom, we have all our novels, memoirs, and literary biographies. There is one shelf devoted to Marcel Proust, and another to Virginia Woolf. Poetry collections, photo and art books, and books about the history of New York City are in the living room.

What have you been reading lately, and what would you recommend to other readers?

I recently read and loved a collection of Etel Adnan’s essays entitled *Voyage, War, Exile*. I’m currently reading my friend Patricia Kaishian’s new book *Forest Euphoria: The Abounding Queerness of Nature*, which blends nature writing with memoir. And for poetry, I recommend Mosab Abu Toha’s beautiful and devastating collection *Forest of Noise*.



ARTS & CULTURE

Books

‘Such Horrors Exist:’ Dora Sakayan’s *Death Marches Past The Front Door*

By Arpi Sarafian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

When Turkey is not held accountable for its perpetration of the 1915 Armenian Genocide and when Azerbaijan, backed by Turkey, enjoys absolute impunity over its systematic destruction of the Armenian cultural and historical heritage in Artsakh — ethnically cleansed of its indigenous Armenian population in a lightning attack in September 2023 after a nine-month-long blockade — it becomes easy to decry, perhaps even to deride, the effort by international teams to monitor the Armenian religious and cultural heritage of Artsakh, or the endeavor to come up with yet another document to “prove” the veracity of the calamity that befell the Armenian people in 1915 at the hands of the Ottoman Turkish State. Nonetheless, providing evidence that would contradict Turkey’s ongoing denial of the Genocide remains extremely important.

Dora Sakayan’s *Death Marches Past The Front Door* (Fresno University Press, 2023) furnishes one such documentation. The book is based on the diary the newly-wed Clara Sigrist-Hilty, a Swiss citizen, kept in the years 1915-1918 she spent in Turkey with her civil engineer husband, Fritz Sigrist-Hilty, contracted to build the Berlin-Baghdad Railway that was to connect Europe with the Persian Gulf. Clara’s diary provides a three-year testimony of the “death marches” the couple witnessed daily from their cottage perched on a steep hillside in Keller, a small Kurdish village in the Amanus Mountains, located in the midst of the deportation routes to the Syrian desert.

“Armenians continually pass by our house,” writes Clara on August 10, 1915. Numerous entries describing the deportations follow: “Columns of deported Armenians,” “Endless successions of deported Armenians,” “The flood of Armenians doesn’t stop,” “We hear now that all Armenians should be gone from Adana.” Clara is increasingly uncomfortable. Her indignation at “the bleak fate of an entire people doomed to destruction” and her “anger at this abominable country” are palpable. On June 16, 1916, she writes: “You feel crushed facing this human misery, and only one thought prevails: Get out from this hideous country!”

Sakayan’s expertise in German — she holds a Doctorate in German Philology from the Moscow Lermontov State University — and her scholarly interests in both German and Armenian Studies — Sakayan has written extensively on the Armenian Genocide — put her in a unique position to decipher the now extinct East German script of Clara’s Diary. It was Sakayan’s passion for the material that enabled her to undertake the painstaking task of revealing the significance of the diary to the world. The meticulously researched *Death Marches Past The Front Door* offers

a wonderful interplay of primary and secondary sources. Sakayan’s details and comments — always generous, always appreciative — never bore.

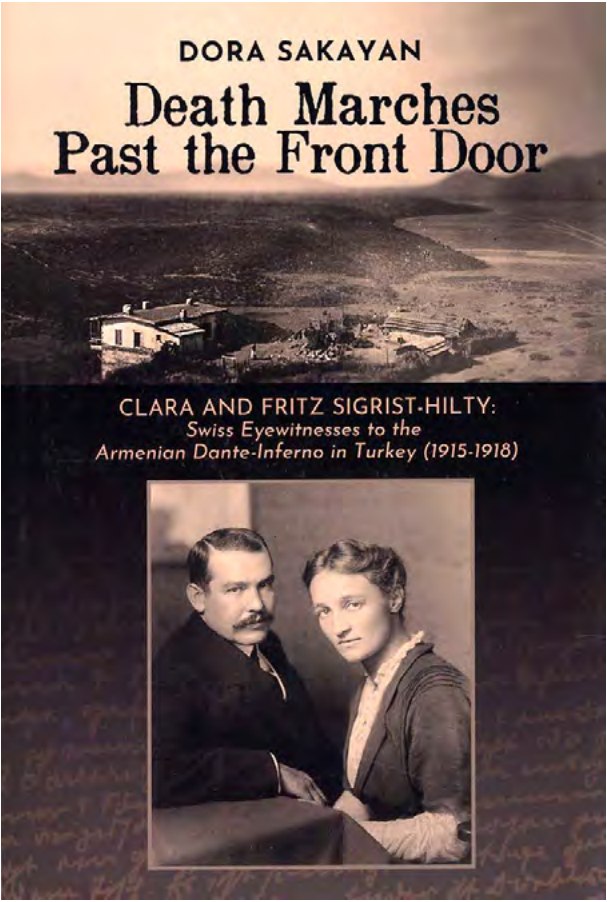
Death Marches Past The Front Door comprises three sections. Each section provides biographical information and a detailed account of the arduous process of bringing the contents of the original manuscripts to their publication. Part I presents Clara’s diary, a day-by-day record of “significant” events — “On a small hill, the Armenian church, which was visible from everywhere, is now a field of rubble. All Armenian houses are deserted” — interspersed with “insignificant” occurrences — the couple’s daily walks up the hill, cultivating the garden, entertaining the many friends they had — and the 15-page Memoir, “Summer 1915,” Clara wrote after she returned to Switzerland.

