

Armenia Condemns Israeli Strikes on Iran

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia on Friday, June 13, condemned Israel’s overnight strikes on nuclear facilities and military sites across neighboring Iran and called for an immediate end to the military action.

“The unilateral attack against Iran is deeply concerning,” the Armenian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. “Taking place ahead of the next round of [US-Iranian] negotiations, it endangers the peace efforts as well as overall regional stability and global peace.”

“We condemn such action and call for the immediate cessation of hostilities and adherence to international law,” added the statement.

“What happened today is not only a threat to Iran or the Middle East but also a problem for Armenia,” Armen Grigoryan, the secretary of Armenia’s Security Council, said for his part.

“This is an encroachment on Iran’s territorial integrity, which will naturally have a negative impact on the region, and escalation will naturally not bring any benefit to the countries of the region. We hope that it will be possible to resolve the issue peace-



Meghri, on the border with Iran

fully as soon as possible,” Grigorian added during a panel discussion in Yerevan.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel launched the “preemptive” strikes “to roll back the Iranian threat to Israel’s very survival” and prevent Tehran from building a nuclear weapon. Among the sites hit were the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ (IRGC’s) command site and residential areas in Tehran and other cities, according to Iranian media.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned that Israel will suffer severe consequences for launching the attacks.

“With this crime, the Zionist regime has set itself for a bitter and painful fate and it

will definitely receive it,” Khamenei said in a statement.

The escalation led to the cancellation of commercial flights between Yerevan and Tel-Aviv, Tehran and other destinations in the Middle East.

Many Armenian policymakers, politicians and pundits fear that a serious Israeli or US military attack on Iran could have far-reaching consequences for Armenia’s own security. They regard Iran as a key deterrent against Azerbaijan’s implicit threats to open a land corridor to its Nakhichevan exclave as well as Turkey that would pass through Syunik, the only Armenian province bordering the Islamic Republic.

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Armenia Dispatches Nuclear Inspectors to South Following Israeli Strikes on Iran Nuclear Facilities

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

YEREVAN (OC-Media) — Armenia has dispatched a group of nuclear inspectors to areas bordering Iran following Israel’s strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities on Friday, June 13.

On June 14, the Nuclear and Radiation Safety Centre (NRSC) reported that its specialists “promptly travelled to the Syunik province to conduct dosimetric measurements” following the strikes. They found that radiation levels in the south have “remained unchanged.”

Measurements were carried out in several locations of the region, including Meghri, Agarak and Kajaran. The center said it would continue to monitor the situation closely.

Israel struck targets inside Iran overnight on June 12 and in the days that have followed, targeting military sites and nuclear facilities and killing dozens of senior military figures and nuclear scientists.

Following the strikes, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan on Saturday, June 14, had a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi. They discussed the recent developments, according to the Armenian readout, with Mirzoyan emphasizing “the importance of managing the risks in the current situation and avoiding escalation in the region.”

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Armenian Opposition Fears Security Fallout From Iran-Israel War

By Ani Ohanian and Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Azerbaijan may take advantage of the military conflict between Iran and Israel to invade Armenia in a bid to open a land corridor to its Nakhichevan exclave, according to Armenian opposition leaders.

The so-called “Zangezur corridor” sought by Baku but strongly opposed by Tehran would pass through Syunik, the only Armenian region bordering the Islamic Republic. Iranian leaders have repeatedly warned against attempts to strip Iran of its common border with Armenia.

The ongoing conflict triggered by Israel’s June 13 strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities and military sites stoked fears of an Azerbaijani attack in Armenia. The Armenian government has signaled no such concerns, however.

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A view of an Armenian checkpoint on the border with Iran, April 12, 2025

Drastic Drop in Import-Export of Diamonds and Gold Dents Armenia’s Trade Turnover

Armenia’s foreign trade turnover fell off a cliff during the first four months of 2025 after the Kremlin changed the rules that govern Yerevan’s imports and exports of Russian gems and precious metals.

According to data published by the Arminfo news agency on June 9, Armenia’s overall trade volume amounted to \$6.3 billion during the first four months of this year, a whopping 53 percent decline over the volume during the first-third of 2024. The decline is linked to a precipitous drop-off in the import and export of gems and precious metals, in particular diamonds and gold.

Armenia imported \$740 million in gems and precious metals during the first four months of 2025 against \$863 million in exports. By comparison, for all of



2024, Armenia recorded \$7.4 billion in gems/precious metals imports and around \$8 billion in exports, accounting for

roughly 50 percent of Armenia’s annual trade turnover amount of \$30.2 billion.

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CALIFORNIA

The Unlikely Group Getting Rich Off Dave’s Hot Chicken’s \$1 Billion Deal

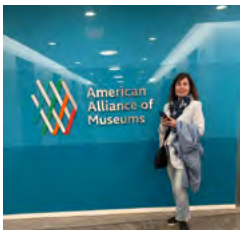
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WASHINGTON DC

Directors of Eight Armenian Museums Tour US

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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

Armenian PM to Visit Turkey at Erdogan's Invitation on June 20

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan will visit Turkey at the invitation of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on June 20, Speaker of the Armenian National Assembly Alen Simonyan confirmed on June 16.

He did not go into detail about the agenda of the visit, saying the prime minister's office will provide an update.

Simonyan said all regional issues will be discussed. He labeling the visit "historic," noting that it will be the first time a leader of Armenia visits Turkey at such a high level.

Anna Hakobyan To Start Master's Program in China

YEREVAN (News.am) — Anna Hakobyan, executive director of the My Step Foundation and commonlaw wife of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, will go to China in September to study at a two-year master's program in Chinese philosophy at the Beijing Pedagogical University. My Step Foundation reported earlier in June.

"The program is taught in English and includes a comprehensive study of Chinese schools of philosophy, ethics and political theory. During my last visit to China and observing how people live in this powerful country, I thought that the cause of many of our problems is education," Hakobyan said.

Armenia Does Not Seek To Push Out Russian Troops

YEREVAN (Caucasus Watch) — On June 13, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated that Armenia does not intend to sever relations with Russia, emphasizing a balanced foreign policy approach amid regional challenges.

Speaking in the Czech Republic, Pashinyan said, "Our parliament recently passed a law to start the process of joining the European Union. We now have very close cooperation with the EU. However, we do not seek to sever relations with Russia, as our foreign policy is balanced. That is our strategy."

Regarding the presence of Russian troops in Armenia, Pashinyan clarified, "We are not seeking to end the presence of Russian troops in Armenia. We face a difficult situation in our region. You mentioned Russian troops in Armenia, but I note that there is also a European observer mission monitoring the border with Azerbaijan. Last year, we reduced the level of Russian troop presence, but we are not aiming to end it. Our goal is to establish lasting and stable peace with regional countries."

Ruben Vardanyan's Lawyer Again Appeals to Armenian Government

By Anush Mkrtchian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A US lawyer representing Armenian businessman and philanthropist Ruben Vardanyan warned on Thursday, June 12, that he and 22 other Armenians will remain imprisoned in Azerbaijan unless Yerevan presses for their release in peace talks with Baku.

Jared Genser pointed out that a draft Armenian-Azerbaijan peace treaty finalized in March reportedly does not address the fate of the prisoners and instead commits the two sides to withdrawing their international lawsuits filed against each other.

"What that means is that if the prisoners are not released by then, simultaneously with the signing of the treaty, he [Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan] won't be able to raise the issue of prisoners going forward," he told RFE/RL's Armenian Service in Yerevan. "And what that means is that they will be trapped in Azerbaijan, with [Azerbaijani President Ilham] Aliyev being able to do what he wants."

Like Armenian opposition leaders and other domestic critics of Pashinyan, Gens-



US human rights lawyer Jared Genser speaks to RFE/RL in Yerevan, June 12, 2025.

er earlier accused Yerevan of doing little to try to have the prisoners freed. Pashinyan has said that his government will make



Ruben Vardanyan in court in April

only "proportionate" and "reasonable" efforts for that purpose. He has claimed that Yerevan will harm the prisoners if it acts more forcefully. His detractors say that he is simply afraid of angering Baku.

Vardanyan and seven other prisoners are former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh who were captured by Azerbaijan during or shortly after its September 2023 military offensive that forced Karabakh's entire population to flee to Armenia and restored Azerbaijani control over the region. They went on trial in January together with eight other Karabakh Armenians, facing a long list of charges, including genocide and war crimes.

Vardanyan, who served as Karabakh premier from November 2022 to February 2023, staged a three-week hunger strike in February and March to protest against the trials described by him as a "farce." The tycoon strongly denies all charges leveled against him.

Genser likewise insisted that the trials are a travesty of justice designed to legitimize "ethnic cleansing" carried out by Azerbaijan in Karabakh. He said he believes that

guilty verdicts in them are already a foregone conclusion.

Still, the human rights lawyer said he is now more upbeat about prospects for the release of his client and the other prisoners than he was a few months ago because of what he called US pressure exerted on Aliyev.

"Secretary [of State Marco] Rubio is undoubtedly going to play a key role, I think, in making sure that this process moves forward and that it cannot be further delayed," he said.

Genser stressed at the same time that Pashinyan should "encourage President Trump to make sure all prisoners are released." "I think it's something that he should be doing both publicly and privately," he said.

Drastic Drop in Import-Export of Diamonds and Gold Dents Armenia's Trade Turnover

TRADE, from page 1

Changes in Russian tariff policies within the context of the Eurasian Economic Union are widely seen as responsible for the dramatic shift in the Armenian import-export pattern.

The comparatively low margin in the dollar amounts of imports and exports indicate that Armenia mainly served as a pass-through for the trade in gems/precious metals and did not add much value in terms of producing jewelry and other items using the raw materials. While helping to boost Armenian trade turnover totals, the large-scale importation of raw diamonds, gold and other precious stones and metals by Yerevan enabled Russia to generate income while evading sanctions.

The trend that saw trade in gems/precious metals start to dominate Armenian trade turnover began in 2022, the same year Russia launched its unprovoked attack on Ukraine. To date, the overwhelming share of Russian gems and precious metals imported by Armenia in recent years have been re-exported to the United Arab Emirates and Hong Kong.

(This article originally ran on www.Eurasianet.org on June 10.)

Armenian Parliament Blocks Bill On Shorter Military Service

By Anush Mkrtchian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Following an opposition uprising, the Armenian parliament threw out on Tuesday, June 17, a controversial government-backed bill that would sharply shorten compulsory military service for those paying the state hefty sums.

The length of the service for Armenian men aged 18 and older has long been set at two years. The bill would give them the option of serving in the armed forces only one or four months in exchange for paying 24 million drams (\$61,500) and 18 million drams (\$46,000), respectively.

Hayk Sargsyan, a pro-government parliamentarian and the main author of the bill, has argued that affluent parents already pay bribes or find other ways to exempt their teenage sons from military duty. He has claimed that the legal fees would largely eliminate the practice and generate more revenue for the state budget.

Opposition parliamentarians and other critics of the government have strongly condemned the bill approved by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's cabinet late last month, saying that it would weaken the army, le-

galize privileged treatment of the rich and severely undermine social cohesion. They say it also runs counter to the principle of citizens' equality before the law enshrined in the Armenian constitution.

The growing opposition criticism echoed by many ordinary Armenians has caused many lawmakers from Pashinyan's Civil Contract party to have second thoughts about the wisdom of the proposed arrangement. The parliament committee on defense and security pointedly declined to endorse it last week, exposing their serious misgivings.

The change of heart led the National Assembly to vote against including the bill on its agenda. Civil Contract's parliamentary leader, Hayk Konjoryan, said the pro-government majority "cannot pass this bill in its current form at the moment."

Significantly, Sargsyan was among the 87 parliament deputies who blocked it. The lawmaker insisted as recently as on Monday, June 16, that most of his Civil Contract colleagues support the bill and that he will therefore insist on its quick passage. But minutes before Tuesday's vote, he said he will now follow Pashinyan's "instruction" to hold further discussions on the issue.



ARMENIA

Russia, Georgia, and Iran Fuel Armenia's Tourism Growth With More than 180,000 Visitors Recorded in May

YEREVAN (Travel and Tour World) — Armenia's tourism sector witnessed a significant boost in May 2025, driven largely by strong visitor inflows from Russia, Georgia, and Iran. These three neighboring countries collectively played a crucial role in pushing international arrivals past the 180,000 mark, reflecting deep regional ties, improved travel access, and growing interest in Armenia's cultural and natural attractions. Their continued dominance in inbound travel underscores the effectiveness of Armenia's targeted outreach and regional tourism strategies.

Armenia's tourism sector is experiencing a strong rebound in 2025, as the country welcomes a growing number of international travelers amid efforts to position itself as a cultural and historical destination in the South Caucasus. According to the latest statistics released by the Tourism Committee of Armenia, the nation recorded a noticeable increase in inbound tourist arrivals for the month of May, signaling positive momentum in its post-pandemic recovery.

In May 2025, Armenia welcomed 181,436 foreign tourists, marking a year-on-year increase compared to the same month in 2024, when 167,049 tourists entered the country. This uptick highlights not only improved global travel confidence but also the success of Armenia's promotional strategies to attract visitors from key regional markets.

Tourist arrival data from January to May 2025 paints a clearer picture of Armenia's tourism landscape. Russia continues to dominate as the leading source of inbound tourism, accounting for a significant 37% of all visitors during the five-month period. This longstanding travel corridor remains vital due to close historical ties, direct flight connectivity, and a shared interest in Armenia's cultural and religious sites.

Armenia remains a favored destination among Russian travelers seeking visa-free entry, diverse landscapes, and affordable hospitality. The mild spring and early summer climate further adds to the appeal, drawing Russians to Armenia for both short city escapes and longer cultural explorations.

Following Russia, Georgia contributed 15% of Armenia's inbound tourists from



January to May 2025. The proximity and ease of cross-border travel between the two countries continue to encourage steady tourist flow. The strong economic and cultural ties shared by Armenia and Georgia, along with frequent intercity transport options and mutual tourism development programs, have helped maintain tourism momentum between these neighbors.

Iran secured third place as a source of inbound tourism, representing 8% of all visitors during the same period. Iranian travelers are drawn to Armenia not only for its cooler climate and scenic mountain regions but also for the vibrant markets, religious landmarks, and year-round festivals. The Armenian government has also facilitated easier travel for Iranian citizens by simplifying visa procedures and strengthening people-to-people ties.

The increase in tourist arrivals comes as Armenia intensifies its marketing and outreach efforts to attract a wider international audience. The Tourism Committee has been actively participating in regional travel expos, building tourism partnerships with neighboring countries, and showcasing Armenia's unique heritage, including its UNESCO-listed monasteries, historic cities like Yerevan and Gyumri, and world-class wineries.

Moreover, compared to many regions with ongoing geopolitical instability, Armenia is perceived as a relatively safe

and peaceful destination. This perception has played a critical role in encouraging more tourists, especially from neighboring countries, to explore Armenia as a tranquil getaway offering both adventure and relaxation.

Infrastructure and Seasonal Events Fuel Interest

Recent investments in Armenia's infrastructure—including road improvements, airport upgrades, and expanded hospitality

services—have made it easier for visitors to navigate and enjoy their stay. The spring season, in particular, saw a rise in cultural festivals, outdoor activities, and religious celebrations that attracted regional tourists looking for immersive travel experiences.

From mountain hiking in Dilijan and spiritual tours in Echmiadzin to wine tasting in the Areni region, Armenia is increasingly offering diversified tourism products tailored to the interests of its core visitor markets.

In May 2025, Armenia welcomed over 180,000 international visitors, with Russia, Georgia, and Iran leading the surge. Their strong travel ties, geographic proximity, and cultural connections played a key role in driving this impressive growth.

With more than 181,000 tourists arriving in May alone and the first five months showing solid growth, 2025 is shaping up to be a record-setting year for Armenian tourism. Authorities are optimistic that the current trend will continue through the peak summer and autumn months, especially as the country looks to attract more visitors from Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

As Armenia strengthens its tourism offerings, enhances cross-border collaborations, and markets itself globally, the country is steadily rising as a must-visit destination in the region.

Legendary Pianist Martha Argerich to Perform at Kapan Festival in July

KAPAN, Armenia — World-renowned pianist and 2016 Kennedy Center Honoree Martha Argerich will make her first appearance in Armenia at the Kapan Fest 2025. The festival, which is being held in Kapan for the third time, will be held from July 4 to 15.

In addition to Argerich, the festival will feature world-renowned artists, including Marian Petrescu, Arturo Solar, Theodosia Ntoku, Francesco Villa, Dong-Hyeok Lim, Lida Chen Argerich, Damien Darioli, Ido Bar-Shai, Jean-Marie Parreir and others. For the first time, electronic music will be presented at the festival with a performance by world-renowned multi-instrumentalist Philipp Johann Timm.

Another unique feature is the exhibition of 18th-century string instruments, including Stradivarius and Guarneri del Gesù violins, which will be presented in Kapan for the second time by the famous violin maker Florian Leonard from London.

The Kapan Fest, held at the Organ Hall of the Kapan State College of Arts, will feature daily concerts and master classes for more than 50 young musicians, who will arrive from different parts of Armenia, as well as from Denmark, Slovakia, and Portugal. Young people living in Kapan and engaged in music will also participate in the master classes.

