

Armenia Accuses Azerbaijan of Firing At Residential House

By Xandie (Alexandra) Kuennig

Armenia accused Azerbaijan of firing towards a residential house in the village of Nerkin Hand in the Syunik Province.

The Armenian Defense Ministry reported that on 20 June, between 08:00–09:00, units of the Azerbaijani armed forces opened fire in the direction of the village of Nerkin Hand, “causing damage to a residential house.” There were no casualties.

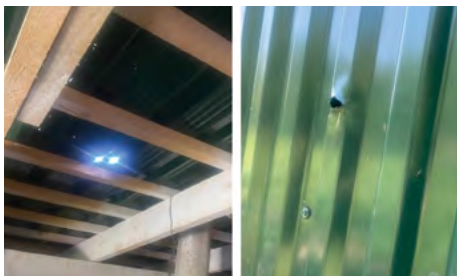
Attached to the press release were a series of photos showing what appeared to be bullet holes in a roof.

That same day, RFE/RL reported that five bullets were fired during the incident towards a house owned by Vahagn Poghosyan. The article also highlighted that Poghosyan has a nine-month-old child.

Poghosyan told RFE/RL that while their house was only 100 meters from the Azerbaijani positions in a straight line, the shooting was irregular.

“Yesterday morning was the same, but twice as light,” he said.

Residents told RFE/RL that the shooting on June 19 was the first in around a year and a half — the last incident occurred in February 2024, when four Armenians were killed in an Azerbaijani “revenge operation,” after an Azerbaijani soldier was wounded along the border between the two countries.



An official photo of the house in Nerkin Hand that was hit by Azerbaijan.

Given the length of time between these cases, residents told RFE/RL that the recent shootings took the village by surprise.

“You can’t go out, you can’t take shelter, especially since we don’t have a basement, we don’t have a safe place, so you have to be patient, until it gets quiet, and then come out,” local resident Lusine Babayan told RFE/RL.

This marks the ninth case that Armenia has accused Azerbaijan of damaging civilian objects in the border villages since March 31, with all statements containing photos showing damage allegedly caused as a result, along with bullet fragments.

The accusation was also the latest in a series of mutual ceasefire violation accusations by the two countries since they agreed on the terms of a peace agreement in March, which has remained in limbo with Azerbaijan pushing for preconditions.

(This article originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on June 23.)

Armenia PM Visits Erdogan During ‘Historic’ Visit to Turkey

ISTANBUL (AFP) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul on Friday, June 20, in a rare and symbolic step toward normalizing ties between the historic rivals.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said he held “in-depth” talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul on a rare visit to arch-foe Turkey Friday, June 20, which Yerevan described as a “historic” step toward regional peace. The talks between the two leaders — whose nations have never established formal diplomatic ties and whose shared border has been closed since the 1990s — took place at the Dolmabahce Palace and lasted just over an hour, Erdogan’s office said.

Erdogan’s office said the pair had discussed Armenia’s peace talks with Azerbaijan and efforts to normalize ties with Turkey as well as the recent explosion of violence between Israel and Iran, which shares a border with both Turkey and Armenia. “President Erdogan emphasized the significance of the consensus reached in the ongoing peace negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, given the current circumstances,” according to his office. The pair also addressed “potential steps to be taken within the framework of the normalization process between Turkey and Armenia”, it said.

Erdogan also told Pashinyan that Turkey was working to ease tensions across the region, notably engaging with other leaders about the Iran-Israel standoff. A statement from the Armenian government said: “The two leaders discussed the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, underlining the importance of continuing constructive



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan meets with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Istanbul, Turkey, on June 20, 2025. [Mustafa Kamaci Presidential Press Office/Handout via Reuters]

dialogue and achieving concrete results.” In a post on the platform formerly known as Twitter (now X), Pashinyan said he had an “in-depth exchange” with Erdogan at which they “discussed the see VISIT, page 6

Armenian Oppositionists Rounded Up During Pashinyan’s Trip to Turkey

By Artak Khulian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Police in Armenia reportedly detained dozens of opposition activists on Friday, June 20, in a crackdown linked by opposition leaders to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s visit to Turkey.

The activists are understood to be mostly affiliated with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun) party and an opposition movement led by Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan. Their exact number was not clear.

OPPOSITION, page 3

Armenia Rejects Pro-Azeri Statement By Muslim States



The foreign ministers of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states pose for a family photo in Istanbul, on June 21, 2025.

By Astghik Bedevian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia on Monday, June 23, accused countries making up the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) of questioning its territorial integrity after they urged Yerevan to accept Azerbaijan’s terms for ending the conflict between the two South Caucasus states.

In a joint declaration adopted at a weekend meeting in Istanbul, the foreign ministers of OIC member states said Armenia should “desist from undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan” and “address the remaining legal and political obstacles” to an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace deal.

see STATEMENT, page 2

NEW YORK

A Summer Evening Of Joy At St. Vartan Cathedral

Page 9



ARMENIA

Education in Armenia Shapes Exceptional Youth

Page 4



Annual Summer Break

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

This is the last issue before the summer break. Our first issue back will be that of July 19.

Happy summer!



ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Parliament Speaker Calls Church Tool of Oligarchs

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan shared an article from Civic.am titled “The opposition’s coup plan” on his Facebook page on June 24, adding a scathing commentary.

“These people think regime change is like LEGO — you can just assemble it. They treat the Armenian people like slaves, to be forced, herded to rallies, and used. The Church is a tool — for oligarchs and politicians. Monkeys,” Simonyan wrote.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan also shared the same article on his Facebook page, commenting: “This process will go down in history as the traitors’ failed coup.”

Former Mayor Arrested on Money Laundering Charges

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Former Vanadzor Mayor Samvel Darbinyan was arrested on June 23 along with three others as part of a criminal investigation led by Armenia’s Investigative Committee.

According to Kima Avdalyan, spokesperson for the Investigative Committee, five individuals have been charged with large-scale money laundering through abuse of office or influence under Article 296 (Part 3, Clauses 2 and 3) of Armenia’s Criminal Code. Four of the suspects have been taken into custody.

Media reports suggest that one of the detainees is Samvel Darbinyan’s brother.

The investigation is underway.

Politician Slams Government’s Plans To Nationalize ENA as ‘Property Seizure’

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Bright Armenia Party leader Edmon Marukyan on June 24 criticized the Armenian government’s plans to nationalize the Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA) currently owned by businessman and philanthropist Samvel Karapetyan.

In a social media post on Tuesday, Marukyan accused the authorities of disguising the unlawful seizure of private property as a public policy initiative.

“The authorities are using the term ‘nationalization of ENA’ to justify the seizure of Samvel Karapetyan’s private assets, portraying it as a significant achievement for the state,” he wrote.