Part II includes three essays by Fritz about his experiences in Turkey. “Clarli’s innumerable tears and my desperate fears will always be stuck in our memory,” writes the compassionate Fritz who was always in despair over being unable to adequately help his “Armenian Friends,” the workers so indispensable to the construction of the Railway.

Part III offers excerpts from *The Armenian Dante-Inferno*, the 1970 memoir published in Beirut, Lebanon, of Haig(azun) Arman Aramian, Fritz Sigrist-Hilty’s storehouse manager in Kettel. Although written 50 years later, Aramian’s accounts of his “miraculous rescue” by his Swiss masters and of the atrocities he witnessed — “Hundreds of volumes would not suffice to record all the details of the martyrdom suffered by Armenians in the years 1915-1918” — corroborate Clara’s Diary and further confirm it as irrefutable evidence of the cruel reality. Nothing I have read on the Genocide, fiction or nonfiction, has impacted me as profoundly as the “I see,” “I hear,” “We hear of,” “They talk of” of the entries in the Diary.

In October 2016, Sakayan went to Switzerland for a book tour of her *They Drive Them into The Desert* (Limmat Verlag, Zurich), the German translation of the Sigrist-Hilty testimonies. In a letter she circulated on November 5, 2016, titled “100 Years After . . .,” the ecstatic Sakayan describes the “sensational” book launch and her “great reception” in Switzerland as “an expression of the love of the Swiss for all the Armenians in the world.” “Yes, once again I recognized the Swiss as loyal, appreciative, and hospitable people,” she writes.

Sakayan’s book acquires even more significance in the context of the skepticism of traditional historians regarding personal accounts as trusted historical sources. As noted by Dr. Bedross Der Matossian, author of the highly acclaimed *The Horrors of Adana*, at this year’s annual UCLA April 24 Commemorative Lecture, extending the



documentation beyond State archives to include eyewitness accounts, letters, memoirs, diaries gives us insights into the broader truth. It helps us better understand what happened and why it happened. To illustrate, Der Matossian cited the importance of exploring Catholicos of the Greater House of Cilicia, Sahag II Khabayan’s correspondence with Ottoman officials, European diplomats and Armenian leaders as documents that contradict Turkey’s denialist approach to the Genocide. While recognized and respected, the methodology is still to find its place in Armenian Genocide History, averred Der Matossian.

Indeed, Clara’s testimonies of the atrocities, embedded in her recordings of the “blooming magnolia tree,” the “radiant morning,” “wonderful sunset,” or “joy at the many seabirds,” make one ponder *human nature* and the suffering of the world. I see the Diary as a desperate cry to reclaim our *humanity*. “We can no longer look at the refugees passing by . . . You feel crushed facing this *human* misery,” confides Clara (*italics mine*).

In a recent interview on CivilNet, in Yerevan, pioneering Turkish historian Taner Akçam referred to the Armenian Genocide as a “widely established fact.” “It is no longer both sides of the issue with Genocide treated as an opinion,” he affirmed. Which is not to say that the Turkish government has stopped denying the Genocide. “But their language has changed,” noted Akçam.

The voice of truth will ultimately be heard. Remembering is key. Pursuing our efforts is paramount. Sakayan’s probe into the Armenian Genocide from the perspective of the Sigrist-Hilty couple is an important contribution to that effort.

Featured in the book are numerous photographs of Fritz and Clara and of Sakayan and Aramian, photographed with Clara’s extended family during their visits to Switzerland, bring the reader closer to the Swiss couple and add immensely to the book’s appeal.