The festival continues to closely collaborate with leading Armenian and foreign renowned musicians who have supported the initiative with their participation since its inception, including Hayk Kazazyan, Marianna Shirinyan, Julien Lieber, Andrey Gridchuk, Anna Sarkisova, Christian Erbsloh Papazian, Ursula von Lerber-Erbsloh, Ellie Su, Hrachya Avanesyan, Armen Nazaryan, Armen Karamyan, Norayr Kartashyan, Tigran Suchyan, Narek Avagyan and others.

This year, Kapan Fest will once again host the Armenian State Symphony Or-

chestra, conducted by Sergey Smbatyan, and will welcome famous Armenian artists Astghik Siranosyan, Ruzan Mantashyan, and Mikael Voskanyan into its artistic family.

Kapan Fest founder, cellist Sevak Avanesyan, said, "What started as a crazy dream and vision to bring a musical renaissance to Armenia has, in just three years, become one of the world's most renowned



Pianist Martha Argerich

and leading music festivals. Kapan Fest is more than just a concert series; it is a celebration of cultural resilience, artistic excellence, and community spirit."

Kapan Fest 2025 is funded by the Kapan Municipality, Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Combine, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia, AGBU France, the EU Delegation to Armenia, the Embassies of the Kingdom of Belgium, Switzerland and Argentina in Armenia, Pirastro, the Amaras Art Alliance, the Eastern Region of Hamazkayin, the Arslanyan Foundation, the Goethe Institute, MG Concerts, Karas Wines, Gurkha Cigar, GG and Enterprise companies, benefactors Thomas Wang and Regina Sir, as well as many other friends of the festival.

Armenian Opposition Fears Security Fallout From Iran-Israel War

SECURITY, from page 1

Prompting opposition criticism, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan did not cancel his participation in an international conference in Prague on Friday, June 13, and flew to the Czech capital right after the outbreak of the conflict. As of June 16, Pashinyan did not convene an emergency session of Armenia's Security Council to discuss the situation in and around Iran and its implications for Armenia. The secretary of the council, Armen Grigoryan, said on Friday that Yerevan has "no information" about possible Azerbaijani military aggression.

"If there is a large-scale military conflict in the region, Azerbaijan could use this opportunity to ... launch another aggression against Armenia," said Hayk Mamijanyan, the parliamentary leader of the opposition Pativ Unem bloc. He pointed to Azerbaijan's close military ties with Israel.

"Azerbaijan's as well as Turkey's rhetoric poses a serious threat in this turbu-

lent situation," said Gegham Manukian, a leading member of the opposition Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun).

Manukian noted that Israel began its military campaign amid a fresh Turkish-Azerbaijani military exercise held in Nakhichevan. Ishkhan Saghatelian, another Dashnaktsutyun leader, echoed his concerns on Monday.

"Have these authorities taken appropriate steps to prevent [an Azerbaijani attack?] I'm not sure," Saghatelian told reporters.

Speaking during the Prague conference on Saturday, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's top foreign policy aide, Hikmet Hajizade, said Yerevan should take an "important first step towards the 'Zangezur corridor.'" Pashinyan's government has ruled out, at least until now, any extraterritorial transport links between Nakhichevan and the rest of Azerbaijan that would compromise Armenian control over them.



ARMENIA

ATP Is Greening Yerevan

YEREVAN — Over the past 30 years, Yerevan has been quietly undergoing a green transformation, one tree at a time. At the heart of this effort is the Armenia Tree Project's (ATP) Community Tree Planting (CTP) Program, one of ATP's flagship programs, which has worked with the Municipality, schools, hospitals, and community groups to create green oases across Armenia's capital.

Since its founding in 1994, ATP has planted more than 140,000 trees in Yerevan, covering more than 380 sites across all 12 districts of the city. This makes Yerevan a national model for urban reforestation in a region where rapid development, climate pressures, and dust pollution present constant challenges to quality of life. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), based on tree species, growth rates, and local conditions these trees are estimated to capture nearly 27,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide over their lifetimes. This projection aligns with international data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which reports that a single mature urban tree can sequester approximately 22–31 kg of CO₂ per year, depending on species and growing conditions (EPA, 2023).

Urban trees do more than beautify the city; they play a crucial role in improving public health and well-being. Trees help cool the air by providing shade and releasing water vapor into the atmosphere, reducing the “urban heat island” effect that makes cities hotter than surrounding rural areas. In Yerevan, where summer temperatures soar and rain is scarce, this cooling effect is vital. Trees also reduce dust and airborne particles, which are prevalent in arid environments like Armenia's capital, and improve air quality by filtering pollutants and absorb-



Antranig Park in the Malatia-Sepastia neighborhood before and after the ATP efforts

ing carbon. Beyond their physical benefits, green spaces have been shown to support mental well-being, offering calming, restorative places for residents to relax, walk, and socialize. They even enhance biodiversity, giving birds and insects places to nest and feed, and strengthen community cohesion by making public spaces more inviting and accessible to everyone. These benefits are well-documented in research by the U.S. Forest Service and the World Health Organization, both of which recognize urban trees as vital public infrastructure with proven impacts on air quality, physical and mental health, and urban climate resilience (Nowak et al., 2018; WHO Urban Green Space and Health, 2016).

ATP's urban CTP work focuses on turning neglected, dusty, or unused urban spaces into vibrant, accessible green zones. One striking example is Antranig Park in the Malatia-Sebastia district. Once a barren expanse with little shade or comfort, the park has been transformed into a lush green space thanks to ATP's long-term planting efforts. In an interview featured in ATP's

documentary on the CTP program, a young woman visiting the park remarked, “I heard this place used to be a wasteland, but now it's beautiful and I love to come here.”

This transformation echoed across the city, from Nor Nork to Ajapnyak. Public parks, schoolyards, medical centers, and memorial sites now provide shade, beauty, and comfort to residents. For example, in Tumanyan Park in the central district of “Kentron”, ATP's efforts have restored native trees and shrubs to preserve biodiversity in the heart of the city. In many schools all over the city, students and faculties now benefit from the shade and cleaner environment created by newly planted trees. Even the grounds of the Yerevan Medical Center have been revitalized with greenery, creating a more soothing atmosphere for patients and staff alike.

Behind these transformations lies a remarkable set of data. ATP's CTP program in Yerevan has so far resulted in the planting of 140,067 trees at 384 separate sites, serving all 12 administrative districts: Arabkir, Davtashen, Erebuni, Kanaker-Zeytun,

Kentron, Malatia-Sebastia, Nork-Marash, Nor Nork, Nubarashen, Shengavit, Avan, and Ajapnyak.

ATP's commitment to community engagement is a defining feature of the CTP program. Trees are not planted randomly or top-down. Instead, the program works closely with local stakeholders such as schools, hospitals, parks departments, and residents to ensure that each planting project meets a real community need. This collaborative approach builds local ownership, encourages stewardship of the environment, and strengthens civic pride. Throughout its 30 years of work, ATP has established CTP sites in the 12 provinces and about 700 communities all over Armenia.

Looking ahead, ATP continues to partner with municipal authorities, educators, and grassroots organizations to expand its tree-planting footprint across Armenia communities. As Yerevan grows and faces new environmental challenges, the city's trees will play an increasingly critical role in protecting public health and preserving quality of life.

H. Hovnanian Family Foundation Supports Soft Landing in Armenia for Seniors

YEREVAN — The H. Hovnanian Family Foundation funds five nonprofit organizations in Armenia including Birthright Armenia, HIKEArmenia, The Armenia Project (TAP), Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC), and Repat Armenia. At their very core, all aim to bring more people, diasporans and non-Armenians alike, to experience and connect with Armenia. It is the latter two, AVC and Repat Armenia are focused on allocating more resources to ensure a softer, easier integration into Armenia for the fastest growing segment of their visitors—seniors.

These two sister organizations are thought to be very different since one hosts volunteers for short stints of service, while the other encourages repatriation and provides services of more permanence. In fact, they are complementary and dovetail nicely when volunteers intentionally apply to AVC as a precursor to deciding whether to stay longer-term. This is often the case of senior volunteers 60+ years nearing or in retirement. “For those who have already decided that long term stays in Armenia will be part of their retirement plan, we have Repat Armenia with its wide array of in-

tegration and support services should they need to utilize it,” explains Edele Hovnanian, the Foundation's president. “For the many others who are still figuring out their plans, we have AVC and encourage them to try volunteering in Armenia first to test the water by immersing in the local culture, forging deep connections with like-minded people, and truly embracing the warmth and resilience of the local community. It is a fantastic way to experience the country and envision the possibility of making Armenia a part of their retirement plans; and whatever is needed to make their experiences more comfortable, we will provide,” she adds.

Established in 2000, AVC has become Armenia's premier volunteer organization, hosting nearly 1,400 volunteers from across the globe. Since fall 2021, when AVC created its Senior Corps program designed for 60+ year old volunteers, it has been customizing program services and resources for them to ensure a softer, smoother landing. Since then, the number of seniors choosing to give back in Armenia has increased substantially. Over the last three years alone the Corps has sig-

nificantly grown as it continues to gain popularity, expanding from only two Senior Corps volunteers at its humble start to last year's 34 volunteers from 12 different countries around the globe. This fall AVC will welcome its 100th senior volunteer.

In addition to volunteerism's known benefits, among them improved physical and mental health, and increased social connectivity, the impact on older volunteers is profound, particularly since they are seeking purposeful engagement post-retirement. This is where AVC becomes so attractive, as it makes it easy to do with its one-stop-shop of services including specialized services for seniors like translations, walking tours of the city, and senior-only trips and service projects. “There are two things that elder volunteers commonly share, and that it to feel a sense of belonging while being appreciated and valued by their local communities and of course enjoying a quality of life they've worked so hard to achieve in their pre-retirement or retirement years,” states Arina Zohrabian, AVC's executive director.

Repat Armenia is currently designing a program that will be open to recent repa-

triatees, with priority given to those who are 60+ and in need of institutional as well as personal lifestyle assistance. The program will provide customized, hands-on help, much like a concierge desk in a quality hotel assisting their guests on a case-by-case basis to meet any needs or challenges they face as newcomers in a new city. Those who meet the eligibility criteria will receive assistance with banking, medical appointments, document preparation for real estate transactions, immigration and citizenship, and much more.

In addition, the organization regularly provides intensive Eastern Armenian language classes to 150 takers per year, inclusive of beginners and intermediate speakers who want to learn Eastern Armenian for better immersion into the local employment market. Monthly Meet and Greet sessions, masterclasses, and unique weekend excursions round out the integration activities Repat Armenia offers to members of the repatriate community. Learn more about how AVC and Repat Armenia continue to help more older Armenians impact Armenia and achieve their own volunteer nirvana!



INTERNATIONAL

Pashinyan Says Armenia ‘Needs’ to Sign Peace Treaty with Azerbaijan by End of 2025

By Arshaluys Barseghyan and Aytan Farhadova

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has said the country needs “to try” to sign a peace treaty with Azerbaijan and dissolve the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk group by “the end of the year.”

Speaking at the GLOBSEC 2025 in Prague on June 13, Pashinyan touched on Azerbaijan’s preconditions for signing the treaty, saying that one of the prerequisites, the dissolution of the OSCE Minsk Group, was “overall an acceptable agenda” for Armenia.

The OSCE Minsk Group was the main venue for talks between the two sides following the First Nagorno-Karabakh War.

He reiterated that in order to dissolve the Minsk Group, the Armenian government must ascertain that Azerbaijan would not press “new demands against Armenia’s territory.”

Pashinyan said that some circles in Azerbaijan refer to over 60 percent of Armenia’s territory as “western Azerbaijan,” which he said Armenia perceived as a territorial claim.

“Western Azerbaijan” is an irredentist term used by the authorities in Baku to describe the territories in which Azerbaijanis used to live before the conflict with Armenia began.

The dissolution of OSCE Minsk Group, as well as amendments to Armenia’s constitution are the two preconditions pushed by Azerbaijan for signing the peace treaty, after the two countries agreed to the deal’s terms on March 13.

Azerbaijan has said that Armenia’s constitution contains territorial claims against its own territory, referring to the constitution’s preamble, which cites Armenia’s declaration of independence. Signed in

1990, the declaration includes a joint decision by the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Karabakh Council to “reunify the Armenian SSR and the Mountainous Region of Karabakh.”

In Prague, Pashinyan reiterated that Armenia’s constitution did not contain any territorial claims against Azerbaijan, citing a previous ruling by Armenia’s Constitutional Court.

At the same time, Pashinyan reiterated his readiness to initiate constitutional amendments if Armenia’s Constitutional Court rules that the text of the treaty did not comply with the constitution.

“We are concentrated, we will try to sign it in June, if we won’t be successful, we will try to do it in July. Repeatedly we will work on that and eventually we will sign the peace agreement, and we will establish peace,” Pashinyan said.

The agreed text was a “mutual achievement” of Armenian and Azerbaijani diplomats, Pashinyan said, adding that the two states had reached a point where “we can be sure that there won’t be war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, there will be peace.”

Armenpress quoted Pashinyan as saying that the two sides were “at the phase of consultations with Azerbaijan to understand how to implement the signature and further ratification.”

Additionally, Pashinyan presented his government’s Crossroads of Peace project, a regional transport proposal that would connect Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Georgia through Armenia.

‘Expectations from Armenia’

Azerbaijani Presidential Aide Hikmat Hajiyev was also present at the conference, during which he said Azerbaijan “ensured

security and stability” in the region but also had an “expectation” from Armenia.

“Armenia can be an integral part of the comprehensive discussions and corridors held in the region. This is possible. Of course, we also have expectations from Armenia.”

Hajiyev claimed that now they were waiting “for the first important step regarding the Zangezur corridor” — an Azerbaijani proposal to establish a corridor through Armenian territory connecting mainland Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhichevan.

“The word “corridor” irritates my colleagues in Armenia. Let them say what they want. But first of all, we want a connection with Nakhichevan, because we have been deprived of this opportunity for 30 years. After the connection with Nakhichevan is established, I think other opportunities may open up for Armenia. We also consider Armenia as part of the regional transport,” Hajiyev said.

Hajiyev has also said that Armenia’s constitution posed a “concern” for Azerbaijan and that the OSCE Minsk Group was a “relic of history.”

“We understand that the constitution is an integral part of the political dynamism of any country, but if the constitution contains claims to the territory of another country, this is already a concern,” Hajiyev said, according to APA.

“The second issue, although not so important, has psychological significance. We are talking about the complete dissolution of the Minsk Group, which is a relic of history. I believe that now is the time to jointly appeal to the OSCE with a request to dissolve the Minsk Group, which is inactive.”

(This story originally appeared on the website www.oc-media.org on Jun 17.)

US Notified Turkey ahead of Israeli Strikes on Iran: Report

ISTANBUL (Turkish Minute) — The United States gave Turkey prior notice of Israel’s plan to launch airstrikes on Iran last week, according to a report by Middle East Eye, which cited two sources familiar with the matter.

The notification, reportedly delivered late Thursday, June 12, came just hours before Israel launched its most extensive military campaign against Iranian targets in decades. According to the report Washington’s move was intended in part to prevent potential friction with Ankara, especially given rising tensions between Turkey and Israel over military movements in Syria.

Israeli jets are believed to have used airspace over Syria and Iraq to reach their targets. Iraq’s foreign ministry lodged a formal complaint with the United Nations Security Council on Friday over the unauthorized use of its airspace by Israeli aircraft.

Turkey has not publicly commented on the reported US notification. Requests for comment by Middle East Eye to the Turkish Foreign Ministry and the US State Department went unanswered.

Tensions between Ankara and Tel Aviv have deepened in recent months, especially in northern Syria, where Turkish forces have begun establishing military outposts in coordination with Damascus. According to the report, Turkey seeks to help train Syrian forces and jointly combat remaining cells of the Islamic State group. Ankara is also pursuing access to Syria’s strategic Ti-yas (T4) air base in Homs province.

Israeli officials are reportedly concerned that Turkish control of Syrian airspace — and particularly any deployment of Russian-made S-400 missile systems — could compromise Israeli air operations in the region. A Turkish source told Middle East Eye that Ankara is unlikely to station S-400s in Syria due to US objections and will instead use air defense systems suited to countering drones and low-altitude threats.

The government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has systematically dismantled Syria’s aerial defense network since December, leaving the country vulnerable to foreign incursions. Israeli strikes on Iranian targets inside Syria and beyond have intensified amid reports of Iranian weapons convoys and intelligence installations.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has stepped up diplomatic efforts in the wake of the Israeli-Iranian exchange. Over the weekend Erdoğan had calls with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump, offering Turkey as a mediator and advocating a return to negotiations on Iran’s nuclear program.

According to the same report, the Turkish Air Force was put on high alert as security officials in Ankara held emergency meetings to assess the risk of escalation and potential spillover from the conflict. One such meeting, held on Friday, included Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, Defense

Minister Yaşar Güler, National Intelligence Organization chief İbrahim Kalın and Chief of General Staff Gen. Metin Gürak.

In a separate call with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, Erdoğan reportedly urged restraint and warned against becoming entangled in the growing conflict between Israel and Iran.

More than 100 Indian Students Evacuated from Iran through Armenia

YEREVAN (Reuters) — India has begun the evacuation of its nationals from Iran amid the escalating tensions between Tehran and Israel.

India’s Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement on June 16 that some Indians have been facilitated to leave Iran through the border with Armenia, WION reports.

This comes after Iran responded to India’s request for the safe evacuation of Indian students saying that though the airspace is closed over Iran, all land borders are open for the safe evacuation.