“This is an attempt to strip a politically persecuted individual of his property. Don’t try to legitimize this process in any way. So far, everything you’ve unlawfully seized has simply been handed over to your loyalists, resulting in a redistribution of property. You seek to seize private property just like the Bolsheviks did. There is no other word for it,” the politician stated.

APRI Armenia Brings Together Global Voices in Times of Uncertainty

YEREVAN — The Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia Foundation (APRI Armenia) held its forum in Yerevan June 11-13, for the fourth consecutive year, centered on peace and prosperity in the South Caucasus.

The APRI Forum, titled “Finding Stability in an Unstable World,” brought together policymakers, academics, civil society representatives, and diplomats and offered in-depth and thought-provoking conversations on the global uncertainties shaping Armenia and the South Caucasus.

A total of 58 speakers, including 14 international speakers from eight countries: France, India, Russia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Iran, Georgia, and Kazakhstan, participated.

The Forum opened with remarks from the Vice President of Armenia’s National Assembly, Hakob Arshakyan, who emphasized the transformative developments in Armenian-Indian relations. He made headlines by proposing Armenia’s potential role as a strategic bridge connecting India to Europe via Iran, Georgia, and the Black Sea. On June 13, amid breaking news of Israeli strikes on Iran, Secretary of the Security Council Armen Grigoryan warned of the negative implications for the region



Panel with Jared Genser

and affirmed that Armenia has considered possible military escalation scenarios and undertaken relevant preparations.

In response to the unfolding regional crisis, APRI Armenia hosted a spontaneous onstage discussion, with its top analysts offering their first insights on the Israel–Iran conflict and its potential effects on the South Caucasus.

The forum also marked the release of the report “Armenia’s Foreign Policy after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War: Diversification in the Post-Unipolar World,” authored by Benyamin Poghosyan, APRI Armenia Senior Research Fellow and a regular columnist for the Armenian Mirror-Spectator. It is the first research publication in Armenia to examine the country’s challenges in diversifying and deepening diplomatic, economic, and security relationships over the last four years.

APRI Armenia: The Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia Foundation (APRI Armenia) is an independent think tank and policy accelerator focused on advancing regional stability, sustainable prosperity, and civic engagement. We are a hub of trusted dialogue, independent analysis, and authoritative ideas to address critical policy issues and unlock Armenia’s potential with a solution-oriented mindset.



Panel with Armen Grigoryan

Armenia Rejects Pro-Azeri Statement By Muslim States

STATEMENT, from page 1

They thus effectively backed the Azerbaijani preconditions for the signing of such a treaty finalized by the two sides in March. Those include a change of Armenia’s constitution.

The OIC declaration also backed Baku’s demands for Yerevan to ensure the return of Azerbaijanis who lived in Armenia until the outbreak of the conflict in the late 1980s. Its signatories said they “deplore Armenia’s refusal to engage in dialogue with the Western Azerbaijani Community.”

The Armenian Foreign Ministry said it is “deeply disappointed” with this stance described by it as “extremely one-sided.”

“We draw the attention of the OIC member states to the fact that the talk of ‘Western Azerbaijan’ under the guise of human rights is a clear claim by Azerbaijan to the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia, which is documented even in the founding documents of the ‘organization’

artificially formed for this purpose,” it said in a statement. “There is no and there can be no so-called ‘Western Azerbaijan’ on the territory of the Republic of Armenia.”

The statement said that the Muslim states should have instead told Baku to drop the preconditions and sign the peace treaty “without undue delay.” It also called on them to abandon “biased initiatives targeting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Armenia and jeopardizing the settlement process between Armenia and Azerbaijan.”

The OIC has adopted pro-Azerbaijani resolutions throughout the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Armenian opposition leaders portrayed its latest document as further proof of what they call the failure of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s appeasement policy towards Azerbaijan. They claimed that Yerevan’s reluctance to champion the Karabakh Armenians’ right to return to their homeland has only encouraged Baku to raise the “Western Azerbaijan” issue in

the international arena.

“Amid the refusal by Armenia’s ruler to protect the rights of the people of Artsakh ... and raise the issue of the occupied territories of Armenia, Azerbaijan is pushing the term ‘Western Azerbaijan’, which includes a significant part of present-day Armenia, onto the international agenda,” said Tigran Abrahamian, an opposition lawmaker.

The OIC statement came hours after Pashinyan’s meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also held in Istanbul.

Erratum

Due to a computer error, the recipe last week was cut off. The recipe provided by Christine Vartanian Dadian for Family Tree Farms’ Aprium Pistachio Oat Bars appears in full online. We regret the error.



ARMENIA

Karekin Condemns Pashinyan’s ‘Anti-Church Campaign’

By Susan Badalian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Catholicos Karekin II condemned Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s efforts to depose him and other senior clergymen of the Armenian Apostolic Church during a religious festival held in Echmiadzin on Sunday, June 22.

The supreme head of the church also reaffirmed support for Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetian, who was arrested and prosecuted last week right after decrying Pashinyan’s campaign.

“Instead of striving for unity in the face of numerous challenges confronting our nation, sad acts continue to be perpetrated to divide our society,” Karekin said in a message read out outside the church’s main cathedral. “The anti-church campaign unleashed by the authorities poses a grave threat to our national unity, undermines our country’s internal stability, and strikes di-

rectly at Armenian statehood.”

“Only days ago, we bore witness to a reprehensible act: the unlawful persecution of the national benefactor, Mr. Samvel Karapetian — a devout Armenian who has courageously defended Holy Etchmiadzin,” he told hundreds of worshipers after presiding over a Mass.

Karapetian accused Pashinyan of “attacking” the church and expressed readiness to “participate” in its defense as he visited Echmiadzin on June 17. Pashinyan reacted furiously to that, pledging to “deactivate” the Moscow-based tycoon. The latter was arrested and charged with calling for a violent overthrow of the Armenian government hours later. The Armenian opposition as well as the church’s Mother See in Echmiadzin strongly condemned his arrest.

Karapetian, who is known for his lavish donations to the church, has remained defiant since then. In a series of statements

released from prison in recent days, he predicted Pashinyan’s imminent downfall.

Pashinyan demanded Karekin’s resignation earlier this month, accusing the Catholicos and other clerics of having had secret sex affairs in breach of their vows of celibacy. He pledged to set up a body tasked with installing a new church head.

Opposition leaders condemned the move as illegal. They claim that the Armenian premier launched a smear campaign against the church in a bid to please Azerbaijan and/or neutralize a key source of opposition to his unilateral concessions to Armenia’s arch-foe.