In Saroyan’s Shadow: The Life and Times of Archie Minasian

By Christopher Atamian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

It’s never easy existing in the shadow of a more famous or accomplished artist, just ask Salieri who labored for years, an accomplished composer who never quite reached his friend and rival Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s brilliance. And if the more famous or talented person in question is your cousin, as William Saroyan was to Archie Minasian, then it may be even more difficult.

In this case all reports seem to point to the contrary: Minasian and Saroyan not only grew up together in Fresno, but they remained lifelong friends. Both jovial and larger-than-life characters, they seemed to revel in each other’s company and success, at least as it has been reported to date. Saroyan did his best to help his cousin, including writing one of the best essays about

Minasian in “The World of Archie Minasian,” where he posits that his self-taught cousin was like the true poets of yore who write from the heart and without having necessarily read or studied much literature before — he is the thing and the purity of his writing and thought, Saroyan asserts, is a rarity.

He was self-taught, in part because necessity would have made it impossible for him to attend school, even had he wanted to. Like most Fresno Armenians at the time, Minasian was born on August 2, 1913 to poor Armenian immigrant parents. He was named Khat-chik after his grandfather who perished immediately following the Hamidian massacres in 1897. His father, Vahan, died when Archie was 6 years old, leaving six children and a wife behind to fend for themselves.

While Saroyan was able to make a good living from his work publishing books and writing plays like “The Time of Your Life,” which won the 1940 Pulitzer

Prize for Drama, Minasian remained in the shadows. Instead, he published occasional pieces in *Ararat* and the *Armenian Weekly* and worked as a house painter his entire life to support his family, which brought him great joy. Many of the topics he wrote about, including nature, human relations and man’s place in the grand scheme of things, as well as his pared down but upbeat, jovial writing style, recall Saroyan as well. Minasian is best remembered as a poet, though he also wrote hymns and some good prose as well.

In “The Celebrated House Painter of Paolo Alto,” an autobiographical short story, Minasian begins with a jubilant description of his children frolicking all around him; the scene could accompany a Norman Rockwell illustration. Then the central theme of the story, and of much of Minasian’s writings takes over: the love of nature and the need for communing with

continued on next page



ARTS & CULTURE

In Saroyan's Shadow: The Life And Times of Archie Minasian

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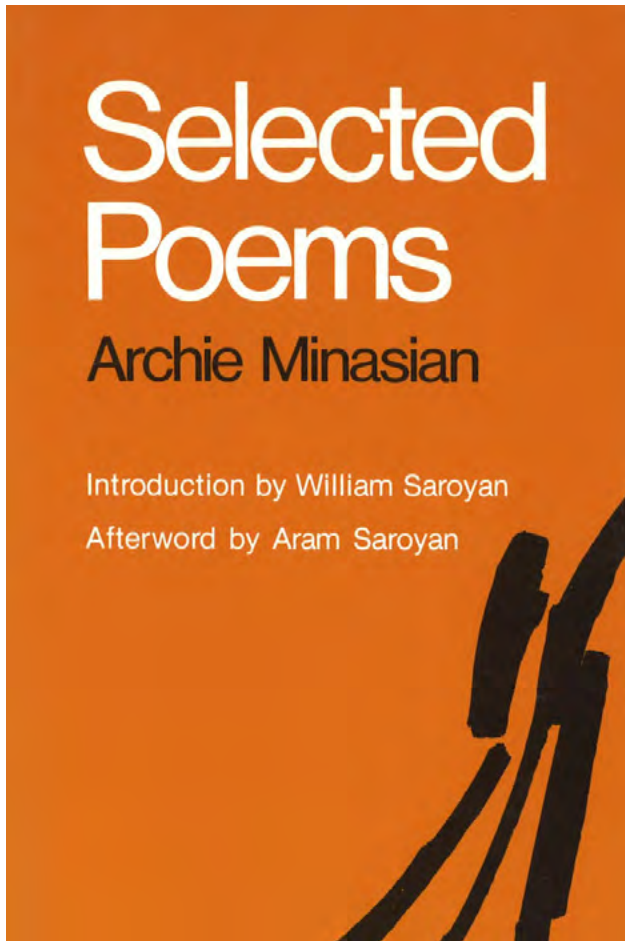
the natural world and the everyday things that surround you: "The urge for the open air became overwhelming, and I felt compelled to fulfill this seasonal awakening, the animal desire, the thaw of the lumbering soul. I declared myself a dividend (not in cash) and we drove southward through the great valley, (past Ezo's lair), to Dinuba, a small community whose lush orchards and vineyards, neatly furrowed by pride and labor, sprawled contentedly under the hot sun. Nothing seemed amiss here, only warm winds and the scent of growth. I always enjoyed visiting this end of the valley, and always with a sense of envy, where the Sierras rise distinctly in a huge arc to the east, like a monstrous arm enclosing the vast farmlands."