According to official sources, the students are currently safe in Armenia and are being extended full assistance by the Indian Embassy. Arrangements have been made for their return to India, and they are scheduled to board a special flight to Delhi on June 17.

INTERNATIONAL

Armenian Tourists Stranded in Bethlehem Amid Regional Conflict

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — A group of 17 Armenian citizens is unable to return from Bethlehem as planned due to escalating tensions in the region.

The tourists left Armenia on June 10 and were scheduled to return on June 17. However, the worsening Iran-Israel conflict has made their return currently impossible.

“We’re in Bethlehem, which is relatively safe since it’s within Palestinian territories and not subject to bombings,” said group member Martha Paloyan.

She explained that due to ongoing shelling in nearby areas, the group has no safe way to leave or return to Armenia.

“Our travel agency is working on our return and has contacted the embassy and the foreign ministry. They’re exploring options to get us across the border safely and possibly return via Jordan or Egypt. But it’s unclear how long that will take, and even the embassy can’t give an exact answer. It’s going to be a long and dangerous journey,” said Paloyan.

She noted that their group is the only one from Armenia currently in Bethlehem, and they are staying in a secure hotel with all necessary provisions. “The locals have been extremely supportive and kind to us,” she added.

China Advises Nationals In Iran to Consider Armenia as Evacuation Route

BEIJING (Reuters) — China has begun evacuating its citizens from Israel and Iran and was pushing for a ceasefire.

China’s foreign ministry said embassies and consulates have been offering assistance to those seeking to evacuate since the outbreak of fighting.

The Chinese embassy in Iran issued an evacuation notice listing border points for people to enter Turkey, Armenia and Turkmenistan, according to Reuters.

Chinese authorities, meanwhile, were in communication with Iran, Israel and various parties to promote a ceasefire, foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a regular press briefing on June 17.

“China calls on all relevant parties, especially those countries that have a special influence on Israel, to shoulder their due responsibilities, take immediate measures to cool down the tense situation and prevent the conflict from escalating and spreading,” Guo said, without naming any countries.

Chinese embassies in Israel and Iran have issued multiple advisories in recent days for citizens to step up safety precautions.

The notice listed several land crossing points but recommended Chinese citizens leave via Jordan.

The Chinese embassy in Iran issued a similar evacuation notice on its official WeChat account later on Tuesday.



INTERNATIONAL

Azerbaijani FM Tells Iranian Counterpart It Won't allow Israel To Use Territory for Strikes

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AFP/news.am) — Azerbaijan reassured neighboring Iran that it would not allow its territory to be used for attacks against Tehran, following unprecedented Israeli strikes on Iranian targets on June 14.

Iran has long expressed concern that Israel — a close ally of Azerbaijan and a key arms supplier — could use Azerbaijani territory to stage attacks.

“Azerbaijan will never allow its territory to be used for attacks on third countries, including friendly Iran,” Azerbaijan’s Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov tells his Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araghchi.

In a phone call with Araghchi, Bayramov warned that the “conflict risked engulfing the broader region,” and called for “diplomatic efforts to prevent further escalation,” the Azerbaijani foreign ministry press service tells AFP.

The ministry added that Azerbaijan had facilitated land transit across its border after Iran closed its airspace in response to the Israeli strikes.

However, on June 16, Iranian political analyst Salar Seyf wrote on social media that the Aliyev regime allowed the launching of Israeli drones from Nakhichevan and Karabakh (Artsakh) toward the city of Tabriz, in the north of Iran.

Armenia Dispatches Nuclear Inspectors Following Israeli Strikes on Iran Nuclear Facilities

INSPECTORS, from page 1

The ministry also noted that the two ministers “will remain in active contact, including related to the discussions in the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency.”

The following day, Mirzoyan held a phone conversation with his Indian counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. The two discussed the situation in the region and underscored “the importance of staying in constant contact and close cooperation in times of crisis.”

On Monday, June 16, the Armenian authorities reported that Armenian businesses were experiencing problems with imports and exports with or through Iran amidst the ongoing conflict.

“There are a number of goods that are now at Bandar Abbas (Iran) port and haven’t exited it yet, a number of other goods are waiting on the roads,” Armenpress quoted Economy Minister of Gevorg Papoyan as saying.

Armenia swiftly condemned Israel’s latest deadly attack on Iran, with whom it enjoys warm relations.

While Tehran remained relatively neutral during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Iranian officials have repeatedly warned Azerbaijan against any attempt to seize a land corridor through Armenian territory by force.

Analysts warn of possible consequences for the region if tensions continue to escalate.



Scene from “Thus Spoke the Wind”

‘Thus Spoke the Wind’ Crime Drama to Premiere At Karlovy Vary International Film Festival

LOS ANGELES (Hollywood Reporter) — Armenian crime drama “Thus Spoke the Wind,” written and directed by Maria Rigel, will have its world premiere as part of the Proxima competition lineup of the 2025 Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (KVIFF), The Hollywood Reporter informs.

The independent Armenian production stars Albert Babajanyan, Lusine Avanesyan, and Annika Abrahamyan, with cinematography by Ayrat Yamilov.

The film tells the story of a family on the edge of society. Hayk, a withdrawn and aloof child, lives on a farm with his aunt Narine and gets mocked and called strange by others. After a lengthy stay abroad, his mother returns to the farm. “The locals openly condemn her behavior because she does not follow the rules of society,” reads a plot synopsis. “Narine, unable to forgive Anahit for the shame brought upon her with her behavior, decides to take revenge.”

The movie features local talent, most of whom are not professional actors. That choice reflects the director’s attempt to ensure “authenticity and create

a sense of documentary realism,” she explains in a director’s statement. The crew consisted of local people and immigrants from the post-Soviet countries.

“The film continues the cultural traditions of Armenian auteur cinema,” Rigel

modern world of Armenia, the clash of traditions of the past and present.”

She also notes the importance of the music in the film. “The soundtrack to the film was created by American composer Steve Brand,” known for his ambient music with



Scene from “Thus Spoke the Wind”

says. “The documentary style of the film is combined with the bright color poetics of Parajanov’s cinema, which reflects the

tribal and ritualistic vibes, the director says. “His magical music perfectly emphasizes the spirit of modern Armenian aesthetics.”

Armenia Condemns Israeli Strikes on Iran

CONDEMNATION, from page 1

Tehran has repeatedly warned against attempts to strip Iran of its common border with Armenia. Armenian and Iranian troops held a first-ever joint military exercise there in April.

Despite the geopolitical tensions and uncertainty brought about by the Israeli attacks, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan flew to the Czech Republic on Friday morning to take part in an international forum that will take place there.

Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan telephoned his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi on Saturday one day after the start of Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities and military sites condemned by Armenia.

In a post on X, Mirzoyan said they discussed “the recent developments and exchanged views on the current situation.”

“In line with the position expressed by Armenia, I emphasized the importance of managing the risks and avoiding escalation in the region,” he wrote. “We remain in close contact, including related to [International Atomic Energy Agency] discussions.”

The Armenian Foreign Ministry issued an identical readout of the phone call that followed Iran’s retaliatory missile attacks on Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities. The Iranian side did not immediately comment on the conversation.

So far Armenia has not urged its citizens to leave Iran. The Armenian Embassy in

Tehran said on Friday afternoon that they should “stay vigilant, follow official instructions and contact the embassy in case of emergency.”

Many in Armenia fear that a possible weakening or destabilization of Iran could embolden Azerbaijan to invade Armenia in an attempt to open a land corridor to its Nakhichevan exclave. The corridor sought by Baku but strongly opposed by Tehran would pass through Syunik, the only Armenian region bordering the Islamic Republic.

Iranian leaders have repeatedly warned against attempts to strip Iran of its common border with Armenia. Armenian and Iranian troops held a first-ever joint military exercise there in April.



INTERNATIONAL

Firebird Announces Strategic Collaboration with Government Of Armenia and NVIDIA to Build AI Cloud

PARIS — Firebird, an AI cloud company, and the Armenian government — with support from NVIDIA — announced on June 11 a vision for building advanced AI infrastructure to accelerate technology innovation and establish the Caucasus region as an AI hub. Firebird plans to launch with thousands of NVIDIA Blackwell GPUs in 2026 and will be designed with the ability to scale to over 100 megawatts of capacity.

Emerging from stealth, Firebird unveiled a vision for a \$500 million public-private partnership with the Armenian government, which will fuel the development and growth of AI technologies in the country. This initiative will help grow the local technology ecosystem by bringing together high-performing infrastructure, talent, and innovation. By working with industry and government, Firebird aims to support economic growth and help businesses, entrepreneurs, and academia stay ahead in the cutting-edge of AI.

The new AI factory marks a significant milestone in Armenia’s journey toward becoming a leader in next-generation technology, building on NVIDIA’s existing presence in the country.

“We welcome NVIDIA’s partnership and work with Firebird to build AI infrastructure in Armenia. This is a major step toward strengthening our tech sector and global partnerships,” said Nikol Pashinyan, the prime minister of the Republic of Armenia.



Jensen Huang, founder and CEO of NVIDIA

“The government is happy to support this initiative and unlock new opportunities for our people and region.”

“AI factories are the infrastructure of the 21st century,” said Jensen Huang, founder and CEO of NVIDIA. “Our collaboration with Armenia will help build foundational

AI capacity and unlock new opportunities for innovation and economic growth across the region.”

“This is about building a launchpad for innovation — from Armenia to the world,” said Razmig Hovaghimian, co-founder and CEO of Firebird.ai. “We will invest in novel models, in robotics and the sciences in partnership with leading universities from around the world and build the capacity to incubate the next generation of innovators in Armenia.”

“We are excited about the potential for U.S. technology exports and AI leadership to drive more innovation in Armenia’s dynamic tech sector, benefitting the United States and Armenia,” said Kristina Kvien, U.S. Ambassador to Armenia. “U.S. companies like NVIDIA continue to offer world-leading computing and AI solutions, and we are proud that they are the partners of choice for Armenian counterparts.”

Regional Technology Ecosystem Support

Team Group, the parent company of Telecom Armenia and Ireland’s Imagine Broadband will support the development of Armenia’s AI infrastructure, bringing deep technical expertise and connectivity infrastructure to accelerate deployment of the data center. The Afeyan Foundation for Armenia will join as founding investor in Firebird, and its principal, Noubar Afeyan, who is also CEO of Flagship Pioneering,

will act as a strategic advisor and a founding partner of Firebird.

“Armenia’s next chapter in technology leadership will be built on global collaboration and long-term investment,” said Afeyan. “The development of AI infrastructure for Armenia and the broader region is a bold step toward positioning the country as a meaningful contributor in the global AI landscape.”

This initiative marks a defining moment for Armenia’s technology sector, bringing together entrepreneurial vision, world-class infrastructure, and global collaboration to unlock new opportunities for innovation and growth. Firebird and the Armenian government are laying a foundation for technology development in the region, enabling businesses and entrepreneurs to seize new opportunities brought on by AI and supporting economic growth in Armenia and across the Caucasus. At the same time, they are forging deeper ties with Europe’s leading tech sectors.

Firebird.ai is a San Francisco and Yerevan based AI cloud company, launching the Caucasus’ first and largest AI supercomputer in 2026, powered by NVIDIA Blackwell GPUs. Future Firebird locations will deliver sustainable, high-performance AI infrastructure to fast-growing emerging markets worldwide, reinvesting a portion of its revenue to build local technology capacity.



From right, Firebird CEO Razmig Hovaghimian, Armenia’s First Deputy Minister of the HighTech Industry Gevorg Mantashyan, Team Group co-founder Alexandr Yesayan, NVIDIA vice president Rev Lebedian, CEO of Flagship Pioneering Noubar Afeyan. / Firebird

Holy See of Cilicia Backs Echmiadzin

BEIRUT (PanARMENIAN.Net) — During a full session of the Religious and Political Councils of the Catholicosate’s Central Executive Board, chaired by Catholicos Aram I at the Holy See of Cilicia in Antelias, on June 17, the body discussed what it termed “the offensive attitude adopted by the Armenian authorities against the Catholicos of All Armenians and high-ranking clergy of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin.”

According to a statement, the Catholicosate of Cilicia “expresses its solidarity with the Catholicos of All Armenians and rejects any attack against him.”

The session highlighted the following points:

- Church-state relations in Armenia are based on the constitutional principle of separation, ensuring the Church’s autonomy. State interference contradicts this principle.
- Ecclesiastical matters are governed solely by church canons; thus, the state has no authority to intervene.
- The language used in public discourse on church-related matters was deemed inappropriate and condemnable.
- Given Armenia’s existential threats, the Catholicosate emphasized the need to focus on national challenges rather than

actions that incite division.

- The principle of “one nation, one church” remains the foundation of the Catholicosate’s stance, reinforcing its ongoing support for the Catholicos of All Armenians and condemning any attacks against him.

The Catholicosate also noted that its dioceses continue active and community-focused work despite security tensions in the Middle East.

In his concluding remarks, Catholicos Aram I emphasized the need for new concepts and methods under current conditions, especially regarding the rejuvenation of diocesan structures. He also

stressed the urgency of reorganizing the diaspora and called for unity around national and universal values, avoiding polarizing actions.

Separately, the Diocese of Artsakh of the Armenian Apostolic Church expressed its full support for the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin and Catholicos Garegin II, who, it noted, continues defending the collective rights of the people of Artsakh.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had stated on Facebook that “active steps are needed to liberate the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin’s residence and organize new Catholicos elections.” He added that a Coordinating Group would be formed to manage this agenda, and he would personally take responsibility for selecting its first 10 members.



Community News

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing Puts Focus On Abuses in Turkey

WASHINGTON — The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing, “Human Rights in Turkey Today,” on June 10, addressed the human rights situation in Turkey and featured panelists Enes Kanter Freedom, human rights activist and former NBA player, Alp Aslandogan, Executive Director of Alliance For Shared Values, and Dr. Michael Rubin, Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, who discussed the government of Turkey’s human rights abuses, U.S. response, and recommendations for Congress.

Led by Co-Chairs Chris Smith (R-NJ) and James McGovern (D-MA), the Tom Lantos Commission hearing follows on the heels of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom’s 2025 Annual Report, that recommended the U.S. State Department “include Turkey on the Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom.”

Smith indicated in his opening statement that he has chaired numerous hearings on this subject and also noted the hearings he held on the Armenian Genocide and also on Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan’s ethnic cleansing. In particular, Rep. Smith recalled the threats made by a Turkish official from the witness stand if Congress recognized the Armenian Genocide.

Raised in Turkey, Kanter Freedom’s citizenship was revoked when he actively voiced his concerns about the authoritarian rule under President Recep Erdogan, emphasizing that “his policies and rhetoric have weaponized religion for political gain and dismantled a democratic model,” while “supporting radical groups and assisting criminal networks with money laundering.”

Kanter Freedom expressed that in Turkey opposition parties, politicians and journalists “continue to face widespread prosecution under Erdogan’s authoritarian rule,” and despite clear rulings from European courts, these actions of silencing individuals by imprisonment “demonstrate the Turkish government’s blatant disregard for democratic norms and international human rights obligations.”

As a survivor of Erdogan’s repressive government, Kanter Freedom, who is a US citizen, has spoken out to amplify the voices of those who have been silenced, including 3 million people in Turkey who have been labeled as terrorists. He stated that he has 12 arrest warrants, a \$500,000 bounty on his head, and narrowly escaped a kidnapping. The implications affected his family as well, as his father was imprisoned and his mother was recently detained in Turkey.

“The Turkish government has abused the Interpol system to abuse me, and repeatedly tried to silence me through threats and intimidation,” said Kanter Freedom, who noted that see HEARING, page 10



The Unlikely Group Getting Rich Off Dave’s Hot Chicken’s \$1 Billion Deal

By Jemima McEvoy

LOS ANGELES (Forbes) — “How late did you guys stay out last night?” jokes Dave’s Hot Chicken CEO Bill Phelps. The 69-year-old, who joined the Los Angeles-based spicy chicken chain in 2019 after leading Blaze Pizza and Wetzel’s Pretzels, is sitting next to his second in-command, Dave’s president and COO Jim Bitticks, another Blaze alumnus, on one side of a large conference room table in Forbes’ Jersey City office.

On the other side are two of Dave’s four cofounders, Arman Oganessian, 33, and Dave Kopushyan, 34, who do indeed look like they’re on their way to (or from) a big night out. Kopushyan, a cook who is the brand’s namesake, is coolly dressed in a white T-shirt and blue-washed jeans covered in Black stars. Oganessian, meanwhile, dons a bright pink and orange Versace silk shirt, matching pink sunglasses and a Hermes belt with shorts, his arms and legs exposed to show intricate tattoos.

Though both claim no mischief the night prior, the duo have plenty to celebrate. Their visit to Forbes is the last stop on a whirlwind two-day press tour following the June 2 announcement that Dave’s sold 70 percent of its business to Roark Capital – the private equity giant that owns Subway, Dunkin’, Buffalo Wild Wings among other restaurant brands – at a \$1 billion valuation. After the interview, they’re hopping on a private jet from Teterboro Airport back to Los Angeles.