Pashinyan began attacking the church late last month just as Karekin attended an international conference in Switzerland on the preservation of Nagorno-Karabakh’s Armenian religious and cultural heritage. In a speech at the conference, the Catholicos accused Azerbaijan of committing ethnic cleansing in Karabakh and illegally occupying Armenian border areas. He

also denounced the ongoing “sham trials” of eight former Karabakh leaders captured during Azerbaijan’s September 2023 offensive.

In his latest message, Karekin stressed that the church will continue “safeguarding the rights and interests of our nation.”

“Let us pray for our sisters and brothers of Artsakh (Karabakh), standing with them in their suffering and perseverance,” he said. “Let us pray for the release of our sons and daughters held captive in Azerbaijan, and for the freedom of the esteemed national benefactor Mr. Samvel Karapetian unjustly imprisoned within our land.”

Pashinyan continued, meanwhile, to attack Karekin. A senior member of Armenia’s ruling Civil Contract party said on Monday that the premier’s efforts to replace have entered an “active phase.”

Under Armenia’s constitution, the ancient church, to which the vast majority of Armenians belong, is separated from the state.

Relatives of Missing Soldiers Demand Dismissal Of National Service Chief Be Revoked

YEREVAN (Caucasian Knot) — Relatives of the missing soldiers during Karabakh wars on June 19 blocked traffic on Bagramyan Avenue in protest against the dismissal of Armen Abazyan, the head of the Armenian National Security Service (NSS), who conducted extensive work to search for the missing soldiers.

As of October 2022, 217 people have been officially recognized as missing during the 44-day war in Armenia. The parents of the soldiers, whose fate remained unclear after the war, are periodically holding actions holding rallies near the Armenian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Government.

Relatives of missing soldiers have spent the night in Bagramyan Avenue in Yerevan, which was blocked yesterday afternoon. Parents spent the night in the avenue. They demand from the Premier, Nikol Pashinyan, to repeal the decision to resign Armen Abazyan, who was dismissed from his post the day before. Relatives note that a lot of work had been done by Abazyan to search for those missing; and now they don’t know who will continue this work, the “News Armenia” Agency has reported.

As follows from the video from the venue posted today by the “News.Am” outlet, the road is blocked by a police car; and apart from people in civilian clothes, there are many law enforcers at the venue. The situation at the road blocking is calm.

Abazyan’s dismissal became known shortly after the arrest of Samvel Karapetyan, a businessman and philanthropist. Karapetyan was detained by the police, although given the seriousness of the charge — public calls for a change of power — the arrest should have been entrusted to the NSS. Journalists tried to clarify their suspicions that Abazyan was fired for refusing to detain Karapetyan in a conversation with the Prime Minister. However, Pashinyan said that “Abazyan needs to rest” and “the NSS Director cannot refuse to carry out my order,” “News.Am” wrote.

The Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, has stated in this regard in the National Assembly that the dismissal of the NSS Director does not change anything; he personally met with the parents on June 6 and promised that he would answer their questions within two months.

Candlelight Vigil Held outside Iranian Embassy

YEREVA (Panorama.am) — A group of Armenians held a candlelight vigil outside the Iranian Embassy in Yerevan on Tuesday, June 24, expressing solidarity with the Iranian people during a time of hardship.

Iran’s Deputy Ambassador to Armenia Bahram Taheri expressed gratitude to the participants, stating: “Your support means a great deal to the Iranian people. We will convey your message of solidarity to Iran.”

“This vigil is not only a gesture of support for Iran, but also a wake-up call for our own society. Evil never sleeps. Armenia could come under attack at any moment, while the world would continue its deafening silence, offering no real protection,” one of the participants, Ellen Manandyan, emphasized.



Armenian Oppositionists Rounded Up During Pashinyan’s Trip to Turkey

OPPOSITION, fro page 1

Dashnaksutyun leader Ishkhan Sagahtelyan said “about a dozen” members of his party from various parts of the country were in police custody as of 8 pm local time. For his part, Galstanyan reported more than two dozen arrests made among his loyalists.

The Armenian Interior Ministry essentially confirmed the detentions, saying that the police received “operational information about the preparation of actions aimed at disrupting public order.” It did not elaborate.

“The police are carrying out enhanced service, within the framework of which preventive and explanatory work is being undertaken,” said a ministry spokesperson. “We call for the maintenance of public order. Any illegal manifestation will be met with a tough response.”

“If the police, prosecutors and the National Security Service care about our country’s constitutional order and public order then they must go after Nikol Pashinyan because he is the main threat to that,” Sagahtelyan scoffed.

The extraordinary crackdown came as

Pashinyan was about to hold talks in Istanbul with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. (See story on this page.)

In addition, opposition leaders condemned the arrest on June 19 of billionaire businessman Samvel Karapetyan that followed his strong criticism of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Pashinyan reacted furiously to the criticism voiced on Tuesday, June 17, pledging to “deactivate” Karapetyan and the top clergy in a series of social media posts.

“Now I will interfere with you in my own way, you scoundrel,” he wrote hours before Karapetyan was arrested and charged with calling for a violent overthrow of the Armenian government.

A court in Yerevan sanctioned the pre-trial arrest late on Wednesday, June 18, despite Karapetyan’s strong denials of the accusation. His lawyers appealed against the measure.

Critics say Pashinyan broke the law by publicly promising and ordering the crackdown. Anna Grigoryan, a lawmaker from the main opposition Hayastan alliance, denounced what she called “Facebook jus-

tice” during a session of the Armenian parliament attended by Pashinyan.

“Samvel Karapetyan’s arrest is a manifestation of Nikol Pashinyan’s fears,” Grigoryan said in a speech interrupted by angry shouts by some pro-government lawmakers.

“Why is Samvel Karapetyan now under arrest under this government and why is Ruben Vardanyan under arrest under the Aliyev regime [in Azerbaijan?] ... Because you [and Aliyev] both hate the Armenian people and Armenian statehood,” she charged.

Robert Kocharian, a former Armenian president and Hayastan’s top leader, also condemned Karapetyan’s “shameful” arrest, saying that the Armenian-born tycoon is being prosecuted for speaking out against Pashinyan’s efforts to depose Catholicos Garegin II and other senior clerics.

“The only way out of this shameful situation is a change of government,” Kocharian said in a statement. “Otherwise we will quickly slide towards total dictatorship, with unpredictable consequences for our statehood.”

The church’s Mother See in Echmiad-

in has also denounced the “illegal actions” against Karapetyan. Several bishops were among hundreds of people who rallied outside the court on Wednesday in support of him. Hayk Konjoryan, the parliamentary leader of Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party, accused the church of “pressuring and attacking the judiciary.”

The accusation leveled against Karapetyan stems from his comments made in Echmiadzin on June 17, when he accused Pashinyan of “attacking” not only the ancient church but also the Armenian people.