Here in rich vocabulary and original turns-of-phrase, Minasian equates the "thawing of the soul" with that of nature — man has tamed nature, yet nature also encircles man "like a monstrous arm enclosing the vast farmlands."

For Minasian, nature provides a way to recharge the soul, especially when faced with human duplicity or cunning.

In one of the only essays on Minasian's poetry, Saroyan qualifies his cousin's work by the now dated term "Asiatic," by which I believe he means an economy of language, a favoring of image over linguistic niceties, a form perhaps best exemplified by the Japanese art of Haiku. Though Minasian's poetry is not as brief nor as codified as Haiku, there is indeed

scribes his father per se; rather the rustling of leaves and "whisperings" reminiscent of many children's memories of parents speaking in hushed tones late at night, evoke



Minasian's memories of his late father.

And in the following poem, titled "How foolish the sweating men," Minasian uses 10 couplets to juxtapose the serenity of nature and farm to the vain toil of man. The first eight describe the beauty and effortless purity of nature

"How pure the air we breathe
And our thoughts;
"How inviting the lushy meadows,
The wandering girls by roadsides;
"How still the air,
How dense the views we pass;
And so on until the tenth couplet like an

anvil descend upon the reader, who has been waiting since reading its title for this wonderful conclusion:

"How foolish the men sweating in orchards,
Shaking peach and the last ripe plum."

Rather than pass summary judgment, Minasian rather tosses out man's foolishness as if a mere evidence, his vanity present up until the last fruit that he shakes out of the peach and plum trees. So much effort, so much toil when nature already has everything perfectly planned out ahead of time.

Minasian was also a gifted painter. Legend has it that one day out of the blue he simply went out and bought canvas and paints and began to paint. Like his writing, much of his painting concentrates on nature, beautiful watercolor landscapes which can be seen at the web site for the remarkable organization Forever Saroyan: <https://www.foreversaroyan.com/three-poems-by-archie-minasian>. This organization, started and run by Saroyan's cousin, Charles



Archie Minasian

something quintessentially pared down about his use of the language, as in the following poem, "Memories of my Father":

The wind spoke to me
I went to the orchard,
Leaves came down
Of every kind
With busy whisperings
I could not understand
Interestingly, nothing in the poem de-

CALENDAR OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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.

MAY 31 — Annual Food Festival 12-6PM Chicken Kebab, Losh Kebab and Kheyma. Cuisine Table, Pastry Table and Jinalgov Hatz. Holy Archangels Armenian Church, 1280 Boston Rd., Haverhill.

MAY 18-JUNE 21 — Events at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church.

•Sunday, May 18, 10:30 a.m., with Holy Mass Dedicated to Our Beloved Mothers at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in Belmont, followed by the Raffle.

•Monday, May 19, Khachkar Café (For Men), at 6:30 p.m., Nishan & Margrit Atinikian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont.

•Saturday, June 7, Jubilee Year Pilgrimage, with departure at 9 a.m. from the church to St. John Paul II Shrine of Divine Mercy, Salem. For tickets email holycrossbostonma@gmail.com

•Saturday, June 21, World Music Day Concert featuring violinist Haig Hovsepian and cellist Dilshod Narzillae, 6 p.m. 200 Lexington ST., Belmont. Reception to follow. For tickets email holycrossbostonma@gmail.com.

JUNE 1 — The Tekeyan Cultural Association will host a Hampartsoum Luncheon cultural program plus entertainment. Program to feature khorovadz (beef, pork and chicken), and mezze, wine, refreshments and dessert. Sunday, 1:30 p.m. Baikar 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.

JUNE 2 — St. James Men's Club, dinner, dance 6.15 p.m. mezza, 7 p.m. Losh Kebab & Kheyma Dinner, \$25 per person, 7.30 to 9 p.m. Monday. Music and dancing, Live Armenian music by Steve Tashjian Middle Eastern Ensemble-Steve Tashjian, John Berberian, Jay Baronian and David Ansbikian. All are welcome, 465 Mt. Auburn Street Watertown.

JUNE 8 — St. James Armenian Festival – Annual Picnic! Delicious Armenian food, Live Armenian music, children's activities, inflatable slide, and more! Sunday, Rain or shine. Noon-5 p.m. St. James Armenian Church - 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown. For more info visit www.stjameswatertown.org/festival or call 617.923.8860.

JULY 2 — St. James Armenian Church in Watertown will host His Beatitude Archbishop Sahak II Mashalian, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, as he visits the Boston community during his visit to the United States. A community-wide hrashapar service will take place at St. James in the early evening, followed by a reception. All are welcome. Please save the date - full details to follow.