Dave’s was founded in 2017 by Oganessian, Kopushyan, and brothers Tommy and Gary Rubenyan. All four were children of Armenian immigrants who grew up together in East Hollywood and high school dropouts. They started the business as a pop-up in a parking lot near where they grew up. Their cayenne-coated, Nashville-style chicken, which comes in six different spice levels (the hottest of which, “The Reaper” requires buyers to sign a waiver), gained an immediate cult following. Continued social media hype around the brand, which says its brand organically generates millions of views a week on TikTok, along with a cadre of celebrity investors including rapper Drake helped turn Dave’s into a \$620 million (2024 systemwide sales) business with over 300 global locations — and a prime takeover target.

The Dave’s original pop-up was set up in the parking lot of a random apartment building in East Hollywood.

The four cofounders, who were at one time so broke they say they struggled to pool together the \$900 needed to launch the first Dave’s popup, are now richer than they ever imagined. Each owned roughly 10 percent of the business prior to the sale and is selling around 80 percent of their stakes, amounting to around \$80 million (pre-tax). “The money’s in our accounts,” says Oganessian, who admits he Googled whether Roark could request the money back. “Wires are permanent. Even if you mistakenly wire money to somebody, you can’t take it back.” (The day before announcing the Roark deal, Oganessian, a former standup comedian who is Dave’s chief business officer, posted a photo of himself sitting on the

continued on next page

Remembering the Martyrs of the Sayfo Genocide

PARAMUS, N.J. On Friday, June 6, Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan joined clergy and faithful of the Syriac Orthodox Church for a solemn evening of remembrance and prayer.

The gathering at St. Mark’s Syriac Orthodox Cathedral in Paramus, NJ, commemorated the martyrs of the Sayfo Genocide of 1915: the mass murder and deportation of Syriac Christians by the Ottoman Empire, which went forward concurrently with the Ottoman’s Genocide of the Armenians. This year marked the 110th year of remembrance of the Sayfo — a name derived from the Syriac word for “sword.”

Archbishop Mor Dionysius John Kawak, the Patriarchal Vicar of the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of the Eastern U.S., led the commemoration, opening the evening with prayers of hope, followed by his meaningful words on the sacred duty to remember and speak the truth, from generation to generation.

Bishop Mesrop was a guest speaker for the occasion, presenting a reflection titled “1915 Genocide: Martyrs for Christ.”

“I was deeply humbled to present this offering of memory, love, and shared suffering that binds our churches together in holy witness,” Parsamyan said. “Like the Armenian martyrs of 1915, the holy martyrs of the Sayfo Genocide — our Syriac brothers and sisters — gave their lives for their faith.”

Also speaking was Richard Ghazal, leader of the organization “In Defense of Christians,” who spoke on “The Sayfo and Christian Persecution Today.” He emphasized that the kind of persecution suffered in 1915 still exists in many parts of the world, and requires eternal vigilance from advocates for justice.

Following the presentations, Fr. Joseph Shammas moderated a discussion with the panelists and guests. Among the clergy dignitaries in attendance was Bishop Ashot Mnat-sakanyan, Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Africa.

The evening concluded with prayers at the Sayfo Memorial, and a heartfelt fellowship hour in the Mor Aghem Center. “Let us continue to remember,” said Bishop Mesrop in remarks afterward. “Let us continue to speak. And let us always stand together in faith and say, Never again!”



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan and Richard Ghazal



COMMUNITY NEWS

The Unlikely Group Getting Rich Off Dave's Hot Chicken's \$1 Billion Deal

from previous page

hood of an electric blue McLaren with the caption: "Patiently waiting for all my relatives in Armenia to call and ask me for money.")

It's quite a jump from the last time they cashed out. The founders previously sold half the business — Dave's had just one location at the time — for \$2 million in 2018 to an investor group led by CEO Phelps and the Hollywood producer John Davis, son of billionaire oil and entertainment tycoon Marvin Davis (d. 2004) who is now a prominent food investor. (The pair had having previously worked together on Wetzel's, which Phelps founded, and on Blaze Pizza.) "I fell in love with the boys. There was something about them," says Davis, who claims he knew from the beginning: "This is a \$1 billion company."

It was really Phelps and Davis who helped it grow so big so fast and, while the duo have worked on the other two restaurant concepts together, this one is the most successful concept to date in terms of the company's ultimate valuation. Phelps and Davis both made 250 times their initial investment. According to Davis, he and Phelps were the largest shareholders in the company at the time of the sale to Roark, with roughly equal stakes. (Davis declined to share his ownership stake but says he still kept some after the sale.) Phelps, who also declined to reveal his ownership stake, says he sold off half of his shares and adds that he and the rest of his investment group

a recipe he says is 98 percent the same as the one Dave's currently sells. The pair recruited Tommy Rubenyan and his older brother Gary, who would later help put up the money to open the first store.

The operation was extremely scrappy. Though they initially floated the idea of selling out of a food truck, they decided to do the pop-up instead, borrowing tables and chairs from their families and using the \$900 to buy a fryer and heat lamps.

A rave review from local food blog Eater LA five days into business made Dave's an overnight sensation. Within a year, they opened their first restaurant in East Hollywood. Despite being in an area Phelps describes as a "dump" — "we would never approve that site today," adds Bitticks — Dave's food went so viral that the founders claim the restaurant ended the year doing \$5 million in sales.

"It was the cult following," says Phelps. "It was what they created through Instagram, the [Eater LA] article... It drew people to the restaurant like crazy and there would be two hour lines for that store." The brand initially relied heavily on marketing its products through Instagram. But it's also become a big hit on TikTok, where it's trendy for people to post videos of themselves eating and reviewing Dave's' sliders, nuggets and fries.

Not surprisingly, the founders say there was immediate interest from investors. They shrugged off most inquiries but one stood out: A post-it note left with the restaurant's manager. "It just said 'founders call John Davis,'" recalls Kopushyan.

Davis is one of Hollywood's most prolific producers with more than 115 credits — including "Predator" and "Doctor Dolittle" — and \$8 billion in box office earnings for the films he's backed. Over the past three decades, he's also made a name for himself as a successful early backer of early-stage fast-casual concepts.

In 1997, Davis bought into Wetzel's Pretzels, an Auntie Annie's competitor founded by Phelps and Rick Wetzel (Davis and his investment group sold their stake in the business in 2008 at a valuation of \$36 million). Davis and Phelps teamed up again in 2012 when they became two of the earliest investors in Blaze Pizza, another restaurant concept founded by Wetzel and his wife Elise. They sold their minority stake in the 380 restaurant chain for an estimated \$250 million in 2017.

Davis, who is also an investor in Pop-up Bagels, has a simple formula for building winning restaurant brands: bring on board his posse of trusted investors including Phelps, actor Samuel L. Jackson and celebrity investment advisor Paul Wachter ("we just go from deal to deal"), take the biggest ownership stake, install his own management team and install a celebrity to help rep the brand. Davis did exactly this with Dave's, convincing Phelps, who he'd worked with at both Wetzel's and Blaze, to run the brand instead of retiring.

Immediately after the deal, Dave's began franchising with the help of a management team almost entirely carried over from Blaze.

Dave's second restaurant opened in 2019 and then six more the next year, according to data from the restaurant industry data collector Technomic. They targeted franchisors who had owned a Blaze, Wetzel's

or another fast casual restaurant previously. Phelps also helped several executives, including Bitticks and Dave's CFO James McGehee, buy franchise locations (Bitticks owns three currently and has plans to open up two more). Dave's founders now own a combined seven locations.

By 2022, a year after Dave's announced rapper Drake as its big celebrity backer (Drake is a client of Wachter's, who helped

Roark began circling Dave's five years ago when it had just 15 locations. The owners joked that the private equity firm was "stalking" the brand as they were constantly being courted at conferences or, in Phelps' case, even one time on the golf course.

In the end, the owners were keen enough on the \$1 billion offer and worried enough about Trump's tariffs and ensuing econom-



Arman Oganessian, Tommy Rubenyan and Dave Kopushyan of Dave's Hot Chicken (Joshua Levitt for CNBC)

bring him into the deal, according to Davis), they'd opened nearly 100 locations, many of them in California. They've since more than tripled that number, expanding into 46 different states and seven countries. Dave's systemwide sales hit \$617 million last year, up from \$392 million in 2023, the Technomic data shows. In 2020, sales were just \$22 million.

It's not uncommon for trendy food restaurants to hit the gas too quickly on their brick and mortar growth, then suffer when they fall out of style. This is what happened with Subway, which was acquired by Roark last year for over \$9 billion after shuttering nearly a quarter of its locations over the past decade. Blaze, Phelps and David's previous venture, shut 30 locations, or 10 percent of its total stores, last year, according to Kevin Schimpf, senior director of industry research at Technomic. Blaze's sales also dropped from \$400 million in 2023 to \$357 million in 2024. When asked whether their chain has any reservations about growing too quickly, Dave's leadership is dismissive.

"We understand this business really well," says Bitticks of Dave's. "We're going to go from opening 80 restaurants last year to roughly 155 this year, to almost 165 or 170 next year. That's the kind of growth we can maintain."

The company isn't worried about competitors. "I went into a Popeye's and had their spicy chicken sandwich and said, 'We're going to be rich,'" says Phelps. Even beloved brands like Chick-Fil-A and Raising Cane's don't rattle him, citing the eating patterns of his two young adult sons. "They eat out twice a day," he says. "It's not like you only have one shot to eat out this week and it's either Dave's or Raising Cane's."

They're talking a big game but, at least for now, Dave's is still a small fry. According to Phelps, the average Dave's restaurant brings in around \$3 million a year in sales (EBITDA margins are between 18 percent and 20 percent); data from Technomic suggests that number is closer to \$2.5 million. This outpaces the likes of Popeyes, which recorded around \$1.9 million in average sales at its more than 2,400 locations last year. But Dave's sales pale in comparison to some of its more ferocious competitors: Chick-Fil-A averaged \$9.3 million at its free-standing and drive-thru restaurants last year, while Raising Cane's reportedly hit \$6.2 million in average unit volume.

ic uncertainty that they rushed to close the deal through a "truncated sales process" after agreeing to the deal initially in January, according to Bitticks. "The [mergers & acquisitions market] has been very quiet," echoes Gordon, the restaurant analyst. Plus, there's another good reason for Dave's to get the deal done now: "Eating out is a form of entertainment," says Gordon. "You need to sell when the concept is hot." What's trending one day may not be trending the next. And as a business deeply rooted in trends, Dave's may be particularly vulnerable to changing cultural tides.

Davis, for his part, says it was largely his decision for Dave's owners to cash out when they did. "We have to take care of our investors and give them the opportunity to get out what they want," he says. "What I recommended to all of them is when everything is perfect, that's the time to get out." He adds that Roark's experience is going to "open up" Dave's to foreign markets, which his team doesn't have as much expertise in. "This concept is going to be really good in foreign countries."

Dave's has already sold the rights to open more than 1,000 franchise locations in the U.S., the U.K., the Middle East and Canada over the next five years.

Despite the celebratory parade around the sale, Dave's founders and execs insist they are not walking away any time soon. None are contractually obligated to stay on now the Roark deal is done, but they all say they're planning to do so. Oganessian remains Dave's chief brand officer, while Kopushyan is chief culinary officer. They highlight that they continue to hold a stake in the brand as well as multiple franchise locations. Plus, they say none of the now 55 employees at Dave's HQ have left the company since it was founded seven years ago.

As for the customers who may be concerned about what will happen to Dave's in the hands of private equity: "Our whole journey, when we were in the pop up, people were saying 'Oh when you guys get a store the quality is going to go down.' Then when we started franchising, people were like 'Oh my gosh, the franchising quality is going to go down,'" says Oganessian. "Every step of the way, people were always like that. And I think what I was always trying to get across to people is, as long as you have founders and people within the brand who care about the food, they care about the experience, the quality will never go down."



The original East Hollywood Pop up

voted to give away a chunk of their earnings to create a bonus pool for Dave's executives and employees, around 20 of whom will become millionaires. "The average bonus for the support people all the way down to assistant restaurant manager level was about \$100,000," adds COO Bitticks.

Alot of things had to go right for Dave's to end up where it did. One important factor was the founders' timely bet on chicken. "The two hottest new concepts in the restaurant world are coffee and chicken," says John Gordon, a restaurant industry expert who is the founder of Pacific Management Consulting Group. In 2010, chicken overtook beef as the most popular meat in the U.S., according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A seemingly insatiable appetite for the protein has helped chicken joints including Raising Cane's, Wingstop and Dave's rank among the fastest growing restaurant chains in America in recent years.

Oganessian says it was this burgeoning trend that prompted him to approach his friend Kopushyan, whom he met in middle school, back in 2017. It was a tough sell at first. Kopushyan, who previously worked as a line cook at famed chef Thomas Keller's Bouchon restaurant in Los Angeles, was a vegetarian working at Elf Cafe, a veggie restaurant on Sunset Boulevard. But after a month of lobbying, Oganessian managed to convince his friend, who developed

COMMUNITY NEWS

Lantos Hearing Puts Focus on Human Rights Abuses in Turkey

HEARING, from page 8

while his case is known, there are millions whose cases have not been heard.

He continued: “Turkish prisons are dangerously overcrowded, there is torture, and denial of medical care is widespread. These are part of the deliberate campaign to dismantle civil society.”

“President Erdogan has consolidated total control, sidelined the judicial system, muzzled the media, and is working to change the constitution to remain in power indefinitely,” said Kanter Freedom. “He undermines democratic values and regional security, and we cannot allow Erdogan to hijack the entire country.”

In his concluding remarks, Kanter Freedom respectfully urged the U.S. Congress and the Commission to publicly condemn political detentions; condition U.S. support and arms sales by measurable improvements in human rights and rule of law; support independent civil society voices; and demand compliance from Turkey.

Dr. Michael Rubin’s remarks focused on policy prescriptions as he advised the US to not “blindly accept either Turkish intelligence or treat its accusations of terrorism in good faith,” noting that intelligence coming from Turkey is “neither credible nor should the United States accept it as such.”

He recommended that the U.S. engage with the PKK to “ensure its integration into the political process” and highlighted that the situation of the Greeks in Turkey is “dire” as they face “slow motion eradication,” as there are now 2,000 Greeks in Turkey, despite the fact that there were about 2 million Greek Christians in Turkey during the foundation of modern Turkey.

Rubin emphasized the importance of Congress to “elevate the issue of religious freedom” otherwise it’s likely that Orthodox Christianity will disappear from Turkey, which he stated would be a “blow after the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh’s 1,700-year indigenous Armenian Christian community.”

He continued: “Armenians in Turkey live



Panelists (l-r) Alp Aslandogan, Enes Kanter Freedom and Dr. Michael Rubin

with the legacy of the Armenian Genocide. Acknowledging genocide is more than a historical question. Genocide denial perpetuates genocide.”

But in Turkey, denial has become embraced, according to Dr. Rubin, who said that “denial means that the ideology, intolerance, and hatred that catalyzed the Armenian genocide remains legitimate.”

Rubin added that Turkey should not receive the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter and that the U.S. should “no longer take Turkey at its word.”

“The best indicator of true reform among the world’s rogues and revisionists is respect for the freedom of religious and ethnic minorities. It is time to elevate Turkey’s human rights abuses, not paper over them,” he concluded.

Alp Aslandogan said that the Erdogan regime, under the pretext of combatting terrorism, has “weaponized counterterrorism laws to silence peaceful critics,” noting that the evidence brought for terrorism charges



Dr. Michael Rubin, Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute

in Turkey are “laughable” and include things like donating to a charity or working at a school.

“The consequences of this witch hunt have been devastating, as thousands were purged from their jobs and blacklisted, and hundreds of schools, NGOs, and media outlets have been shuttered,” he said.

The media repression has extended to “global erasure” of content at the pressure of the Turkish government, as Aslandogan urged Congress and the Commission to make improvements in human rights in Turkey a condition for any kind of assistance, to enable the Global Magnitsky Act against Turkish authorities known to perpetrate torture, and finally for the “U.S. to leverage its leadership in NATO to implement reforms and international laws.”

During the question and answer session, Kanter Freedom stated that while Turkey is a NATO ally, Erdogan is the “Trojan Horse for Putin in NATO because Erdogan does not act like a NATO ally when he works with dictatorships, and we have to take concrete actions because condemnation does not work.”

Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), who serves as Armenian Caucus Co-Chair, commended Kanter Freedom’s bravery for speaking out, as well as Rep. Smith for his leadership, and posed a question about the desecration of Christian heritage sites in Turkey.

“The Assembly applauds the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission led by Congressmen Chris Smith and Jim McGovern for holding this important hearing,” said Armenian Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny. “The panelists’ insightful remarks and recommendations crystallized Turkey’s ongoing human rights and underscored the need for action.”



Assembly Grassroots Associate Bettina Saraydaroglu, Assembly Terjenian-Thomas 2025 summer intern Charles Schlindwein, Assembly Director of Research and Analysis Robert Avetisyan, former NBA player and human rights activist Enes Kanter Freedom, Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), Terjenian-Thomas interns Ofelia Yeghiyan and Victoria Mnatsakanyan and Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL)



COMMUNITY NEWS

Der Matossian Delivers Lecture Series at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute

YEREVAN — On June 3–4, the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute hosted a series of thematic lectures delivered by Prof. Bedross Der Matossian of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Over the course of two days, Der Matossian presented four lectures on the following topics: “Microhistorical Approaches to the Armenian Genocide: The Case of Sahag Khabayan II”; “Interdisciplinary Approaches to Mass Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Case of the Adana Massacres of 1909”; “Denial of the Armenian Genocide in the Digital Age”; “Beyond Impunity, Lack of Humanitarian Intervention, and International Apathy: The Ethnic Cleansing of the Armenians of Artsakh in Historical Context”.