“Since I have always been on the side of the Armenian Church and the Armenian people, I will have direct participation,” he told News.am. “If politicians fail, then we will also participate in all of this in our own way.”

Armenian law-enforcement authorities say the remarks amounted to a call for violent regime change, a claim shrugged off by Karapetyan’s lawyers.

Karapetyan, 59, was born and raised in Armenia and moved to Russia in the early 1990s. The bulk of his business assets estimated by *Forbes* magazine at \$4 billion are located in Russia.



ARMENIA

Education in Armenia Shapes Exceptional Youth

By Anzhela Sedrakyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — How can a country like Armenia — surrounded by external threats — consistently educate and shape exceptional young people, who win award after award in regional science and education competitions and go on into technology?

Despite decades of economic hardship and unresolved conflicts with neighboring countries, Armenia has developed a unique educational model centered on fostering critical thinking from an early age, preserving national identity, and promoting civic engagement.

In 2023, Armenia’s education expenditure amounted to just 0.24 percent of its GDP — significantly below the global average of about 4.4 percent (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=AM>).

Yet it is not only financial investment but also systemic vision that propels Armenia forward. Since 2011, chess has been a compulsory subject in public schools for grades 2–4, reaching more than 40,000 students and cultivating early strategic thinking and analytical skills.

International rankings also reflect this upward movement. Armenia climbed from 72nd to 63rd place in the 2024 Global Innovation Index (WIPO), and in the 2023 Global Talent Competitiveness Index, Armenia ranked 55th out of 134 countries, distinguishing itself in attracting and retaining talent.

These numbers reflect real people and real journeys. Three people who have benefitted from a rigorous educational system — Almast Muradyan, Artyom Manukyan and Kristine Karapetyan — offer some answers.

Muradyan is Yazidi by ethnicity and has achieved notable success in education. Her parents and family members



Artyom Manukyan and Almast Muradyan

always encouraged her academic pursuits. Almast studied history at Yerevan State University, later completing her master’s in the same department, and is now preparing to apply for a PHD program. She also works at Aliq Media as a journalist.

“For me, education isn’t optional. Society advances through education, and for me, it has been an even greater responsibility. I have always seen the challenges within our community and understood that education is a pathway to solving these problems,” Muradyan said.

She emphasized the significance of preserving her people’s centuries-old traditions and identity. She highlights that the Yazidi community in Armenia is active, engaging through various programs and initiatives.

Almast takes special pride in seeing her fellow Yazidis pursue education and succeed.

“That inspires me and makes me more determined. From school age, education and my profession have been my top priorities — I’m convinced that without them, neither personal nor societal development is possible,” she says.

Almast fondly remembered her school teacher Lianna Zakaryan.

“While I was still in school, she would say that I would pursue a career in science. When we met recently, she reminded me of those words. Her rigor always had a positive impact on me, and I’m grateful for it.”

Regarding journalism, she admits:

“For many years, journalism was a background interest for me — especially in Middle Eastern and international affairs. But after the 2020 war, I decided I had to take responsibility and act through my work.”

She added, “While working on my master’s thesis, I applied for a position at Public Television’s Media Academy.”

Her journey into Aliq Media is equally unique:

“I read an article about Kurdish rock that mentioned Kurdish Yazidi culture and music. I was so moved that I wrote to Aliq Media asking if they had any journalism positions. The editor, Tigran Paskevichyan, replied that they didn’t at the time but asked what my background was. When I said ‘historian-journalist,’ he invited me for an interview. My first piece was about the book launch of ‘Young People Speak About Peace.’ On my first day, Mr. Paskevichyan gifted me his own book — a memory I cherish.”

Her journalistic work focuses on cultural and educational issues, especially those affecting youth. Her academic interests lie in Middle Eastern history and culture, including the history and culture of the Yazidi people.

She has already written an article on the Yazidi Genocide.

“I believe preserving our national identity is crucial, and through my work I want to advocate for it. This is my path. A person’s path is not always straight, but when you look at your heart and understand what you live for, everything falls into place,” she said.

Manukyan first sat in front of a chessboard at the age of 5. Since then, chess has been an integral part of his life. He was born and raised in Agarak, in Syunik. He attended the local secondary school and later studied at the Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture and Sport, majoring in chess.

“Chess has never been just a game to me. I started at a young age, but soon understood: this is my field. It demands discipline, focus, and it gives the freedom to think.”

One of his earliest achievements came at age eight, when he became the U-10 chess champion of Syunik. A few years later, in 2009, he placed third in the Armenian national championship for his age group.

“I never stopped learning. Regardless of results, I continued participating in tournaments, courses, and training. I’ve always believed that success comes to those who never cease to work on themselves. And that’s how I’ve lived,” he said.

He was coached by his father, Petros Manukyan, a long-time chess coach in Agarak.

“At the heart of my success is not only my own work, but also my father’s support and exemplary dedication. He taught me that before victory comes humility — toward the game and your opponent,” he said.

Today, with years of experience, Artyom continues to develop in the world of chess as a coach. He says that in modern Armenia, chess occupies a special place: “Chess has become a national characteristic in Armenia. It is taught in schools and forms part of our intellectual culture. Many children grow up understanding the value of the game and how to think — and that’s a great advantage for us.”

He works at the Armenian Chess Academy in the Meghri and Agarak branches and coaches numerous students from both Armenia and abroad. For Artyom, the most important mission is passing the game to the next generation.

“With every child, I try to see the motivation I had when I was young. As a coach, my calling is not only to teach technique but also to instill psychological resilience — toward both victory and defeat. Chess teaches the ability to think and navigate in life. If we can plant that seed, we’ve already changed something,” he explained.

He understands well that an athlete’s success does not start with talent alone, but with perseverance.

“I was never the most promising young chess player, but I never stopped trying. My story is about that. The path of an athlete is not straight, but if you keep moving, every step becomes experience and result,” he added.

For him, coaching is the continuation of that journey — from athlete to mentor. And as he says himself, this path is just the beginning.

Karapetyan, the executive director of the Armavir branch of the Armenian Red Cross, belongs to the generation of youth who, from an early age, understood the value of responsibility in both academic and humanitarian spheres. She is 24, born and living in Noravan village, Armavir. She combines science, social activism, and education in her life. Her path was not shaped by sudden



Kristine Karapetyan

success but by consistent internal drive developed since her school years.

As a teenager, she began actively participating in school events. School leaders noticed her initiative and enthusiasm and involved her in regional events and training sessions that covered diverse topics from law to history and culture. In 2017, Kristine took part in media literacy workshops — new in Armenia at the time — which brought her into collaboration with NGOs and marked the beginning of her role as a socially active citizen and future specialist.