JULY 28 — St. James Armenian Church, 25th Annual Harold Partamian Golf Tournament, Oakley Country Club, rain or shine, scramble format, raffle & silent auction, following golf-cocktails, appetizers and banquet dinner at Oakley Country Club. Monday. Please see church website for full information, church office 617-923-8860

RHODE ISLAND

JUNE 28 — Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church, Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Apostolic Church, Armenian Evangelical Church and Armenian Music Festival of Rhode Island present 70th Anniversary Concert of Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island. Saturday, 7 pm, Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson Street, Providence. Tickets \$20, children under 12 – free. Gala refreshments following the concert.

To send Calendar items to the Mirror-Spectator email alin@mirrorspectator.com or alin.gregorian@gmail.com. You can also visit our website, www.mirrorspectator.com, and find the "calendar" section under the heading "More" or mail them to the Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472. All calendar entries must be received by noon on Monday before publication.

Janigian, has become a veritable treasure trove and archive of all things Saroyan and Minasian. It also organizes presentations and public lectures on the two writers, as well as (re) publishes much of their writing, ranging from psalms, to short stories, watercolor prints and just about anything the two ever wrote, including the fascinating compendium "William Saroyan & Archie Minasian: The Complete Correspondence, 1929-1981"! Anyone interested in reading some lovely lyrical poetry, or with a particular interest in Minasian or Saroyan, would do well to check out this remarkable site.

Writer Aris Janigian has singled Minasian out as one of our most gifted poets, and indeed he deserves to be read by this generation of readers, if nothing more than for the simple almost Buddhist outlook that he presents on life. In a sense, Minasian is also godfather to a long line of accomplished Armenian-American poets that stretch down to writers such as Aaron Poochigian, Lory Bedikian and Peter Balakian. You can also read some of Minasian's work at the Armenian Poetry Project, the brainchild of another talented Armenian poet, Lola Koundakjian: <https://armenian-poetry.blogspot.com/2010/11/>.



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**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



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COMMENTARY

Armenia- Russia Relations: What Next?

By Benjamin Poghosyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

RUSSIA is highly likely to remain a driver of geopolitical dynamics in the South Caucasus for the foreseeable future. The potential cease-fire in Ukraine may shift Moscow’s resources back to the South Caucasus and thus make Russia’s position stronger. The relations built since 1991 has given Russia leverage with Armenia, including the presence of Russian military base and border troops in Armenia, and Armenia’s membership of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), while Armenia was providing an opportunity for Russia to project power in the South Caucasus and foment its position as the strongest external player in the region.

Over the past four years, relations between Armenia and Russia have changed significantly, transforming Moscow from a strategic ally into a problematic partner. Both sides now harbor a lengthy list of grievances against the other. With the potential new chapter in Ukraine comes also an opportunity for both countries to reset their bilateral relationship and find a new modus operandi.

According to the Armenian government, Russia has failed to fulfill its obligations under the 1997 bilateral agreement to protect Armenia during Azerbaijan’s incursions into Armenian territory in 2021 and 2022. Furthermore, Russia did not prevent Azerbaijan’s military takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023. Another major point of contention is Russia’s insistence on implementing Article 9 of the November 10, 2020, trilateral statement, while the remainder has been void given Azerbaijan’s and Russia’s noncompliance with it.

On the other hand, Russia accuses Armenia of “pivoting toward the West” by deepening cooperation with the European Union, France and the United States, inviting EU observers to Armenia while freezing its membership of and openly criticizing the CSTO. The signature of the US–Armenia Strategic Partnership Charter and discussions to sign a New Partnership Agenda with the EU have upset Russia.

Armenia has also drastically reduced its military-technical cooperation with Russia. Armenia sourced more than 90% of its weapons from Russia a few years ago. As of 2025, that figure has dropped to below 10%, with India and, to some extent, France emerging as Armenia’s primary partners in defense cooperation. Interestingly, Russia does not criticize Armenia’s military partnership with India, at least openly.

Despite these political and diplomatic tensions, bilateral economic ties are flourishing. In 2024, trade turnover reached \$12.4 billion, from \$2.5 billion in 2021. Russia remains a key destination for a significant portion of Armenia’s exports and is the primary source of several strategic imports, including wheat, while Russia is benefitting from re-export of multiple

goods done via Armenia, a process started after the US and the EU imposed sanctions on Russia. The growing economic relations give Russia additional opportunities to use them as leverage against Armenia if Moscow deems this appropriate, but the re-export of billions of dollars in goods to Russia via Armenia also provides leverages for Yerevan.