Through these comprehensive and thought-provoking presentations, Der Matossian offered a multifaceted examination of mass violence and atrocities committed during the late Ottoman period. He placed particular emphasis on the 1909 Adana massacres—a pivotal yet often overlooked episode of anti-Armenian violence that foreshadowed the larger-scale atrocities of the Armenian Genocide. Utilizing both microhistorical and interdisciplinary methodologies, he illuminated the lived expe-

riences of victims and survivors, as well as the sociopolitical dynamics that contributed to the escalation of violence.

In addition to his historical analyses, Der Matossian addressed pressing contemporary issues, including the evolving strategies of Armenian Genocide denial in the digital age. He examined the roles of misinformation, algorithmic amplification, and state-sponsored narratives in distorting public discourse and obscuring historical truth. He also emphasized the broader implications of impunity, arguing that the failure to hold perpetrators accountable perpetuates cycles of violence and undermines international norms.

One of the most timely and sobering topics explored in his lectures was the eth-

nic cleansing of Armenians from Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). Der Matossian contextualized these recent events within a century-long pattern of targeted violence,

geopolitical indifference, and the ongoing marginalization of Armenian communities. His analysis underscored the urgent need for sustained international engagement and a comprehensive reckoning with historical injustices.

Dr. Edita Gzoyan, the director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, commented: “We were honored to host Professor Der Matossian for this timely and deeply engaging lecture series. His ability to connect past atrocities with present-day challenges not only enriches our understanding of history but also reinforces the importance of confronting denial, advocating for justice, and amplifying marginalized voices. Professor Der Matossian is a long-standing collaborator of the AGMI. He is actively involved in a number of our initiatives, including serving on the edi-



During the presentation at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute



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Prof. Bedross Der Matossian

torial board of the International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies, acting as a consultant for two of our ongoing grant projects, and contributing to various academic and educational programs.”

Born and raised in the Old City of Jerusalem, Der Matossian is a professor of Modern Middle East History and the Hymen Rosenberg Professor in Judaic Studies at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. He is the author, editor, and co-editor of seven books. His most recent edited volume, *Denial of Genocides in the Twenty-First Century*, was published by the University of Nebraska Press (UNP) in 2023. He currently sits on the boards of several international academic institutions, including the Scientific Board of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute. He is also the editor of the academic series *Armenians in the Modern and Early Modern World*, published by I.B.Tauris an imprint of Bloomsbury Press.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Laidrey Coffee Opens Third Café in Agoura Hills

AGOURA HILLS, Calif. — Laidrey Coffee Roasters, the San Fernando Valley’s first majority woman-owned specialty coffee roastery and café, opened its third location here on May 1. Founder and co-owner Gacia Tachejian opened Laidrey Coffee Roasters in Tarzana in January 2022 and expanded to a second location in Encino in July 2023. The café has built a loyal following from patrons near and far, being named one of the “cafés that make LA a world-class coffee destination” by the *LA Times* and one of the Best Coffee Bars in LA by Eater.

The Agoura café offers a full lineup of craft coffee drinks made with Laidrey’s signature roasts, including brewed coffee, single-origin pour-overs, cold brew on draft, specialty lattes made with house-crafted syrups, and even CBD or mushroom-infused coffee. Guests can also enjoy a curated selection of seasonal teas and tea lattes. The food menu will include artisan pastries baked daily by local businesses Larder and Chaumont, sweet and savory made-to-order toasts on freshly baked vegan sourdough bread, the signature Laidrey Breakfast Sandwich, breakfast burritos from Sobuneh, and more.

The welcoming, 2,000-square-foot space includes seating for 30.



OBITUARY

Sarkis Demirdjian Former AGBU Trustee, Industrialist-Philanthropist

A powerhouse of philanthropic vision and a pillar of strength to the Armenian community of Lebanon, steel industrialist Sarkis Demirdjian died on June 8, 2025, at age 92, with an indelible legacy that spans generations.

In addition to his great success running a family business Demco, active citizenship was his stock and trade and good will and trust his currency.

The Aleppo-born Demirdjian was a steadfast patron of Armenian community in Lebanon and beyond. He, along with his wife Seta, have been influential figures in the community and instrumental in ensuring that Armenian youth receive an education deeply rooted in their heritage while preparing them for global citizenship.

AGBU President Sam Simonian, who knew him both personally and as a fellow board member, said, “Sarkis Demirdjian is a household name and sort of folk hero in Lebanese Armenian and mainstream circles. He possessed the clout and influence to turn material resources and connections into tangible benefits for important charitable causes. His legendary business acumen was widely respected, and his community leadership greatly admired. Yet it was his quiet dignity and modesty that made an especially deep impression on me.”

Moving with his family from Syria to Lebanon in 1947, Demirdjian earned a French baccalaureate from the College des Frères Gemmayzé in 1952 and a degree in civil engineering from the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 1957. A year later, he joined his father’s enterprise Yervant Demirdjian & Sons, a major steel and trading company. The young Demirdjian, along with his two brothers Avedis and Hagop, helped grow the company into

Demco Steel Industries, one of the leading distributors and transformers of steel products in Lebanon. The presence of Demco is widespread across most major construction projects in Beirut including the city center, the sports stadium, the petrol tank farms and the Beirut International airport.

It was Sarkis Demirdjian, along with his wife Seta and the Demirdjian brothers, who, after the Lebanese Civil War, committed to creating a community center that would welcome the broader Lebanese community, making AGBU the first Armenian organization to create such a powerful medium of solidarity in the country and a mainstay of social enterprise. The Demirdjian Center has remained a vibrant home for youth activities and cultural exchange and celebration for decades. In 1997, Demirdjian also became the director and board member of Solidere, a multi-billion-dollar real estate development company that was instrumental to the rebuilding of war-torn Beirut.

Over the years, Demirdjian’s generosity reflected on a long family history of community activists and benefactors. His father, Yervant Demirjian, was a prominent member of the Armenian community serving both as AGBU Chapter chair in Aleppo and chair of the Gullabi Gulbenkian Maternity Hospital Trust. After moving to Beirut, he was appointed member of the Provincial Council and was elected to the National Council and the Building Committee of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. He also served as chairman of the AGBU District Committee of Lebanon for 18 years and was elected a member of the AGBU Central Board. The Demirdjian family founded many initiatives in Lebanon including an elementary school.

Demirdjian held various positions on AGBU committees such as the AYA (Armenian Youth Association), Asbeds, where he served as vice president for 14 years, and the AGBU Regional Beirut Committee, for which Sarkis was treasurer for 15 years. Demirdjian was elected to the AGBU Central Board in 1987 and served as vice president from 2002 to 2006. In 2006, he was elected to the AGBU Council of Trustees, which he served until 2019.

Honorary AGBU President Berge Setrakian said, “Sarkis understood the importance of community and investment in youth. During times of calm, he was forward looking and building for the fu-

ture — whether with the AGBU Demirdjian Center in Lebanon or with supporting the AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School half-way around the globe in Los Angeles, California. In the wake of the catastrophic 2020 Beirut port explosion, Sarkis was once again among the first to respond with extraordinary generosity and compassion. His support enabled AGBU to provide urgent relief and long-term recovery for families, institutions, and schools affected by the tragedy. He reminded us, in our darkest hour, of the power of unity and the resilience of our people.”

Demirdjian’s impact also extended to the Armenian Church. He was a proud supporter and spiritual follower of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Holy See of Cilicia. He was committed to the spiritual and cultural revival of the Armenian nation as well as the Lebanese community, supporting countless musical festivals and

regional celebrations.

AGBU Lebanon President Gerard Tufenkjian expressed condolences on behalf of the community that knew him best: “In honoring his memory, we recommit ourselves to the ideals that Sarkis Demirdjian embodied — dignity, service, and enduring devotion to the Armenian people. His legacy will live on in the institutions he strengthened, the lives he uplifted, and the future he helped secure for new generations of Armenians.”

In addition to his wife, he leaves his children: AGBU Central Board Member Yervant Demirjian and his wife Ani Shabazian, member of the AGBU Lebanon District Committee Taline Bachian and her husband Raffi, and Alex Demirdjian and his wife Anne Abi-Farah.

AGBU paid tribute to Sarkis and Seta Demirdjian in 2019 at the 90th AGBU General Assembly, held in Paris, France.



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Arts & Culture

Venice Art Scene Welcomes Stephanie Logan's 'Flowers' at MoDa Studios

VENICE, Calif. — MoDa Studios presents Armenian-American artist Stephanie Logan's "Flowers," an enchanting solo exhibition that invites viewers to explore the delicate beauty of nature through Logan's vivid brushwork.

The exhibition, featuring 12 oil paintings, debuts on Thursday, June 26 and will be on view through Wednesday, July 2 by appointment.

Logan is an accomplished painter known for her evocative portraits and floral compositions. An activist for human rights and an advocate for mental health, Logan uses art to shine light on some of the darkest areas of our society. Her mural work is displayed in prisons and jails around the country, including NYC's infamous Rikers Island. Logan co-created Create: New Beginnings, a restorative art program used in prisons, which continues to serve as a creative outlet for women inside and outside of prison. Her paintings have been exhibited across the United States and are part of numerous private collections.

Gallery Director Tina Segel comments on the exhibition, "Stephanie Logan's 'Flowers' is more than an exhibition; it is a bridge between two worlds, enriching our understanding of the intricate ties between loss and creation."



The artist Stephanie Logan with some of her paintings

In "Flowers," Logan captures the intricate details and vibrant colors of floral compositions. The collection draws inspiration from the Victorian language of flowers, a historical method of sending messages through flower arrangements. Each bouquet, meticulously crafted by the artist herself, contains hidden messages that foster an engaging dialogue between the artwork and the viewer. Blending realism with expressive flair, Logan evokes emotion and wonder.

Logan's floral subjects showcase the spirit of new beginnings, which is further accentuated through her expressive brushwork and rich palette. Each bloom in Logan's work serves as both a celebration of natural beauty and a symbol of renewal, an emblem of how life reemerges even

see FLOWERS, page 15



Armine Grigoryan

Directors of Eight Armenian Museums Tour US

By Haykaram Nahapetyan

Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Last week, the directors of eight Armenian museums — the Sardarapat Battle Museum, the

National Gallery, the Sergei Parajanov Museum, the Martiros Saryan House-Museum, the Yeghishe Charents Museum, the Avetik Isahakian Museum, Khachatur Abovyan Museum and Aram Khachaturian House-Museum — came to the United States for a tour.

They visited Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and Tulsa, OK. The choice of the first two cities makes perfect sense — D.C. is home to the Smithsonian, while the Philadelphia Museum of Art is one of the most significant establishments of its kind. But why Tulsa?

According to Hayk Mkrtchyan, head of International Partnerships at the Cultural Development Foundation of Armenia, who accompanied the group, the itinerary was a result of aligning the interests of the Armenian delegation with opportunities provided by the US State Department. American organizers included Tulsa to highlight how the cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples is preserved in Oklahoma's museum.

"They wanted us to experience the diverse cultural fabric of the US, not just limit our visit to the major Smithsonian museums in DC or the iconic art collections in Philadelphia," Mkrtchyan explained. "Sites like the Cherokee Heritage Center and the Bob Dylan Center in Tulsa were selected with that goal in mind."

The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) was launched by the US State Department in 1940. In the following decades, about a quarter of a million public leaders, academicians, artists and law enforcement officials have visited the United States in the framework of the program. Hayk commented that he had worked with IVLP since 2009. Once the Armenian government launched the Cultural Development Foundation of Armenia in 2024, he, as the head of the International Partnerships desk revitalized the projects and, under the auspices of the US Embassy to Armenia, visited the US with a group of museum directors from Armenia.

Zhanna Manukyan, director of the Yeghishe Charents House-Museum, observed see MUSEUMS, page 15



Visiting the Bob Dylan Museum in Tulsa, OK

Children's Book By Sisters Harkens Back to Pre-Internet Era

By Alin K. Gregorian

Mirror-Spectator Staff

BOSTON — Sisters Marlene Fereshetian of Belmont and Sossi Manoukian of Montreal have always loved recalling stories from their childhoods in the Canadian city, where they had arrived as children from Israel. The sense of community and playfulness which shaped them, they say, is needed now. That led the two to write a children's book, *Beasley Street Bandits*, about a more innocent, pre-Internet time, with friends and without screens, inspired by their experiences.

The book came out at the end of 2023, after a gestation period of almost three years. It is aimed at children ages 7-12.

"Because I was involved with children so much, I could sense the fact that kids love being together. I kept thinking about it and asked Sossi, 'remember how it was when we were kids? Everyone was outdoors playing together.' We just kind of ran ideas back and forth and then Covid hit and we had time. We decided to let's just work on it," Fereshetian said.



"Marlene always wanted to write a book. We were in my kitchen and she said she really wanted to write a children's book and wanted me to be her partner. I said sure. It read came out of a love of writing," Manoukian added.

"There were pranks and all kinds of crazy things that we did. We never got into trouble, but we certainly had an imagination," Fereshetian noted.

Fereshetian searched locally for an illustrator and connected with a then-senior at Belmont High School, Nina White. White also worked with them on FaceTime.

Sossi is married to Dr. John Manoukian and has two children, Michael and Valentina.

Fereshetian is married to Dr. Shahe Fereshetian and has two sons, Shaunt and Arden, said the teacher had read the book to her students last year and the kids had wanted to stage it.

Beasley Street is about a group of five neighborhood friends from different backgrounds who are trying to put together a concert with the few resources they have. Again and see BOOK, page 14

ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



(Photo courtesy Family Tree Farms)

Family Tree Farms' Aprium Pistachio Oat Bars

REEDLEY, Calif. — “Apriums are a combination of apricots and plums, with more apricot than plum. While most apriums will taste mainly just of apricot, our unique varieties have hints of raspberries and plums, like fruit juice without the added sugar. Their flesh is juicier and firmer, and they make the perfect summer snack,” says Family Tree Farms in Reedley, CA.

“FamilyTree Farms was founded and is operated by three generations of farmers with a mission to ‘consistently produce, package and market the most flavorful fruit in the world. As new generations and leadership partners join the legacy, each represents his own expertise and bears the distinct responsibility to uphold this mission. They bring new ideas and innovations for enriching the lives of our employees, our communities and our ecosystems as we continue to feed the world. We do this through leading by example and having the humility to share our success, while learning when and where we fall short.’”

“Family Tree Farms is renowned for producing some of the most flavorful fruits globally. Committed to quality, integrity, and safety in their growing, packing, and shipping processes, the farm offers a diverse range of fruits, including Satsumas, Blueberries, Plumcots, Apriums, Peaches, Nectarines, Apricots, Blackberries, and Raspberries.”

“Apriums were developed in the late 1980s by Floyd Zaiger of Zaiger Genetics, in Modesto, CA. In fact, aprium is a federally registered trademark for the name of the fruit and the process by which it is grown. Genetically, the aprium’s parentage is 25 percent plum and 75 percent apricot.”

“Orange-fleshed apriums possess a fuzzy exterior and taste like an apricot, but they’ll be a touch sweeter, juicier, and firmer. Apriums have a longer growing season than plumcots. You can find them in farmers markets and grocery stores from mid-May to September. Like plumcots, apriums are ripe when firm but with a light spring when pressure is applied. They’re quite aromatic when ready to be eaten,” says *AllRecipes*.

“Apriums make a wonderful snack, but are also excellent in salads. Aprium fruits are an excellent source of vitamins A and C and fiber. They are also a source of calcium, iron, and protein. Substitute apriums for stone fruit in salads, pies, cakes, tarts, crisps, puddings, preserves, or enjoy them in their natural state.”

Try this new and tasty aprium recipe from Family Tree Farms for your next family brunch, lunch or dinner.

“At Family Tree Farms, we know the value of including fruits and vegetables to one’s diet for living a healthy life. With days now busier than ever, it’s not always easy to eat right, especially on the go. We only provide fresh, unprocessed, unadulterated snacks to families because we are committed to helping them lead better lives. And with copious varieties and limitless ways to enjoy them, we make it easier to find the perfect fruit for even the pickiest of eaters. While some are loaded with anti-oxidants and anti-inflammatories, and others have immunity-boosting vitamins, our fruits adds vibrancy to everyday eating. We’re proud to grow something you can share with your family as a delicious treat, without all the added sugar. We are a family farm that grows the most flavorful fruit in the world. Visit familytreefarms.com to meet the family and learn more about our fruits.”

Children’s Book by Sisters Harkens Back to Pre-Internet Era

BOOK, from page 13

again, they bump up against the mean landlord, Mr. Rainieri, who has no patience with the pesky kids and makes things tougher and tougher for them until the children’s spirit of joy suddenly makes him realize that he is in the wrong. He changes his attitude and learns to embrace their sense of wonder.

“The children taught the adult. Without them saying it, they showed him kindness and tolerance,” Fereshetian said. “The whole thing was about friendship and community and how important that was because he was a part of it,” Fereshetian said.

The Covid lockdown, which stopped so much work, by contrast made the two sisters able to dedicate large chunks of time to communicate and write the book on Facetime. Fereshetian stressed that she and her sister, as demonstrated by the help of technology, are not against it; they just want it not to replace human interaction.

“It is important to have that interaction,” Manoukian said. “I find kids are very isolated today.”