Her civic engagement and school successes gradually led to a conscious educational path. She received a full scholarship to Yerevan State University’s Faculty of History, earning qualifications as both historian and educator. She then completed her master’s in world history, also on a scholarship. Today, Kristine is recognized as a historian, educator, and professional active on international platforms.

Her academic journey also began early: in her very first semester, at the invitation of the Student Council at YSU, Kristine began taking part in various programs, conferences, and seminars.

She has since participated in numerous conferences addressing global history, regional politics, and cultural heritage, and is now considering getting her doctorate. Her first engagement with the Red Cross came in school, when she entered and won first place in the national essay competition “Humanity in Action.” That marked the start of her volunteer journey. Though she experienced less active years during university due to academic workload, from 2021 onwards she became an active member again.

Kristine has always stood out for her active engagement in Yerevan’s centers, but never forgot her native Armavir.

The start of her tenure coincided with the ethnic cleansing that forced out the Armenian population of Artsakh across the border into Armenia.

She recalled, “There were moments when I wanted to give up the burden, but at the same time I realized I had to live up to their hope and trust.”

Equally demanding was the operation in the disaster-stricken Lori region after major floods: “At night we had to urgently depart for Alaverdi with a rapid-response team. On-site, we organized the entire volunteer group’s work. My team relationships are based on equality, mutual trust, and support. I’m convinced that such an approach enables effectiveness and sustainability in difficult times.”

She also founded “Luse” educational center to offer tutoring for young children. Together with her team, she decided to share their knowledge and experience to help children realize their dreams through education. Today, Kristine leads the Red Cross’s Armavir regional branch, expanding programs and directions. Her team continues active work with displaced Artsakh residents, single elderly people, socially vulnerable families, and school-children. They organize humanitarian aid, tutoring, educational campaigns, and tree-planting events aimed at addressing individual needs and fostering a generation of responsible civic-minded youth.

According to Kristine, the key to her success is her continuous desire to learn and relentless work ethic. She believes it’s thanks to these qualities that one can cultivate an intelligent and competitive generation.



ARMENIA

Russia Steps Up Warnings Over Armenia’s Drift to EU

MOSCOW (Azatutyun) — Russian companies see no future in Armenia and trade between the two countries is already shrinking rapidly as a result of Yerevan’s plans to seek to eventually join the European Union, Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk said on Friday, June 20.

Overchuk stepped up Moscow’s warnings about economic consequences of that geopolitical choice for Armenia during a panel discussion with his Armenian opposite number, Mher Grigoryan, held as part of an annual economic forum in Saint Petersburg.

“Under the conditions formed between the Russian Federation and the European Union, Russian business understands that it has no prospects in Armenia because as things stand now, we have no prospect of interaction with the European Union,” he said. “It’s a fact. And this explains the ongoing drop in commercial exchange [between Russia and Armenia.]”

Overchuk said that Russian-Armenian trade, which has skyrocketed since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, is now on track to contract by almost half, to less than \$7 billion, this year.

Russia accounted for over 41 percent of Armenia’s foreign trade last year, compared with the EU’s 7.7 percent share.

Earlier this year, the Armenian government pushed through the parliament a bill declaring the “start of a process of Armenia’s accession to the European Union.” Moscow has warned that the South Caucasus nation risks losing its tariff-free access to Russia’s vast market and having to pay much more for Russian natural gas and foodstuffs.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and other Armenian officials have stressed that the law does not amount to an EU membership bid. They have also said that Yerevan has



Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk participates in the APEC Leaders’ Informal Dialogue at the APEC Summit in Lima, November 15, 2024

no plans yet to leave the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), a Russian-led trade bloc comprising five ex-Soviet states.

“But you’ve passed the law and we take it seriously,” countered Overchuk.

He said that Pashinyan’s government is already introducing some EU standards for food imports to Armenia which run counter to the EEU’s relevant regulations.

“We understand that these actions are aimed at creating conditions for diluting our existing relations. Unfortunately, it’s a very serious issue,” he said, hinting at retaliatory measures by Moscow.

Grigoryan disagreed, saying that ordinary Russians continue to “feel great” in Armenia and that Overchuk is “somewhat dramatizing the situation.”

“I would say that Russian business also feels very comfortable in Armenia,” added the Armenian vice-premier.

Grigoryan did not comment on his government’s EU aspirations that have not yet been officially welcomed by any of the bloc’s 27 member states.

Pashinyan stated last week that Armenia will eventually have to choose between the EU and the Russian-led bloc. But he did not say when that could happen.

Pashinyan and his entourage first floated the idea of an EU membership bid in early 2024 amid rising tensions with Moscow. Armenia’s mainstream opposition groups denounced the resulting drift to the EU as reckless and warned of its severe consequences for the domestic economy.

Armenian Students Win 5 medals At International Geography Olympiad

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenian high school students have earned 2 silver and 3 bronze medals at the Open International Geography Olympiad, held online for the first time by Lomonosov Moscow State University’s Faculty of Geography, on June 24.

The Armenian Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports reports that the competition took place from June 20 to 23, bringing together 107 participants from 23 countries. Each country could submit a team of up to six students, aged 15-19, selected through national contests. The Olympiad featured three rounds: theoretical, practical-mapping and multimedia-testing, all conducted in English.

Armenia’s six-member team included five students from Quantum College and one from Artashes Shahinyan Physics and Mathematics School. Silver medals went to Hayk Antonyan and Sati Hayrapetyan (both from Quantum, 12th grade). Bronze medals were awarded to Samvel Khachatryan (PhysMath School, 10th grade), Erika Harutyunyan (Quantum, 11th grade) and Nare Poghosyan (Quantum, 12th grade).

The team was led by Vardan Asatryan, head of Armenia’s National Geography Olympiad Committee. Organizational support for Armenia’s participation was provided by Quantum College.

Strengthening Rural Healthcare One Nurse at a Time FAR Annette Choolfaian Scholarship Program

YEREVAN — Twelve nurses from the communities of Movses, Choratan, Artsvaberd, Verin Karmiraghbyur, No-

rashen, Aygepar, Nerkin Karmiraghbyur, Chinchin, Tsaghkavan, Vargavan, and Paravakar recently completed a two-week

accredited training program to sharpen their skills, renew their professional knowledge, and most importantly, help them meet national health requirements to keep doing the work they love. The training was made possible by the Fund for Armenian Relief’s Annette Choolfaian Scholarship Program.

Under Armenian law, healthcare professionals are required to complete continuing education — 140 credits for nurses and 220 for doctors — every five years. But for many nurses in remote regions, access to such training is limited. Some haven’t had the chance to update their qualifications since graduating decades ago — sometimes as far back as the Soviet era.