Recent developments have also profoundly impacted Armenian public perceptions of Russia. While an overwhelming majority of Armenians viewed Russia as a friendly nation in 2018, that figure has now dropped sharply, as illustrated by the September 2024 International Republican Institute poll.

The current elusiveness of Armenia–Russia relations may pose significant challenges for Armenia. In the foreseeable future, Russia will likely remain one of the key external powers in the South Caucasus, with considerable leverage to influence the region’s geopolitics. It may well be with this calculation that the Georgian Dream since 2024 has reshaped the Georgian foreign policy trajectory to a more ambiguous one. In recent years, a marked increase in Russia–Azerbaijan cooperation started with the February 2022 statement of strategic interaction. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s state visit to Azerbaijan in August 2024 was a prominent demonstration of this high-level partnership. Azerbaijan plays a significant role in Russia’s efforts to reach Iranian, Indian, and Southeast Asian markets via the International North–South Transit Corridor. Russia and Azerbaijan share a vision in which regional powers manage regional conflicts, and both support the 3+3 regional cooperation format. Despite recent tensions between the two sides triggered by the AZAL Baku–Grozny flight crash, and President Aliyev’s last-minute rejection of President Putin’s invitation to attend the May 9, 2025, military parade in Moscow, Russia continues to express its interest in developing relations with Azerbaijan, as was stated by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, during a May 15, 2025, press briefing.

In the current environment, Russia may decide that it can pursue its interests in the South Caucasus through a strategic partnership with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has been actively encouraging this perception among Russian leaders in various ways, including by funding Russian experts and academics

to portray Armenia as an adversary of Russia while presenting Azerbaijan as friendly nation. These developments can further strain the relationship between Armenia and Russia.

If an “understanding about Ukraine” develops between Russia and the US under the new Trump administration, Russia would then have a greater capacity to shape regional geopolitics, while the US might stop viewing the region as another battlefield with Russia and thus reduce its involvement. In this context, Russia might resume — or more actively pursue — its role as the primary mediator in Armenia–Azerbaijan negotiations and take actions to restrain Western presence in the region while seeking to manage its competition with Turkey in the South Caucasus. In such a scenario, Armenia could face demands from Russia

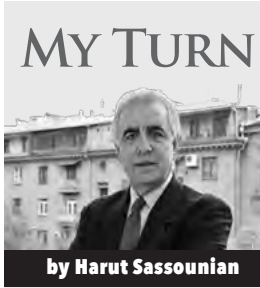
to realign its foreign policy, particularly to limit its growing ties with the EU, European countries and the US.

Amid evolving regional geopolitics, with the South Caucasus possibly facing a situation with less Western influence and more from Russia, Armenia should avoid further deterioration of relations with Russia and seek a new modus operandi. In this context, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s decision to visit Russia on May 9 to attend the military parade was a step in the right direction. Armenia should continue to communicate frankly with Russia about the key goals of its foreign policy strategy, while resuming Track 2 dialogues with Russian expert circles to better articulate Armenia’s position and counterbalance Azerbaijan’s narratives.

(Benjamin Poghosyan is chairman of the Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies in Yerevan, and Senior Research Fellow at the Applied Policy Research Institute [APRI] of Armenia.)



COMMENTARY



MY TURN YouTube Posts Two Sensational Videos Presenting Armenia as a Muslim Nation

On YouTube, I came across two fictional videos that distort Armenia's history and identity. The first video, which runs for nine minutes and 53 seconds, is titled: "The world's first Christian country now embraces Islam: Millions of its citizens convert to Islam" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRuB-cYQ-0WA>). The second video, lasting eight minutes and 24 seconds, is titled: "The first Christian country in the world: Now 99% Muslim" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qve3KR58xI>).

The two videos, which offer somewhat different content, are narrated by an unidentified individual with a professional voice. They tell the baseless story of how the entire population of Armenia supposedly converted to Islam. The videos contain many realistic-looking scenes of Armenia, likely created by artificial intelligence.

The videos are produced by an unknown entity called "Light of Islam." When I first viewed these videos, YouTube displayed a note stating that they contained "altered or synthetically-generated content," but that notice is now removed. YouTube shows on the screen a lengthy explanation requiring that videos disclose if the content is fictitious. I urge readers to file a complaint with YouTube.

My objection is based on the fact that these videos contain false information, misleading non-Armenian viewers into believing that it is truthful.