“The book is a feel-good book. We’re not here to preach. It’s just a book that tells you that you are richer when you are in a community, you’re richer when you have friendship with people from all walks of life,” Fereshetian said.

“Every day we would be discussing the story, the characters. They became

all these kids from diverse backgrounds and we learned from them so much and they learned from us so much,” Fereshetian added.

Manoukian concurred. “Many friends told me when they were reading the story that ‘this is my neighborhood. This is how I grew up.’”

While the main message the sisters want to convey is for children to let go of devices and embrace humanity and imagination, their message of welcoming immigrants and diversity is even more powerful at this time.

Added Manoukian, “Kids don’t see [color and differences]. It is so beautiful.”

“It is not an Armenian story. It is an immigrant story, a multicultural story. We never say what city it is taking place in because it could take place anywhere,” Manoukian said.

Fereshetian has long been involved in the arts and ran a successful children’s theater camp for many summers. Manoukian said she conducted a lot of fundraisers for Armenian organizations in Montreal, including the Tekeyan Cultural Organization, by staging events.

But Fereshetian and Manoukian are not just promoting the book; what they want is to bring their message of personal friendships and collaboration to schools. They have visited several schools in greater Boston and Montreal and have been able to get the book on suggested reading lists. Their message has coincided with a growing trend of schools banning cell phones during school hours.

“The school principals, because many schools are banning cellphone use, ... found it was a book that kids can relate to in terms of things kids can do outdoors,” Fereshetian said.

Certain teachers have asked for the two to do presentations for the kids. For those presentations, Manoukian said the two sisters got retro, 1970s gadgets, including rotary phones. In addition, a school in Montreal is going to stage the book as a play for a school fundraiser next year, Manoukian said.

Fereshetian has also written songs for the characters, which can be used in a play.

As for what is next, the two sisters are mulling a variety of options. “A lot of people have told us you have to do the continuation [of *Beasley Street*]. We thought about it and haven’t decided but in the meantime we have so many stories we would like to tell,” Manoukian said.

Both sisters credited their late mom, Lucy Boghossian, for encouraging their creativity when they were small.

“She would say go out there and put together a play,” Fereshetian said. “Mom was the one who inspired us a lot.”

“We want kids to know dreaming matters, that you can be whatever you want to be, no matter how far-fetched it may sound to the adults. Don’t be locked up in a home, isolated with your tablet or cellphone. Learn to resolve conflicts. Get to know one another and dream. There are possibilities out there,” Fereshetian said.

Beasley Street Bandits is available at Barnes and Noble in the US and Shopify in Canada. To purchase a copy, go to <https://linktr.ee/beasleystreetbandits> or <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/beasley-street-bandits-marlene-fereshetian/1143875432>.



Marlene Fereshetian, left, and Sossi Manoukian

like friends. When we came to the end, I told Marlene, ‘I am going to miss these characters,’” Manoukian noted.

“It was a labor of love. Like Sossi said, you get sad when it is over,” Fereshetian concurred.

The fictitious Beasley Street is similar to the Montreal neighborhood where the two sisters grew up. The sisters arrived from Israel when Fereshetian was 7 and Manoukian was 5. “We really grew up Canadian,” Manoukian said.

Added Fereshetian, “It was time when immigrants had come from all over the world. Immigrants were coming from everywhere so you got to play with kids in a very diverse setting. You learned things from them, they learned things from you. We looked out for each other. There was a bond that was so wonderful because there was a face to face interaction on a daily basis. There wasn’t technology at that time so you weren’t stuck by yourself. We were together all the time, creating, imagining. It was a wonderful time to create.”

She added that sometimes they would find treasures on the street and use them or just rehearse and put on shows for the neighborhood.

“We were a neighborhood. We knew each other and protected each other,” Manoukian said.

“In Canada, when all the immigrants came, the streets were full of Greeks, Asians, Polish, Italians. We grew up with



ARTS & CULTURE

Directors of Eight Armenian Museums Tour US

MUSEUMS, from page 13

that while Armenia’s museums have made significant strides in recent years, noticeable differences remain between museums in Armenia and the United States. One key distinction she pointed out is the widespread use of textual displays in American museums — a feature still relatively rare in Yerevan.

“At the Holocaust Museum, for instance, the variety of written materials provided a deep and comprehensive understanding of the historical events being portrayed,” she said. “Conceptually, there are parallels we could draw with the Charents Museum, as the poet was also a victim of political repression. His arrest and death in 1937

under Stalin’s regime is a major historical event that could be presented with similar interpretive materials to create a more engaging experience.”

Armine Grigoryan, director of the Aram Khachaturian House-Museum, highlighted another difference: American museums, especially those under institutions like the Smithsonian, benefit from a broader base of donors, which allows for greater operational independence.

“Our museum directors are full of creative ideas, but often face more limited resources,” she noted. “That said, Yerevan’s museums have come a long way. They’ve evolved from being simply exhibition spaces into dynamic cultural hubs that now

host concerts and a range of other events.”

When asked about how well-known Khachaturian is in the US, Grigorian acknowledged that while some of his music is recognized, much of his body of work remains underappreciated — not just in the US, but even in Armenia.

“Of course, *Sabre Dance* is his most famous piece,” she said. “But we should use that recognition as a gateway to introduce audiences to the broader brilliance of his music.”

Grigoryan brought several images of Khachaturian taken during his visits to the US in 1968 and 1972.

Making the most of the overseas visit, Grigoryan — along with the other two members of the Khachaturian Trio — also performed concerts in both Washington, D.C. (at St. Mark’s Church Hall) and Los Angeles (at Zipper Hall). The programs included works by international composers, as well as pieces by prominent Armenian composers such as Khachaturian, Arno Babajanian and Edward Mirzoyan.

“Foreign diplomats, US officials, and European guests were in attendance,” Grigoryan noted. “I believe it’s our responsibility as Armenian musicians to share our culture — especially our music — with international audiences. From that perspective, it was especially meaningful to see a strong turnout of non-Armenian attendees at our concerts.”

A video report about the trip is available with this article at mirrorspectator.com



The Khachaturian Trio’s concert in Washington, D.C.



The delegation at the US State Department

Venice Art Scene Welcomes Stephanie Logan’s ‘Flowers’ at MoDa Studios

FLOWERS, from page 13

after devastation. Through her art, Logan conveys not only the physical attributes of nature but also the spirit of resilience and rebirth that echoes the recovery of Los Angeles in the wake of the devastating fires.

“Flowers have become a recent source of inspiration for me, a representation of ephemeral beauty. Each bouquet is like a silent conversation or a love letter, encapsulating a single moment with a deeper meaning, in the midst of continual growth, death, and regeneration,” states Logan. “Through this collection, I aim to celebrate

the transient elegance of flowers, to mourn a beauty now gone, to be present in a living community, and to inspire all the possibilities still to come.”

The exhibition will open with a special reception on June 26, sponsored by Flowers Winery, where guests can meet the artist and engage in conversations about her creative process. Attendees will have a chance to experience the works up close and gain insight into the inspiration behind each piece. Guests are encouraged to RSVP in advance.

Gallery Location: MoDa Studios – 1117 Abbot Kinney Blvd, Venice.

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

- MASSACHUSETTS
- 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 22 — Celebrating What Unites Us! Sunday at 4 pm. highlights: Ghana. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org

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 hrshapar 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 10 — Under the July Moon. Thursday at 8 pm. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Meet & greet, old friends & new. Enjoy grilled chicken satay with the bone sauce, hosted by chef Joe Johnson, owner & founder. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org

JULY 20 — Celebrating What Unites Us! Sunday at 4 pm. Highlights: Ireland. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org

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

AUGUST 3 — Under the August Moon. Sunday at 7.30 pm. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Meet & greet, old friends & new. Enjoy Dan Teager’s Black Sea Salsa Combo while sipping on refreshing citrus spritzers. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org

AUGUST 17 — Celebrating What Unites Us! Sunday at 4 pm. Highlights: Italy. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org

SEPTEMBER 20 — Celebrate Armenia! Heritage. Culture. Traditions. Saturday, 1:30-8 pm. On the occasion of Armenian Independence Day on September 21. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Rain date: September 27. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org

NOVEMBER 21 — AMAA’s Boston Child Care Committee presents an evening supporting the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan, Armenia, FEATURING COMEDIAN KEY ORKIAN. COCKTAILS, DINNER & LIVE AUCTION. Wellesley Country Club, Wellesley Hills. SPONSOR BY AUGUST 1, 2025, TO BE LISTED ON THE INVITATION! (Individual Tickets will commence at a later date). For more info visit: <https://amaa.org/hyemindsboston2025/>

- 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.



COMMENTARY

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PM's Inappropriate Discourse Harms Himself and His Office While Church Remains an Armenian Pillar

By Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, C.M.

Alas, Mr. Pashinyan... It is very difficult for us to understand the shortsighted thinking, amidst the already fragile current psychological state of the country, that led you, with provocative and crude language targeting the leaders of the Armenian Apostolic Church, to ultimately humiliate only yourself and your immediate circles.

Mr. Prime Minister, we have expressed repeatedly the demand of the overwhelming majority of the knowledgeable Armenian populace for you to bring together all the important structures of our people so that we may be able to overcome the great existential dangers threatening our homeland and nation today.

It is unacceptable for all of us that not only have you made practically no effort in this regard until today, but on the contrary, you and your immediate circle, obviously with your encouragement, use a vocabulary which is most incendiary for polite ordinary Armenians, and declare war against the senior hierarchs of the Armenian Church. We must infer that you deliberately ignore that the Armenian Church, with its worldwide structure, has been for 17 centuries and remains, despite certain shortcomings, one of the most important factors assuring our national survival.

Under these circumstances, Your Excellency, in order to remain consistent, we are compelled to remind you again that our supreme national interests demand that you, in this period of grave crisis, consider it your primary and most serious immediate obligation to create a platform for national unity, where all the important structures representing the power of the entire Armenian people, whether operating in the homeland or in the diaspora – political, intellectual, scientific and yes, even spiritual – come together. It is only with all our combined and coordinated forces that we can build the powerful defenses which will hopefully permit us to effectively fight and ultimately overcome the current unprecedented vortex of global dangers.

It is simply not permissible for any of us, especially you, Mr. Prime Minister, under the current crisis conditions, to ignore or weaken any of the roots of our national resilience, in this case in particular the Armenian Church.

There are plenty of serious grounds for criticism.

At the cost of repetition, we are forced to specify, Mr. Prime Minister, that first and foremost, on behalf of the Armenian people, you are required to correct all the omissions of responsibilities in the areas considered to be your national duties.

We demand that you strengthen and modernize the national army that protects the borders of our country in proportion to the seriousness of today's dangers. Without this, diplomatic agreements will remain impotent and powerless.

We demand that, in parallel with the development of the economy, you encourage our people to become masters of their native language, their history and their culture.

We demand that our sanctities not become the subject of political bargaining, including our sacred Mount Ararat, the centuries-old symbol of Armenia, the unnegotiable demand for justice for the Armenian Genocide, and Artsakh, who after thirty years of glory, today stands with its churches turned into mosques and its historical national monuments in ruins.

We demand in particular, Mr. Prime Minister, that you should consider it a priority to organize by means of significant state resources information networks with international reach and thus build internationally pro-Armenian public opinion. At present, these are simply non-existent, and the field is wide open for widespread Azerbaijani disinformation.

It is as a result of your abovementioned major omissions, Mr. Prime Minister, that we lost Karabakh, with all its national wealth. It is also unbelievable, condemnable and extremely dangerous that to this day, the Armenian state has not yet resorted to any effective measures when the Azerbaijani administration and its entire press freely call the whole of Armenia itself "Western Azerbaijan."

We know, of course, Mr. Prime Minister, that your resources are somewhat limited, but among your important shortcomings is also the lack of a serious attitude by the state towards the diaspora, which, although by nature inevitably uncoordinated, has enormous resources.

After all this, as for the issues within the structure of the Armenian Church, as is the case with all our other institutions, including political ones, it is natural and correct that, just as in the past, there are still important reforms that must be carried out today. However, in the context of these concerns, compared to our other structures, fortunately our church, with the participation of clergy and laity, has a most serious canonical administrative machinery in operation, through which, as in the past, improvements must be made today. In that legitimate administrative system, every faithful Armenian baptized with holy Myron has equal duties and rights. It is only in the case of fulfilling those requirements that you also may enjoy such designated duties and rights. However, it is absolutely clear that your position as prime minister, constitutionally does not grant you any additional rights in this realm.

This is why it is unacceptable and condemnable for all of us that you and your entourage have attacked using unacceptable language senior servants of the Armenian Church. On the contrary, Mr. Prime Minister, it is now expected that you publicly apologize to the Church and Armenian society for your inappropriate and shameful writings, as you are expected to uphold behavior of a much higher standard.

In conclusion, we will reiterate that, unfortunately, during these otherwise already critical distressing days, your shameful writings forced us to deviate for a moment from the greatest existential national concerns.

Mr. Prime Minister, repeating the immortal words of the poet Vahan Tekeyan, as spiritual parents, "The Church is the birthplace of the soul of the Armenian people," we, and you, must approach it lovingly and constructively, and nurture it. On the condition that all the above enumerated expectations we have from you are fully met, and as long as you occupy the highest responsible position of the homeland, we, Mr. Prime Minister, considering our duty, will also continue to provide assurance of our cooperation within the limits of our abilities in your current decidedly difficult work of overcoming the dangers threatening our homeland.

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

The Old Ships of Yesteryear Bringing Immigrant to These Shores

By Gary A. Kulhanjian

The Armenian legacy to America developed in various time frames that took place over the course of centuries. The earliest Armenians were adventurers, explores, trade merchants, horticulturalists and cultivated tobacco also. Furthermore, missionaries sponsored Armenians who were students of theology in the late nineteenth century. Statistics vary and some estimate approximately 50,000 arrived between the 1890s and 1914. By the end of World War I, perhaps close to an estimated 100,000 Armenians were on American soil. The United States had restrictive quotas by the 1920s which hampered not only

Armenians but other nationalities from southern and eastern Europe, people of the Levant region and Asians. The great challenge of all immigrants was transoceanic travel. The article presented here is an abstract highlighting some of the case studies and means of transportation presented in my book, *A Kaleidoscope of Armenian Immigration to America: Origins of a Modern Diaspora*. (Los Angeles: Harrcrawf & Carroll Publisher, 2023.)

The story begins, with Martin the Armenian when he arrived in the Jamestown Colony of Virginia in the second decade of the seventeenth century. The name of the vessel that he traveled on was not found in the research. The

course of his voyage was perhaps from Persia stopping in the Ottoman Empire from where he went to Holland then Britain to America. Martin the Armenian was a name that he used or known by to English colonists. He should not to be confused with a Captain John Martin who was a well-known member of the pioneer colonists. Martin the Armenian was not on any of the first-known English vessels.

Martin the Armenian was distinct since his name was adapted or anglicized and later had British citizenship. His surname in Armenian was not known but speculation in several sources appeared as Martirosian, Mardigian, see YESTERYEAR, page 20



COMMENTARY

Legal Controversies Concerning Azerbaijan's Lobbying in the US

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

One of the tools for influencing political decision-makers and their policies in the USA is lobbying. This tool is used by both domestic actors and foreign governments, which hire lobbying organizations officially registered in the United States to promote their own interests. There are two main types of lobbying here – ethnic and professional. Professional lobbying implies hiring a professional lobbying organization, which acts on behalf of the foreign actor to promote its interests. In contrast, ethnic lobbying is exercised through American lobbying groups of various ethnic backgrounds. Jewish, Armenian and Greek lobbying groups are prominent examples.

US legislation requires public disclosure of agents acting on behalf of a foreign government. Hence, the data on foreign governments' expenditures to buy influence in the USA is publicly available information.

The government of Azerbaijan has been using the services of professional lobbying organizations for years, and has spent millions of dollars for that purpose. Despite its attempts to hide some of its spending, bypassing US law, there is still a significant amount of public information which discloses the amount of money spent along with the goals the Azerbaijani government pursues. Throughout the years, Azerbaijani target areas for lobbying have not changed.

These goals are being consistently reflected in the contracts between the Azerbaijani government and the US lobbying firms and include but are not limited to anti-Armenian propaganda. They make use of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's speeches supporting Azerbaijani political discourse; constant statements on

Armenia's strong ties with Iran and Russia (adversaries of the US) and Azerbaijan's strong ties with Israel, in order to show that Armenia cannot be a reliable ally for the US. They instead attempt to create the image of Azerbaijan as a tolerant multicultural state, and advocate for the continual waiver of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which prohibits direct aid to the Azerbaijani government. Also, roundtable briefings and discussions are organized with the ambassador of Azerbaijan with the help of these lobbying organizations in which Congressional staffers and important members of the administration are invited to participate.

There are a few lobbying organizations hired by Azerbaijan in recent years that are worth investigating, including Skyline Capital LLC (with an agreement with the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan), the Friedlander Consulting Group LLC (with an agreement with the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan), and Teneo Strategy LLC (with an agreement with the COP29 Azerbaijan Operations Company).