This training gave these frontline caregivers the opportunity they had long need-

ed. Not only did they earn 55 accredited credits, but they also gained new knowledge and built important connections in their field.

“Before FAR stepped in, we didn’t know where to go, how to register, or how we’d even afford the fees. Thanks to FAR, we received our training, our questions were answered, and created the network with the Nurses Association of Armenia. The more we work with FAR, the more we understand the depth of support. FAR has always been there for us with BCPP program and children’s nutrition program,” said Arus Bozinjan, a longtime nurse from Paravakar’s kindergarten adding that the classes were held online during the evenings, making it possible for participants to attend after work.



Cadet Yana Simonyan, left, with US Ambassador to Armenia Kristina Kvien

First Armenian Female Cadet Joins West Point

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — For the first time, an Armenian female military cadet will study at the United States Military Academy at West Point, the Facebook page of the U.S. Embassy in Armenia announced on June 24.

“Congratulations to Yana Simonyan on her admission to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Yana is the first Armenian female cadet to attend West Point and is expected to graduate in 2029. Admission to this prestigious institution speaks to her exceptional abilities and the growing cooperation between the United States and Armenia. We wish Yana the very best and much success,” the embassy’s post read.



Frontline caregivers in Armenia receive medical training

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

EU Condemns Conviction of Azerbaijani Journalists

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — The European Union has expressed deep concern over the severe prison sentences handed down to journalists and staff of Abzas Media in Azerbaijan, calling the move a troubling signal for press freedom in the country.

In a statement issued following the verdicts, the EU emphasized the essential role of independent journalism in fostering transparency, accountability, and an informed public. It urged Azerbaijani authorities to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, in line with their international commitments.

“The EU calls on Azerbaijan to take immediate steps to guarantee a safe and supportive environment for all journalists and media professionals,” the statement read.

Mkhitarian Says He Will Stop Playing at End Of Current Contract

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — In an interview with La Repubblica this week, soccer star Henrikh Mkhitaryan, who plays for Inter Milan, said: “I don’t know how much longer I’ll play. I’m not ruling anything out, but I know I still want to be on the field.”

“I have one year left on my contract with Inter. If they don’t kick me out, I’m staying. I don’t want to retire with the regret of having done it too soon. After Inter, I’m done. Moreover, I don’t want to lower the level,” he noted.

“I won’t go back to playing in Armenia. And destinations like Saudi Arabia don’t interest me. With all due respect, I love football for the game, not for money. When I wake up, I want to train and show what I’m worth,” Mkhitaryan said.

Speaking about his plans after football, Mkhitaryan said: “After football? Today I say I’d like to leave the football world, but never say never. I’ll need time to reflect and rest, with my family.”

Armenia Questions Europe’s Silence on Azerbaijani Trials

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian MP Armen Gevorgyan on June 24 raised the issue of Armenian detainees in Azerbaijan during a session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), criticizing the Council’s inaction.

“You are aware that shameful trials are currently taking place in Azerbaijan against Armenian prisoners. This organization has so far failed to exert any significant influence on the Azerbaijani authorities or ensure a fair and dignified resolution of these cases. Why is the Council of Europe unable to act in this situation? What message does this send to those who still believe in democratic values, especially at a time when those values are under intense pressure?” Gevorgyan asked.



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan arrives in Istanbul to visit President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Armenia PM Visits Erdogan During ‘Historic’ Visit to Turkey

VISIT, from page 1

Armenia-Turkiye normalization process, regional developments, and the importance of sustained dialogue”. He reassured the Turkish leader that Armenia was “committed to building peace and stability in our region”.

Relations between the two nations have been historically strained over the Armenian Genocide. They have been further complicated by Ankara’s close ties to Azerbaijan and support for Baku in its long-running conflict with Armenia. But Pashinyan’s visit sparked unease back home, where police rounded up “several dozen” opposition supporters in the capital Yerevan and beyond, rights groups and a lawyers coalition said. Ahead of the meeting, Armenian parliament speaker Alen Simonyan told reporters: “This is a historic visit, as it will be the first time a head of the Republic of Armenia visits

Turkey at this level.”

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev had travelled to Turkey the day before to meet Erdogan. He hailed the two nations’ “significant” alliance in a meeting at which the Turkish leader reiterated his backing for “the establishment of peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia”. Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed on the text of a peace deal in March, but Baku has since outlined a host of demands – including changes to Armenia’s constitution – before it will sign the document.

Pashinyan has actively sought to normalize relations with both Baku and Ankara. “Pashinyan is very keen to break Armenia out of its isolation and the best way to do that is a peace agreement with Azerbaijan and a normalization agreement with Turkey,” Thomas de Waal, a senior fellow at Carnegie Europe told AFP. The main obstacle to normalization with Turkey was

Azerbaijan, he said.

Opening the border would help the economy in eastern Turkey, diminish Russian influence and likely improve Ankara’s ties with Washington and the West, among other things, he added. “Pashinyan by himself won’t make this happen, it’s only when it moves higher up the Western agenda with Turkey that you might see change.”

Earlier this year, Pashinyan said Armenia would halt its campaign for international recognition of the genocide, a major concession to Turkey that sparked widespread criticism at home. He has visited Turkey once before, for Erdogan’s 2023 inauguration. Ankara and Yerevan named special envoys in late 2021 to lead a normalization process, a year after Armenia’s defeat in a war with Azerbaijan over the disputed Karabakh region. A year later, Turkey and Armenia resumed commercial flights after a two-year pause.

Golden Apricot Film Festival Names Jury, Special Guests

YEREVAN — Armenian actor Karren Karagulian, one of the stars of the Academy Award winning film “Anora,” will visit Armenia at the invitation of the Golden Apricot International Film Festival.

He will be joined by the winner of the Grand Prix of the “Un Certain Regard” program of the Cannes Film Festival, one of the best students of the outstanding master Alexander Sokurov - Russian director Kira Kovalenko.

The jury of the regional competition program will be headed by the pioneer of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, a representative of the so-called “Second Wave” - Iranian director, screenwriter, photographer Amir Naderi.

This year the Golden Apricot Film Festival will be held from July 13 to 20, during which Yerevan viewers will traditionally be presented with films from leading international film festivals (Cannes, Berlin, Venice, etc.). A visit by



Karren Karagulian

outstanding figures of world cinema is expected, who will share their experience and art with the public.

Sean Baker’s film “Anora” was awarded the “Golden Palm” at the 77th Cannes Film Festival, as well as 5 Oscars at the

97th Cannes Film Festival award ceremony in the nominations “Best Film”, “Best Director”, “Best Original Screenplay”, “Best Editing”. The film’s fifth statuette was brought to it by the actress who played the main role, Mikey Madison. Let us recall that during the award ceremony at the Cannes Film Festival, Sean Baker called Karen Karagulian his “lucky talisman”, since the Armenian actor has starred in all of the director’s films for over 20 years.