To illustrate the fabricated narrative presented in these videos, here are excerpts from one of the videos which I have transcribed:

The video starts with an entirely fictional history of Armenia: "In the 17th century, churches became mosques, crosses were replaced by crescents, and Bibles were replaced by Qurans. Armenia, the world's oldest Christian country, is now a devout Muslim country has its culture disappeared, [though] the art of stone-carving Khachkars has survived, now inscribed with holy verses. Armenian folk songs are still sung, but their lyrics praise God. Armenian is still spoken, but prayers are now recited in the name of Allah. In school, children memorize the Al-Fattah [one of the 99 names of Allah] and continue to learn about their nation's history...."

In the video, Armenia is portrayed as having "developed into a center of Caucasian Islamic culture. Large Madrassas [Islamic schools] were established in Gyumri and Yerevan. Armenian Muslim writers and poets emerged

writing poetry in Armenian, Arabic, and Persian. A new spiritual capital grew up around Lake Sevan. It was there that the largest mosque in the Caucasus was built whose architecture combines the design of ancient Christian Khachkars with Islamic calligraphy.... Armenia is now a bridge between the Islamic world and the West. Armenia's Muslim diplomats sit at the European negotiating table. They speak five languages, quote al-Ghazali [11th century Persian Muslim scholar] and Shakespeare in one sentence. They are respected, because they are the mirror of two worlds. This country is living proof that identities can grow without losing their roots, and that faith can change without killing culture. In universities, Armenian scholars study two great legacies: the Bible and the Quran, the cross and the crescent, not as symbols of conflict, but as two sides of their history. What makes a nation great is not whether it is Christian or Muslim. Today, in that alternative Armenia, the call to prayer still echoes from the minarets of mosques that used to be church bell towers. Children still dance folk dances singing the songs of their ancestors, now with verses praising God."

The narrator then introduces a fictitious individual which he calls 'Harut': "One day, Harut asked: 'Mom, why is there a picture of a cross in our house? Aren't we Muslims?' His mother paused, then, she answered quietly, 'because it's part of who we are, son. We used to be Christians, then we became Muslims, but what never changes, we are always Armenian.'"

The video continues: "At school, Harut learns to read the Quran and also learns about the ancient Armenian alphabet. In his small library, there are old leather-bound Qurans and a Bible in Krapar [classical Armenian], both inherited from his grandmother who was a nun before converting to Islam. When the harvest festival arrives, families gather in the town square. Mothers serve lavash and dolma, while children dance the Kochari to the accompaniment of zurna and davul [drum]. The Imam of the mosque and the caretaker of the old church stand side by side welcoming people who have come from the mountain villages."

"Outside the school, new buildings stand side by side with ancient ruins. A mosque with Ottoman style arches sat next to an Armenian church with its distinctive cone roof. The call to prayer echoed through the air, but the small toll of the bells that were still rung on special occasions, in honor, not in resurrection. Armenia's new government created an impartial history curriculum. The National Museum showcases both the stories of Christian martyrs and the early spreaders of Islam in the region: in one room, an old icon of Jesus, in another, a torn 16th century prayer rug. In the middle, an inscription reads, 'Here is where wounds and love learn to coexist.'"

YouTube should be urged to delete both fictitious videos to prevent misleading viewers who are unaware of the true facts about Armenia's culture and religion.

Armenia Supports India During Tense Standoff with Pakistan

By Arunansh B. Goswami

On April 22, 2025, members of the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, designated as a terrorist entity under the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 1267 (1999) and trained in Pakistan, carried out a horrific attack on Indian tourists in Pahalgalam, Jammu and Kashmir. This assault claimed the lives of 26 people, including a Nepalese national, marking the highest civilian death toll in a terrorist act in India since the Mumbai attacks on November 26, 2008. Many victims were interrogated about their religion to single out non-Muslims before being executed. The Pahalgalam attack was marked by extreme brutality, with most victims shot in the head at close range in front of their families, who were deliberately traumatized by the nature of the killings, accompanied by threats intended to send a chilling message.

India launched Operation Sindoor hitting terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistani-occupied Jammu and Kashmir from where terrorist attacks against India have been planned and directed. Armenia has come out in support of India after the Operation whereas Azerbaijan has supported Pakistan as expected by Geopolitical Pundits.

The Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan said "I would like to begin by recalling what caused this escalation.

A terrorist attack was carried out, & the Republic of Armenia responded promptly, by condemning the act of terrorism, expressing condolences to the families of the victims & showing solidarity with their relatives. I believe that no civilized country can ever condone or welcome terrorism, the latter can only be condemned. And I believe we must also recognize the country's right to defend itself against terrorism. To be honest, this is the perspective through which we view this issue, this is how we perceive it, & this is our position."