The agreement between Skyline Capital LLC and the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United States of America is dated January 1, 2025 and expires on December 31, 2025. The organization is supposed to "deepen relationships between the Embassy and US Congressional and Executive leadership; facilitate and coordinate official Congressional Delegation (CODEL) and Congressional Staff Delegation (STAFFDEL) visits to Azerbaijan; work in a bipartisan fashion within the House and Senate, specifically targeting Members and staff who serve on the Foreign Affairs/Relations Committees, the Appropriations on State and Foreign Operations Subcommittees, the Armed Services Committees and the Rules Committees to identify potential opportunities for engagement between the U.S. and Azerbaijan; reinvigorate and expand the Congressional Azerbaijan Caucus; identifying potential champions

for stronger partnership with Azerbaijan in both the House and the Senate and actively involving them in advancing the US - Azerbaijan partnership; [and] facilitate trade missions and economic engagement between Azerbaijan and the US."

According to the agreement the organization is to be paid \$50,000 a month, totalling \$600,000 for the whole period. This is an extension of the original agreement commencing on June 5, 2024 that expired on December 5, 2025. The monthly pay was still \$50,000.

The agreement with the second organization, the Friedlander Consulting Group LLC, expired some months ago (at least for now there is no public information on the renewal). The agreement was in force from February 20, 2024 and expired on February 19, 2025. The monthly fee for the services of the company was \$41,666.00 (\$499,992 for twelve months). The company was hired to "implement a multi-faceted advocacy effort, media outreach and provide lobbying services to assist Azerbaijan to develop Azerbaijani-United States relations."

However, the largest Azerbaijani lobbying deals in the US recently were for the campaign to hold the 29th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Azerbaijan, and for the subsequent organization and large-scale

coverage of the event in the US. In terms of money, Azerbaijan spent more than 5 million US dollars on the preparation, implementation and subsequent coverage of the event from April 2024 to November 2024. Contracts were signed between the COP29 Azerbaijan Operations Company and the US lobbying organization Teneo Strategy LLC.

Not only does Azerbaijan hire US lobbying organizations to further its

interests in the US, but also it has tried to violate US laws in order to conceal its lobbying deals and activities with those firms. There have been several reports from lobbyists who chose to speak on condition of anonymity that Azerbaijani government tried to hire some lobbying organizations and work with them without registering and disclosing those deals under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). According to these reports, the lobbying firms backed away and didn't pursue a potential contract with the Azerbaijani Embassy. However, Texas Democratic Rep. Henry Cuellar, co-chair of the Congressional Azerbaijan Caucus, together with his wife Imelda Cuellar, allegedly accepted approximately \$600,000 in bribes and was charged with taking bribes from an oil and gas company owned by the government of Azerbaijan and trying to use his congressional influence to benefit Azerbaijan's government.

Overall, Azerbaijani lobbying efforts in the USA seem to be quite productive. The country is spending millions of dollars on high-level engagement and advocacy campaigns and one can notice the results. Despite Armenian lobby groups' continued efforts, Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act has been continuously waived by US presidents. Azerbaijan has managed to find more supporters in the Congress to promote its interests. Though much of its lobbying activities are disclosed, Azerbaijan's efforts to bypass American laws and basically bribe US officials should raise concerns about such illegal lobbying practices.

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

A Letter from Los Angeles

By Adrin Nazarian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The events now unfolding in Los Angeles have awakened painful memories for me and for many members of this city's large and varied Armenian community.

My grandparents on my father's side escaped the Genocide in Shushi in 1920 as the Ottoman Turks burned the city. My grandmother Raya was imprisoned by Stalin in a work camp in Siberia. They eventually made their way to Iran to escape persecution in the Soviet Union. I came to this country as a child when my family fled war and revolution in Iran.

My experience is hardly unique. How many of us would be living in the United States now if not for violent upheavals in Iran, in Lebanon, in the collapsing Soviet Union, or the massacres in Baku, to name a few. In most cases, the crisis was preceded by a change of government, and the onset of a hostile regime that threatened our families.

Countless immigrant families in Los Angeles are now experiencing that fear. Many fled violence in Central America in hopes of finding refuge in the United States. Now, a change in government here is forcing them to choose between life in hiding or a return to the dangers they hoped to escape.

When I see families separated by force, I can imagine what it's like for parents and children to be told they may never see each other again, because it speaks to my own family's experience of dispossession, flight and exile. These are memories that many of us share. We came to this country to escape oppression. Can we deny that refuge to others without stopping to see them as human beings?

We have all heard that America is a country of immigrants. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Los Angeles, where street signs in Spanish, Korean and Armenian are as much a part of the scene as the Hollywood sign or the Walk of Fame. The energy of L.A.'s immigrant entrepreneurs is one of the strengths that made California the world's fourth largest economy.

Every country has the right to regulate immigration and enforce its laws, but its laws should recognize the realities of its marketplace. As long as there is work to be done, people will come to do it. Large sectors of the American economy are powered by the labor of undocumented immigrants, not just in Los Angeles, but in every part of the country. Contrary to the nativist propaganda, undocumented workers pay billions of dollars in taxes. Although they will never receive the benefits they pay for, their contributions help to keep our Social Security fund liquid — a fact never brought to light.

For decades, cynical politicians have sold a false narrative that immigrants are responsible for every problem imaginable. President Trump campaigned on a promise to carry out the largest deportation in our history. We are now seeing the removal of people who have lived constructive lives in our country for decades.

In Los Angeles, ICE agents are not hauling in gangsters or violent criminals. They're seizing seamstresses from their benches and families from government offices where they waited patiently for scheduled appointments with authorities they hoped could help them. Many of these migrants entered the United States legally and have worked for years to establish their legal status.

The spectacle of masked agents piling handcuffed men and women into vans, in full view of their families, is heartrending. Many of these detainees are parents who now face summary deportation and permanent separation from their families.

People are outraged and tempers are running high. This is understandable. We should all be outraged at the administration's abuse of its i see NAZARIAN, page 19





COMMENTARY

The Driver of Türkiye's Persistent Denial of The Armenian Genocide

By Hrayr S. Karagueuzian

In 2014, during an international cardiology conference in Antakya, Türkiye (new official name for Turkey), I asked my Turkish colleague Dr. Mehmet Ali Oto a direct and sincere question: Could Türkiye ever recognize the Armenian Genocide? Dr. Oto, a leading cardiac electrophysiologist in and then-President of Hacettepe Medical Center and University in Ankara—did not pause. His response was swift, unambiguous, and chilling: a “It is impossible.”

Both of us were members of the Heart Rhythm Society in the United States. He had taken a keen interest in my research on atrial fibrillation and had invited me to a lecture at a cardiology conference he was organizing in Antalya. Over dinner, in what I assumed would be a collegial and open conversation, I posed the question. His answer left no room for discussion, doubt, or dialogue. The door wasn't closed in anger — it was slammed with cold finality.

A decade later, we crossed paths again at the annual Heart Rhythm Society meeting in San Francisco. Nothing had changed. His position remained fixed, untouched by time, reflection, or the growing international consensus. I was stunned not only by his rigid denial but by the absence of any nuance from a man trained to dissect complexity and uncertainty in the most intricate of human systems. This encounter forced me to confront a deeper and more painful question: Why such absolute refusal? Why is the recognition of the Armenian Genocide still taboo in Türkiye, even as nations across the globe have courageously acknowledged the truth? What political, historical, cultural, or psychological forces sustain this wall of denial?

Genocide is not merely the mass murder of a people. It is the systematic erasure of their identity, language, religion, culture, and history alongside their physical existence. For Armenians, it was the murder of over 1.5 million souls between 1915 and 1917. But it was also the destruction of entire communities, the seizure of ancestral lands, the confiscation of property, the looting of wealth, and the deliberate annihilation of a people's place in their own homeland.

And denial compounds the crime. It deepens the wound, obstructs healing, and robs survivors and their descendants of the dignity of truth. To deny a genocide is to continue it by other means. Contrast this with post-war Germany, where the successors of the Nazi regime, despite initial resistance, eventually accepted responsibility for the Holocaust. Germany not only acknowledged the atrocities but institutionalized remembrance, offered reparations, and made historical education a moral imperative. More recently, it also recognized and apologized for the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples in colonial-era Southwest Africa, taking concrete steps toward restitution. Germany said it would ask for forgiveness and establish a fund of more than 1 billion euros. That is what moral courage looks like. That is what accountability demands. The roots of genocide are complex, but the conditions are painfully familiar: extreme nationalism, authoritarian power, and manufactured fear of the “other.”

After the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, the Ottoman Empire embraced a policy of aggressive Turkification, targeting non-Turkish minorities — Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians — as existential threats. Between 1915 and 1917, Armenians were systematically exterminated or exiled. Churches were leveled, villages emptied, cultural artifacts destroyed, and generations erased. This was no collateral damage of war. It was genocide, planned, executed, and justified. Yet the crime remains unpunished, its memory resisted, its truth suppressed. In 1998, French jurist Louis Joinet outlined four foundational principles for justice in the wake of crimes against humanity: 1) The right to know the truth; 2) The right to justice; 3) The right to reparation; 4) The guarantee of non-recurrence. In Türkiye's case, all four are under siege. The truth is buried. Justice is denied. Reparations are rejected. And the cultural and political currents that enabled genocide — ultranationalism, historical revisionism and intolerance persist. Worse still, some voices in Türkiye do not merely deny the genocide — they glorify it. They describe the extermination as “necessary,” even “righ-

teous.” These statements are not only morally repugnant, but they also represent a dangerous normalization of atrocity. History has taught us, time and again, that silence in the face of such crimes is complicity. Denial is not neutral; it is violence sustained through indifference. The world cannot look away. Türkiye must confront its past, not just for the sake of justice for Armenians, but for its own moral and democratic future. Without truth, there can be no healing. Without acknowledgment, there can be no trustworthy relationship between the Armenians and the Turks.

Why, then, does denial continue unabated? Is it about economics? Fear of territorial concessions? The threat of reparations? National embarrassment? Or something deeper and more entrenched? These soul-searching questions pushed me to dig further — specifically into the deliberations of the Turkish Military Tribunal that prosecuted the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress after World War I. I hoped to uncover something more revealing, something that might expose the psychological underpinnings of this culture of denial—and perhaps still echoes in the realpolitik of modern Turkey.

I believe I found one compelling reason why the Turkish state continues to resist acknowledging the Armenian Genocide, which began in 1915 and extended until 1923. Key insights lie buried in the official records of the Turkish Military Tribunals, published between 1918 and 1920 in the *Takvîm-i Vekâyi* (Calendar of Events), the official gazette of the Ottoman Empire. Established in 1831 by Sultan Mahmud II as part of the Tanzimat reforms, *Takvîm-i Vekâyi* served as the Empire's first government bulletin, a vehicle for broadcasting laws, imperial edicts, state appointments, treaties and administrative decrees. Modeled after European state bulletins such as France's *Moniteur Universel*, it aimed to modernize and centralize the empire's communication. It was widely circulated to civil servants, religious authorities, and provincial administrators, and eventually published in multiple languages, including Arabic, Persian, French and Armenian, reflecting the empire's multiethnic makeup.

For historians, *Takvîm-i Vekâyi* remains an invaluable primary source. It captured the Ottoman state's official voice and documented key events with bureaucratic precision. While its content was highly curated, often shaped by the regime's ideological agenda and censorship, it remains a trustworthy archive for understanding state policies, especially when read critically alongside other sources. It revealed not just what happened, but how the state wanted events to be remembered. Buried within the proceedings of the Ottoman Military Tribunals and in *Takvîm-i Vekâyi* it is startling to find often neglected historical truth: the very court that prosecuted and condemned the architects of the Armenian Genocide also issued a death sentence, in absentia, against the leaders of the nascent Turkish nationalist movement, including none other than General Mustafa Kemal, the man who would later become the founding father of modern Turkey. Sixteen people with ties to the Nationalist Movement were sentenced to death, and four were eventually executed on June 12, 1920 for attempting to assassinate then the Prime Minister Damad Ferid Pasha. This jarring overlap is not merely a historical curiosity it is a profound and unsettling convergence. It reveals that the Republic was born not only from the ashes of a fallen empire, but also amid the very flames of atrocity and upheaval that consumed millions. To fully recognize the Armenian Genocide is not simply to indict the Ottoman past; it is to confront the uncomfortable reality that the foundations of the modern Turkish state were poured during a period of mass dispossession, ethnic cleansing, and cultural erasure. The lands were emptied, the homes seized, the bank accounts appropriated, and the memory of an entire people deliberately extinguished—all while the Republic's earliest champions were positioning themselves as the architects of a new national identity. To accept this truth would be to fracture the carefully curated nationalist mythology that undergirds the Turkish Republic's origin story. This, perhaps more than fears of reparations or international shame, lies at the core of persistent denial. It is not merely a defense of the past — it is a defense of the present. For to acknowledge the genocide is to risk unraveling a foundational narrative, to admit that modern Turkey was not only a project of re-

form and independence, but also one entangled in the unresolved crimes of empire. And so, the silence endures, not because the truth is unknown, but because its full weight may prove unbearable.

During the brutal years of the Kemalist campaign to remake the Turkish Republic, a period that historians, dubbed it as the “Final Phase of the Genocide,” or as has been dubbed, “Finishing the Genocide.” The machinery of ethnic cleansing did not pause with the fall of the Ottoman Empire. While Kemal's nationalist movement was condemned as a coup against the Empire his share in ethnic cleansing of Christian minorities is abundantly evidenced through scholarly publications and through personal experience. Beginning with the city of Smyrna (modern-day Izmir), Kemalist forces set the city ablaze on September 19, 1922. Once a thriving and cosmopolitan port, home to large Armenian and Greek communities, Smyrna was reduced to ashes within days—over ninety percent of the city destroyed. What followed was a brutal campaign of pillage, rape, and mass slaughter carried out with impunity. Western powers, eager to safeguard their oil concessions and commercial interests in the newly emerging Turkish Republic, looked the other way. Their silence, and refusal to intervene, amounted to complicity in one of the gravest atrocities of the early 20th century. However, according to *Takvîm-i Vekâyi* Kemal's death sentence is solely attributed to his Nationalist's coup attempt against the Empire. Without any mentions of his decisive orders of forced deportations of remaining Christian populations including the Armenians across all the Turkish land. Amid this silent storm of state-sanctioned brutality, an eleven-year-old Armenian boy lived with his family in the Tarla Mahallesi district of Konya, a central Anatolian city far from the frontlines of war and turmoil but not far enough from the reach of nationalist zeal. One morning, without warning, Kemalist gendarmes on horseback thundered into the neighborhood, their sabers gleaming in the sunlight, raised high not just as weapons, but as instruments of terror. With cold authority, they ordered the family to abandon their home immediately, no time to gather belongings, no chance to say anything. The message was brutal and unmistakable: leave now, or face the consequences (yallah şimdi buradan geden). No explanation. No appeal. Just an order to vanish. Clutching only what they could carry, the eleven-year-old boy with his family joined the long and harrowing trail of forced displacement. Their journey began on foot, southward toward the Mediterranean, walking for weeks toward the port city of Mersin, and eventually crossed the border into Syria, finally arriving in Damascus in the winter of 1922.

That eleven-year-old boy was my father, Anania Karagueuzian.

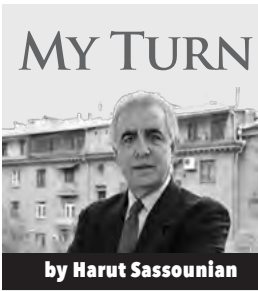
His childhood was not a memory of games or schoolbooks, but of exile, resilience, and determination away from his ancestral homeland, now turned into a graveyard of silence. He carried with him not only the trauma of loss but also the unspoken duty to bear witness, a duty I now inherit.

Today, Türkiye's persistent policy to erase the past memory is not just a domestic issue, it is a global moral challenge. By refusing to acknowledge the truth, Türkiye not only dishonors the victims of the Armenian Genocide but undermines the very principles of justice, memory, and prevention that are essential to a civilized world. Importantly, it builds hurdles for reconciliation and prevents the development of friendly relationship between the Turks and the Armenians. When powerful nations deny genocide, they embolden others to do the same. When history is silent, the cycle of violence may continue. The international community must not remain indifferent. Justice begins with truth, and denial is its enemy. For Armenians, the denial is not just an absence of words, it is the prolongation of pain, a daily theft of dignity. And for Turks, it is a missed opportunity to step into moral maturity and embrace a future relieved by suppressed guilt and respectful of memory. Because if memory dies, humanity follows. And without truth, no peace can endure. Only by facing the darkest corners of our shared past can Armenians and Turks one day walk together, not as enemies or strangers, but as neighbors who have chosen remembrance over forgetting, and

continued on next page



COMMENTARY



MY TURN

Pashinyan’s Attacks on the Church Risk Instigating Civil War in Armenia

With his approval ratings plummeting ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is targeting the Catholicos of All Armenians. He is wrongly assuming he can court public favor, disregarding the fact that the most Armenians, at home and in the Diaspora, remain devoted to the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Last week, Pashinyan announced he intends to replace Catholicos Karekin II with a more compliant cleric, citing clerical celibacy as justification. The Prime Minister escalated his assault on the Catholicos and the Armenian Church through incendiary Facebook posts. Here are some examples:

1. He urged his followers to go and “liberate” the Catholicosate and elect a new Catholicos: “The sacred Armenian Apostolic Church must elect a new Catholicos, whose moral conduct will be verified and confirmed before the Catholicosate elections. I call on the faithful followers of the sacred Armenian Apostolic Church to come together to liberate the Seat of the Catholicosate with love and in a Christian manner and elect a truly holy clergyman as Catholicos of All Armenians.”