The jury members are Armenian-American screenwriter and director Eric Nazarian; Athina Rachel Tsangari, co-founder of the Greek New Wave; Adilkhan Yerzhanov, a prominent auteur of Central Asian cinema, master of genre experimentation; Ada Solomon, leading producer of Romanian cinema, and Abderrahmane Sissako, the Mauritanian award-winning filmmaker, laureate of Cannes Film Festival, César and many more.



INTERNATIONAL

‘Everyone Is Scared’: Iranians Head to Armenia to Escape Conflict with Israel

By Rayahn Demytrie

AGARAK, Armenia (BBC) — It’s hot, dusty and feels like a desert at the Agarak border crossing between Armenia and Iran.

There are dry, rocky mountains surrounding the area - no trees, no shade. It’s not the most welcoming terrain, especially for those who have travelled long hours to reach Armenia.

A woman with a fashionable haircut, with the lower half of her head shaven, is holding her baby, while her husband negotiates a price with taxi drivers. There’s another family of three with a little boy travelling back to their country of residence, Austria.

Most of those crossing into Armenia appeared to have residency or citizenship in other countries. Many were leaving because of the conflict between Israel and Iran, now in its eighth day.

“Today I saw one site where the bombing happened,” said a father standing with a small child near the minivan that they just hired. They had travelled from the north-western town of Tabriz.

“All the people are scared, every place is dangerous, it’s not normal,” he added.

The conflict began on 13 June, when Israel attacked nuclear and military sites as well as some populated areas.

The Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) - a Washington-based human rights organization that has long tracked Iran - says 657 people have so

far been killed. Iran has retaliated with missile attacks on Israel, killing at least 24 people.

Israel says it has established air superiority over Tehran and has told people to leave some of its districts. In recent days, heavy traffic jams have formed on roads out of the city as some of its 10 million residents seek safety elsewhere.

Those who drove to Armenia from Tehran said the journey had taken at least 12 hours. Several told us that they did not see the Israeli strikes - but heard the sound of explosions they caused.

“It was troubling there. Every night, attacks from Israel. I just escaped from there by very hard way. There were no flights, not any other ways come from there,” said a young Afghan man with a single suitcase, who did not want to be named.

He described the situation in Tehran as “very bad”.

“People who have somewhere to go, they are leaving. Every night is like attacking, people cannot sleep, because of the sounds of explosions, the situation is not good at all,” he said.

A young woman with white headscarf and thick fake lashes said she was heading back to her country of residence, Australia.

“I saw something that is very hard, I don’t want to talk about it,” she said as she boarded a car with several others for the onward journey to the Armenian capital Yerevan.

“Someone comes and attacks your country, would you feel normal?”

Some Israeli ministers have talked up the possibility that the conflict could lead to regime collapse in Iran.

But Javad — who had been visiting the north-eastern city of Sabzevar for the summer holidays and was heading back to Germany — said he thought this was unlikely.

“Israel has no chance. Israel is not a friend for us, it’s an enemy,” he said. “Israel cannot come to our home to help us. Israel needs to change something for itself not for us.”

Some Iranians at the border however were crossing were travelling in the other direction. The previous evening, Ali Ansaye, who had been holidaying in Armenia with his family, was heading back to Tehran.

“I have no concerns, and I am not scared at all. If I am supposed to die, I will die in my country,” he said.

He said Israel was “harassing the entire world – Gaza, Lebanon and other countries”.

“How can such a small country have nuclear weapons?” he asked. “Based on which law can this country have a bomb, and Iran, which has only focused on peaceful nuclear energy and not a bomb, cannot?”

Israel is widely believed to have nuclear weapons, although it neither confirms nor denies this.

Azerbaijani Researcher Bahruz Samadov Sentenced to 15 years on Charges of Treason

By Aytan Farhadova

The Baku Grave Crimes Court has sentenced Azerbaijani researcher, peace activist, and OC Media contributor Bahruz Samadov to 15 years in prison on charges of treason.

The court issued its ruling against Samadov on Monday, June 23.

A journalist present in court for the verdict told OC Media that the process was held behind closed doors, with Samadov’s grandmother, friends, and activists only allowed to enter the courtroom for the verdict to be announced.

They said Samadov looked tired, as he was on the fourth day of the hunger strike.

Human rights lawyer Zibeyda Sadigova, who represented Samadov said he was only drinking water, and was currently being held in the prison hospital.

“As Samadov was very weak from the hunger strike, he could not write his last words on paper. He said that he is a peace activist, and did not commit any crime,” she said.

“He is connected with his state, and if that were not true, he would not have visited Azerbaijan. He is a researcher and author of many articles, and he wrote about Azerbaijanis, Armenians, the Khojaly massacre, etc,” she added.

“We were ready for this verdict and Samadov also expected this decision from the judge. And will appeal the decision, we have not lost hope,” she said.

On Friday, the prosecution demanded Samadov be sentenced to 16 years in prison. Samadov reportedly attempted suicide and then began a hunger strike shortly after.

On Saturday, Samadov’s grandmother, Zibeyda Osmanova, told OC Media that Samadov was innocent, and could not come to terms with not being allowed to prove it.

“When he spoke with me, one of the guards sat with us and [Bahruz] stated that one of his cell mates saved him. He could not say when he attempted suicide, last night or this morning,” she said.

One of Samadov’s friends, Aykhan Zayedzadeh, wrote that Samadov had gone on hunger strike after the prosecution announced their demands.

Samadov disappeared on August 21, 2024 while visiting Baku from Prague where he is a PhD candidate at Charles University.

After two days of silence, officials confirmed that he had been detained, with the Baku’s Sabail District Court that afternoon confirming that he was being charged with treason.

Samadov has denied the charges against him, calling the accusations of high treason fabricated. In his testimony, he has stated that there was no evidence to support the accusations that he had collaborated with the Armenian security services.

Before his arrest, Samadov was an outspoken advocate for peace with Armenia.

The conclusion of Samadov’s trial comes as the authorities continue the latest wave in its crackdown on dissent.

In May, Iqbal Abilov, a Talysh researcher, was sentenced to 18 years in prison, also on charges of high treason.

On Friday, the Baku Court of Grave Crimes sentenced the management and journalists of Abzas Media to between seven and a half and nine years in prison.

Farid Mehralizada, a journalist at RFE/RL, was also sentenced to nine years. He was detained in June 2024.

(This story originally appeared on OC-media.org on June 23.)