Pakistan is the only country of the world that does not recognize Armenia. Recently Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Pakistan's Defense Minister, acknowledged that Islamabad provided support to terrorist organizations for 30 years. During an interview with a British news outlet, he conceded that Pakistan engaged in "dirty work" for the West when questioned about its past involvement in financing and supporting terrorist groups. Former Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto said in an interview with Sky that it was no secret that Pakistan had a past, and the consequences of that were deeply felt within the country. "As far as what the defense minister said, I don't think it is a secret that Pakistan has a past."

In 2020 Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan accused Pakistani Special Forces of collaborating with the Azerbaijani military in the Nagorno-Karabakh re-

gion. During an interview with the Russian news agency Rossiya Segodnya on October 15, Pashinyan claimed that Pakistani troops, in conjunction with Turkish forces, were involved in the ongoing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Pakistan has not just used terror as a geopolitical tool against its neighbors but also exported terror to region like Nagorno-Karabakh to eliminate its enemy Armenia, that according to its strategic community is a "Kafir" non-Muslim nation preventing connectivity between Turkic brotherly nations Turkey and Azerbaijan that have majority Muslim populations. After Operation Sindoor Baku has supported Islamabad, according to statement No:184/25 by Azerbaijani foreign ministry, on escalation of tension between India and Pakistan Baku has condemned New Delhi's military action against Islamabad to destroy terrorist establishments in Pakistan. Baku has shown solidarity with the people of Pakistan, even terming terrorists as innocent victims, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Baku said "we express condolences to the families of the innocent victims and wish a speedy recovery to those who were injured."

Turkey has consistently supported Azerbaijan and Pakistan, both of which have been accused of violating international law against innocent civilians. In return, Ankara has received backing from Baku and Islamabad against its adversaries. Re-

cent media reports indicate that Turkish C-130 Hercules transport planes delivered military supplies to Pakistan last month. In 2021, the two nations formalized an agreement to bolster cooperation through joint arms manufacturing, making Turkey Pakistan's second-largest arms supplier after China. According to the Eurasian Times, citing the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 10% of Ankara's arms exports from 2020 to 2024 are designated for Islamabad. Furthermore, there are indications that both countries are working together to establish a joint facility for producing Turkish-designed fighter jets. Their collaboration extends beyond military affairs, as Turkey has consistently backed Pakistan's position on Kashmir, while Islamabad has expressed solidarity with Ankara regarding its claims on Cyprus. As defense cooperation between New Delhi and Yerevan grows, it is crucial for nations with shared geopolitical interests, such as India, Armenia, Greece, and Cyprus, to strengthen their defense collaboration. The ongoing human rights violations by Islamabad, Baku, and Ankara in various regions must be addressed, and it is imperative for peace-seeking countries to unite and take action to ensure this.

(Arunansh B. Goswami Expert Fellow, Orbeli Analytical Research Centre Armenia and Sumit Kaushik Public Policy and Social Impact Consultant.)

Armenian Open Returns to Tallwood Country Club in Connecticut, June 7

HEBRON, Conn. — The Armenian Open golf scramble will return to Tallwood Country Club in Hebron on Saturday, June 7. Once home to the original Armenian golf tournament in the region, the three Armenian Churches of St. George in Hartford, St. Mark in Springfield and Holy Resurrection in New Britain have again combined their efforts to continue the tradition. The event grows year over year.

The format is a four-player scramble and will feature 18 holes of golf, lunch and

dinner featuring Armenian cuisine, raffle prizes, a \$25,000 hole-in-one prize, and various contests with cash prizes. Registration begins at 11:30 a.m. and golf begins at 1:30 p.m. After play is complete, awards and raffle winners will be announced at the dinner hosted on the course grounds.

To register to golf, visit the Armenian Open website at www.armenianopen.com. Those who would like to become an event sponsor can also make a contribution through the website.



Golfers enjoying the Armenian Open last year

Photographer Ken Martin Speaks at Worcester Holy Trinity Men’s Club

WORCESTER — *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* contributor, photographer and teacher Ken Martin on May 8 spoke about his long-form documentary project titled “Armenian-Americans, American-Armenians: A Search for Identity & Meaning in Diaspora.”

A native of Worcester, he also presented a brief history of the origin of Armenian immigration to the first Armenian colony in America. Ken showed family photos, documents and ephemera as part of the narrative of settlement.

His own family played a role beginning in 1892, establishing themselves in business, education and religion in the city and yet maintained connections to their homeland. Later, Martin presented his own photography from Worcester days and beyond, including many international personalities and locations he has photographed throughout his career.

Martin spoke about his first photography classes taken at Worcester State University with Prof. Paul Davis in the 1970s, also a Worcester Armenian, when suddenly a voice from the audience called out that Davis was present. To grand applause the student and the professor were re-united after 50 years!



Prof. Paul Davis, left, with Ken Martin

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