2. “The sacred Armenian Apostolic Church will be returned to Jesus Christ and the Armenian people. Ktrich Nersisyan [inappropriately referring to Karekin II by his lay name] must vacate the Seat of the Catholicosate.”

3. He proposed to “take active steps to liberate the Seat of the Catholicosate and organize new Catholicosate elections by creating a ‘Coordinating Group’ to manage the organizational issues of the mentioned agenda.” Pashinyan described the qualifications of the future members of the “Coordinating Group” as follows:

- a) “Believe wholeheartedly in our living Lord, Jesus Christ”;
- b) “Have read the Bible in its entirety at least once”;
- c) “Have observed Great Lent at least once in the past five years”;
- d) “Pray daily”;
- e) “The members of the ‘Coordinating Group’ may include men, women, lay-people and clergy. Celibate clergy must not have violated their vow of celibacy.” Pashinyan added: “I will select the first 10 members of the ‘Coordination Group,’ based on conversations evaluating their alignment with the stated criteria. Thereafter, the Group will determine its expansion procedures, structure and other matters.” He invited those interested in joining the Group to email their name, phone number, and profession to: nikolpashinyan@gmail.com.

Meanwhile, Anna Hakobyan, the Prime Minister’s partner, who had shamelessly described Armenian clergymen as “the country’s chief pedophiles” and “black-vested maniac perverts,” made the surprising revelation she will be

moving to China for the next two years to study Chinese Philosophy at Beijing Normal University. This was announced last week by the charity My Step Foundation, founded by Hakobyan where she now serves as Executive Director after previously chairing its Board. It is not known if she will leave her four children behind for two years.

Hakobyan is often mistakenly referred to as Prime Minister Pashinyan’s “wife” and Armenia’s “First Lady”. She is neither his wife (since they are not married) nor First Lady as that title is reserved for the President’s spouse. Yet, Hakobyan travels around the world as First Lady at Armenian taxpayers’ expense and is escorted by government bodyguards, while representing Armenia in international meetings and conferences.

To show that Pashinyan is violating Armenia’s Constitution, let us review Articles 17 and 18. Article 17 mandates church-state separation: “Religious organizations shall be separate from the State.” Most people misinterpret this provision thinking that the clergy have no right to be involved in political affairs. That is not correct. As Armenian citizens, the clergy enjoy the same rights and obligations as all other citizens of the country, such as voting and participating in political matters. The state may intervene only if laws are violated.

Article 18 of the Constitution grants the Armenian Apostolic Church a special status: “The Republic of Armenia recognizes the exclusive mission of the sacred Armenian Apostolic Church, as a national church, in the spiritual life of the Armenian people, in the development of their national culture and preservation of their national identity.”

No one should be surprised if the Prime Minister decides to delete Articles 17 and 18 from his revised version of the Constitution next year.

By urging his followers “to converge” on Etchmiadzin and “liberate” the Catholicosate from Karekin II, Pashinyan risks instigating a civil war. The Church’s millions of faithful vastly outnumber his supporters. Should the Catholicos call on Armenians to come to Etchmiadzin and defend the Catholicosate, a violent confrontation could erupt on holy ground.

Nearly every Diocese at home and abroad has issued written statements condemning Pashinyan’s intervention in the church’s internal affairs. To make a definitive decision on this controversy, Karekin II plans to convene in the near future the “National Ecclesiastical Assembly” — the highest body of the Armenian Apostolic Church — comprising the Catholicos of All Armenians, Catholicos of the Holy See of Great House of Cilicia, Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Constantinople, Bishops and Primates of the Church from around the world, members of the Supreme Spiritual Council of Etchmiadzin, and delegations from all Dioceses.

By targeting the Catholicos — cheered by Azerbaijan’s Sheikh al-Islam and Azeri media — Pashinyan appears oblivious to the damage he is inflicting on his own popularity in the 2026 elections, and bolstering Karekin II’s public support. Most Armenians, faced with a showdown between a faltering politician and their spiritual leader, will naturally side with His Holiness. The public will demand the resignation of the Prime Minister, not the Catholicos.

The Driver of Türkiye’s Denial of the Genocide

from previos page
reconciliation over silence. Reconciliation does not begin with treaties or ceremonies; it begins with truth, spoken aloud, written in the open, acknowledged with courage.

As a final though I carry the weight of my father’s forced exile not as a relic of the past, but as a living memory that shapes who I am. His childhood, stolen by fear and flight, is not just his story, it is mine also as it is the story of an entire people scattered, silenced, and scarred by genocide. And yet, even in that pain, I believe in the power of truth. True reconciliation does not erase the past, it honors it. It begins with acknowledgment, with the courage to face uncomfortable truths, and with the humility to extend a hand not in defiance, but in shared humanity. When Armenians are seen not as enemies but as fellow human beings whose suffering deserves recognition, a door opens, not just to justice, but to healing. That healing can be transformative. It can lay the foundation for a new relationship between Turks and Armenians, not rooted in denial and mistrust, but in mutual respect and historical honesty. I hold fast to the belief that the future does not have to be bound by the chains of the past. From that foundation can grow something powerful: peace, dignity, and prosperity that belongs to both peoples.

So, the next time I meet Dr. Mehmet Ali Oto, I hope the conversation will be different. I hope that, beyond professional respect and shared scientific pursuits, we can find a moment of human recognition, one in which the weight of history is not denied but embraced with honesty and courage. I hope he will see, as I do, that true reconciliation is not only possible but necessary. It does not demand forgetting the past but rather honoring it in a way that opens the door to healing. I believe that the courage to speak the truth can transform pain into under-

standing, and that even between those shaped by different sides of a painful history, bridges can be built. Perhaps, in that moment, we will not only stand as colleagues, but as two men committed to the healing of hearts as much as the healing of bodies, mind and soul. And perhaps then, we can begin to imagine a future where Turks and Armenians do not stand apart, but together, united not by

grievance, but by a shared commitment to truth, dignity, and peace.

(The author is Professor Emeritus of Medicine, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. He is the author of the book with Yair Auron: Perfect Injustice. Genocide and the Theft of Armenian Wealth, Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, NJ 2009.)

A Letter from Los Angeles

NAZARIAN, from page 17
mmigration authority. Peaceful protest is justified and necessary. Large protests have been focused and orderly. Unfortunately, a small number of misguided individuals have taken the excesses of ICE as an excuse to destroy property, vandalize public buildings and pursue violent confrontations with the police. This helps no one but President Trump.

He is now selling the false narrative that Los Angeles is a city overrun by violent rioters. In fact, in a city of 469 square miles, the disorder replayed endlessly on television has been limited to a few city blocks. I have called on the outraged residents of our city to restrain themselves and demonstrate peacefully for the release of the unjustly detained. Our local law enforcement is more than up to the job of maintaining order. We don’t need armed troops to keep the peace in our city.

Unfortunately, the President is more interested in promoting his narrative of a city out of control than he is in actually restoring peace to our streets. Our city was at peace on Thursday, June 5. Since then, the Trump administration has carried out its policy in the most provocative

and divisive way possible. Sending in the National Guard without a request from the Governor is both illegal and inflammatory. Ordering unneeded Guard units and Marines into the city has only served to escalate the conflict.

Even those of us who imagine we will not be directly affected by ICE’s actions in Los Angeles need to stand up and speak out. We should remember that leaders who flout the law to scapegoat vulnerable minorities never stop with the first targeted group. *When the civil rights of one group are violated, the rights of all are degraded, and we all become less safe.*

Advocates of legal immigration have long proposed legislation to match immigration policy to the realities of our labor market, but so far their efforts have been thwarted by politicians who prefer to score cheap political points by scapegoating immigrants. We can adopt peaceful democratic solutions to our country’s broken immigration system. It’s time to discuss those instead of tearing families apart and provoking senseless violence.

(Adrin Nazarian is a member of the Los Angeles City Council for District 2.)



COMMENTARY

The Old Ships of Yesteryear Bringing Immigrant to These Shores

YESTERYEAR, from page 20

Martanian, or other derivations in spellings. His forename in Armenian was perhaps “Hovhannes” translated to English “John.” His status was not that of a colonist but an assistant who served Governor Yeardley and was under the guidance of a nobleman by the name of Lord Argall. Martin the Armenian had two distinct specialties. One was his knowledge of silkworms and the other was in developing tobacco in Jamestown.

In recent times, scientists discovered pottery, helmets and pipes in the colony. The pipes were referred to by the British as “hubble-bubbles.” In Arab countries, these pipes were called “sheesha” or “hookah.” The Turks called them “nargiles” in the seventeenth century. Perhaps, Martin the Armenian brought them over as gifts from Armenian artisans in the Ottoman Empire from Iznik (Bursa), or from Kutahia/Kutahya, Constantinople (now Istanbul). The pipes were perhaps thought to be of Turkish origin; however, the evidence researched did not reveal the presence of Turks in the region of the Jamestown Colony.

The first Armenian American who wrote a book containing information on Martin was M. Vartan Malcolm. He was a distinguished lawyer in the 1920s. The book was titled *The Armenians in America* and was published by Pilgrim Press in Boston and Chicago in circa, 1919. He was approximately 11 years old when he arrived with members of his family aboard a steamship named the SS Obdam. It originated in Holland and went to Boulogne, France and later New York. At least eight passengers on the vessel with the last name of Melkonian were listed in steerage. Malcolm changed his name a few years after he was of age from Melcon Melkonian to Malcolm Vartan Malcolm in the Suffolk County, Mass. Later, he graduated from Amherst College and Harvard Law School.

In the late 1850s, a small aggregate of Armenians began their influx to America. It was the beginning of transoceanic migration by large sailing vessels. The precedent was set by Khachik (Christopher) Oscanyan (or found Voskanian) when he arrived to the United States, in New York City circa 1835. His vessel was not found in the research, but he traveled on the Atlantic a few times. He had an illustrious life. By the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman Turkish Sultan Abdul Hamid promulgated conspiracy theories against Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians. The regime furthered their quest when the so-called Young Turks usurped power and sought a homogeneous empire. Oscanyan was the first Armenian to become a naturalized American citizen.

A segment of male Armenians were theological students sponsored by various Christian missionaries in the Ottoman Empire. They wanted to return but saw the dangers imposed on the Armenian population by the Sultan and other new regimes. By the 1890s, the Armenians were suffering under Sultan Abdul Hamid with laws and discriminatory issues. Furthermore, World War I commenced in 1914 and by 1915 the advent of the Armenian Genocide gave survivors the impetus to leave the land where their ancestors had resided for centuries. Those Armenians, who were able to reach port cities, hoped to find a way to escape or were lucky to hide before they found a way to do so.

Ship building companies controlled the construction of steamships near the beginning of the twentieth century. Some familiar names of the companies were the following: White Star Line, Red Star Line, Cunard Line, Hamburg-American Line and many others. The ships arrived in several different ports on the east coast like in New York City, Providence, Boston and other port cities. Ellis Island became known as the “Isle of Tears” since many immigrants had tears and joys in arriving.

Racism affected all immigrants but by the 1920s, restrictive quotas hampered southern and eastern Europeans and people from the Levant region of the world. The sail and steamships manufactured had histories and they were not all for passenger travelers alone. The ships were also used for freight; however, other immigrants along with Armenians were in steerage. By the 1890s, many immigrants were divided into three categories: families, ladies and single men, who were in steerage. At the end of World War I, ships of defeated powers were relinquished as reparations to the nations who were the victors. Their names were changed and they were used as passenger or freight ships for immigrants crossing the ocean. Some ships transported soldiers during and after World War I.

The experiences of other immigrants were also similar. An individual may have sold his ticket before boarding a ship and the person who purchased it may have used the seller’s name. If children were orphans and lost both parents, it was likely the family member or person did not change the youngster’s name until after their arrival. Ticket scalpers were trying to sell tickets from ports of departure

to innocent emigrants at a higher price.

It was estimated that between 1820 to 1920, approximately 30 million immigrants arrived to the United States. The conditions aboard ships were less than adequate. The food was of poor quality, in addition, milk was scarce for children. Many were sea sick or developed health problems that prevented them from entering and some were rejected by inspection agents for a variety of reasons. The other major Immigration Station was on the west coast called Angel Island near San Francisco. Asian groups came in but with limited numbers and restricted laws based on racism. The research manifested the small number of Armenians on the registries arrived also.

The Armenians had two problems migrating which were unlike other groups. One problem was the United States quota system. There were fewer Armenians in the United States by the 1920s than other groups. They were part of the Ottoman Empire and their nation of Armenia had no recognition. Some citizens of other nations protested the Armenians using the quota of their nation. Some Armenians had used the quota of a nation other than Turkey although they were of a different ethnicity. The second problem among some Armenians was trachoma, a bacterial infection of the eyes which was noted by United States immigration authorities. Other dangerous diseases reported at all ports of entry were also tuberculosis and diphtheria. Ship lines were forced to pay a heavy penalty if harboring a victim of trachoma. A percentage of immigrants were subject to physical exams at Ellis Island and other ports and some were delayed entry for other health or criminal reasons. Immigrants



Immigrants arriving in Boston, circa 1920s

were advised to return from their destination if they were rejected during inspection.

Haik (Haig) Kavookjian became a well-known American businessman of a large photo engraving company that many Armenians were employed in New York City. It was called the Bingham Photoengraving Company. He donated much to the Holy Cross Church and to the building of the St. Vartan Cathedral in New York City. He was a local politician in a town on the New Jersey shore. He was born in Constantinople (Istanbul) but left from Smyrna (Izmir) and arrived in the United States circa 1892 at age 16 aboard a British vessel called the “Boy of London.”

At 26, Bagdasar Simonian arrived to the United States on September 8, 1891 perhaps at Castle Garden, New York before the opening of Ellis Island yet recorded at the location. He was travelling on the SS Rhaetia. He migrated to Fresno and successfully started farming in the San Joaquin Valley. Farming was popular for Armenians in California. Bagdasar’s farming of grapes and fruits was carried on for generations by his offspring and their grown children. The business was carried out and continues into the twenty-first century.

One of the well-known champions for an independent Armenia was Vahan Cardashian. He was born in Caesaria in the Ottoman Empire and arrived in New York City circa, June 22, 1902. His traveling companion was Leon Tempetchian (or spelling Pempejian). They were to meet Leon’s brother Givan at 201 East 26th Street in New York City. The ship Vahan and Leon were traveling on was the SS Pennsylvania, launched by the Hamburg American Line in circa, 1896. The ship saved a crew of thirteen from a sailing ship called the Bothnia which was Norwegian. The SS Pennsylvania and its crew transported Vahan Cardashian and other immigrants. With the advent of World War I, the ship was maintained by the United States in the Hudson

River in New York. The ship was renamed by the United States Navy to Nansemond. Cardashian, who was a lawyer, promoted the A.R.F. quest for the independence of Armenia at the Paris Peace Conference at Versailles, circa 1919 and favored the United States to support the creation of the League of Nations. His dream was severed since the United States Senate disapproved the mandate and did not join the League of Nations. Cardashian married a New York socialite who favored suffrage for women and their rights.

In 1925, the Armenians were challenged by the Tatos Cartozian case in Portland, Oregon. The outcome of the case was extremely consequential to the Armenians entering the United States and based on racism. Tatos’ mother was widow; her entire family was from Sivas. It was speculated that her husband was killed in the Hamidian Massacres before the departure of the family for a safe-haven in America. Marguerite (nee Jorjorian) Cartozian had twelve children. Some grown children came at different times. Tatos was married and arrived in 1906. He was on a ship named the SS La Touraine from Le Havre, France to Ellis Island. Upon arriving the oldest family members applied for naturalization. They all settled in Portland, Ore. Tatos became a naturalized American citizen in 1917. Yet later by 1925, Armenians were challenged when the United States sued Cartozian to annul his citizenship based on the claim he was of Asiatic origin. Cartozian was defended by several prominent people like M. Vartan Malcolm, lawyer, Professor Franz Boaz of Columbia University and “Father of American Anthropology,” and others. Cartozian was exonerated from all charges.

The RMS Titanic was the largest passenger ship launched into the ocean in 1912. It was operated by the White Star Line. Unfortunately, the ship was on its maiden voyage from Britain to the United States and struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic. There were seven Armenians on the Titanic and only three survived the huge calamity. Those Armenians who perished were: Mampri Zarkarian, Artin Zarkarian, Sarkis Mardirosian and “Arsen” Sirayanian. The three survivors were: Neshan Krikorian, David Vartanian and Vaghinag Purad who was the son of author Sempard Purad. Some of these immigrants were from a province called Keighi in the Ottoman Empire. How did they survive was speculated while others died? Did any immigrant disobey the rules to access a life boat because they did not understand directions? Many immigrants did not know the English language. Women and children were given priority to access the scant number of life boats. Did any disguise themselves as a woman to survive?

The Armenians found conditions worsening after the Hamidian Massacres, World War I and advent of the Armenian Genocide. Armenian survivors sought a diaspora by involuntary migration from the Ottoman Empire. They were eradicated from their ancient lands. The ordeals intensified when the short existence of an independent Armenia was not supported in international relations. Their goal was to start a new life despite the racism and prejudices they faced like other immigrants. The vessels and ships were a safety valve to their freedom and security in the start of a new beginning.

(Gary A. Kulhanjian, Social historian, retired educator and former member of the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education. He is the author of *A Kaleidoscope of Armenian Immigration to America: Origins of a Modern Diaspora*. The author resides in California.)