Russian Police Say Oligarch Was Smuggling Diamonds out of Russia to Armenia

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — On June 23, Russian law enforcement agencies uncovered a high-profile crime, apprehending members of a criminal group who stole diamonds from “Alrosa” and then smuggled a large quantity of them into Armenia.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) reported that the stolen diamonds were transported to Armenia to “ADM Diamond LLC,” whose beneficiary is Khachatur Sukiasyan, an oligarch close to Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and a Member of Parliament from the ruling faction of the National Assembly, known by the nickname “Grzo.”

The Armenian prime minister himself had participated in the opening of the factory that became central to this scandal.

It’s worth recalling that the first facts about diamonds being illegally imported into Armenia were revealed by Mikayel Minasyan, the former Armenian ambassador to the Holy See, in 2021. Ambassador Minasyan stated that a large quantity of diamonds was being illegally brought into Armenia, then marked as Armenian, and subsequently exported. According to Minasyan, all of this happened with the direct knowledge and patronage of Nikol Pashinyan.

“According to state statistics, as of the first quarter of 2020, Armenia had 20 billion worth of diamonds. To process such a quantity of diamonds, there should be more than 1400 workers, whereas only 400 workers are registered in that sector in Armenia. Consequently, it’s impossible to process that quantity with the existing workforce. I’ll add one more thing: to do



Khachatur Sukiasyan

this in Armenia, large factories would be needed, and these factories would consume a lot of electricity and pay taxes for 1400 people. There is only a figure indicating that 20 billion worth of diamonds and gold were exported from Armenia. This system was created and is controlled by Nikol Pashinyan, because these individuals, at the expense of Armenia’s international reputation, have organized an international mafia system of import and export.

Following this statement, the political persecutions carried out by the Armenian authorities against Minasyan and his family became even more intense.

Meanwhile, during an attempt to steal another batch of diamonds worth over 1.7 million rubles, Russian law enforcement officers arrested Valentina Matyushchenkova, an employee of the company that stole the diamonds, her son Alexey Matyushchenkov, who acted as an intermediary, as well as Armen Petrosyan and Arman Sa-

hakyan, who were transporting the stones illegally. A criminal case has been initiated on charges of theft and illegal circulation. During searches, approximately 200,000 carats of industrial diamonds, money, and jewelry were confiscated from the criminal group.

In August 2024, the investigative journalism publication *Hetq* also reported that an unprecedented volume of 29.1 tons of semi-processed or unprocessed gold was exported from Armenia in 2023. This is gold that has not undergone final processing and is refined abroad. The overwhelming majority of the gold, 71%, was exported to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Armenia imports this gold from Russia. The total value of the exported gold amounted to 1.8 billion US dollars, a 4.4-fold increase compared to 2022. Diamonds rank second in the top ten exports. Here too, the volumes are unprecedented: approximately 4.5 million carats, valued at 593 million US dollars. “Hetq”’s investigation revealed that this mainly concerns diamonds brought from Russia, which are exported in an unprocessed state—before becoming cut diamonds. Armenian, Russian, and Arab businessmen are involved in this business. From the Armenian side, the ADM Diamonds factory in Abovyan and its partners are actively involved. The factory’s name is linked to Sukiasyan, a member of parliament from the Civil Contract party.

It should be noted that Sukiasyan is an Armenian oligarch who is close to the prime minister of Armenia and an MP elected from his party’s list.



Community News

Albert Shirakian Joins Armenian EyeCare Project Board of Directors

LOS ANGELES — The Armenian EyeCare Project (AECPP) is pleased to welcome its newest board member to the organization's Board of Directors. Mr. Albert Shirakian, who serves as chief executive officer (CEO) of Retina Vitreous Associates Medical Group (RVAMG) in Los Angeles, joined AECPP as a board member in early 2025.

Shirakian heads one of the largest retina specialty practices in the US. With a proven executive record that includes roles as chief financial officer and chief administrative officer, Shirakian quickly rose through the ranks at RVAMG to become CEO and has contributed greatly to driving strategic growth, operational excellence and robust financial leadership at the medical group.



Albert Shirakian

Shirakian said his decision to join AECPP as a board member was solidified when he traveled to Armenia with the organization during its 2024 Medical Mission. "As a member of the Armenian diaspora, I've always sought meaningful ways to give back to my homeland," Shirakian says. "When I visited Armenia last year, I was humbled by the dedication and expertise of the local clinicians and deeply moved by the quality of care being delivered through AECPP. It was a proud moment to realize that my professional background could help support and strengthen this impactful work."

Shirakian looks forward to facilitating connections between AECPP and U.S.-based retina specialists who are eager to share their knowledge and contribute to the mission. He also hopes to leverage his experience in healthcare operations, accounting and strategic management to contribute insights that build on AECPP's strong foundation and help ensure its programs remain efficient, effective and sustainable as a custodian of generous public support.

Beyond his executive responsibilities, Shirakian also acts as a trusted strategic advisor to leading pharmaceutical, technology and distribution companies and provides critical guidance to drive innovation, accelerate market positioning and enhance organizational effectiveness. He is also

see SHIRAKIAN, page 11



AMVN founders and staff interviewed on A-TV channel "Aracin Cragir" Program

Armenian Volunteer Network Celebrates 5 Years of Educational Opportunities for Armenian Youth

Armenian Volunteer Network (AMVN) cofounders Seroj Terian, Kristina Terian, and Hasmik Torosyan gathered in Yerevan with a group of volunteers, students and partners to celebrate AMVN's 5th birthday.

AMVN is an educational nonprofit founded in 2020 by educators in the US and Armenia with one goal: To improve educational opportunities for Armenian students and create ties between the people of Armenia and the rest of the world.

The organizers do this by recruiting, training, and linking volunteers with Armenian universities, institutions and organizations where they can teach and share their knowledge. We also focus on training educators in Armenia so they become the best teachers they can be.

Volunteers don't have to have advanced degrees or be professional teachers. If they are native English speakers, or perhaps fluent in another language, they can help a student in Armenia improve their skills. Other professionals can help teach kids too.

Our amazing volunteers come from all over the world. Each volunteer applicant is interviewed, and then we pair their knowledge and availability with an educational need in Armenia. We do this through our partnerships in Armenia with primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, universities, NGOs and cultural institutions.

Most of our volunteers teach remotely, once or twice a week, via Zoom. We also offer the opportunity to volunteer in-person and have placed volunteers in Yerevan, Gyumri, Ijevan and elsewhere.

As we celebrate our 5th birthday, we are proud of our accomplishments but humbled by the work that remains. We are immensely grateful to our volunteers, students, partners and supporters for being part of our story. Together we are building a brighter future for Armenia.

If you would like to volunteer or support our organization, please reach out and make a difference.

AMVN is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization registered in the United States and Armenia. For more information, visit www.amvn.org or email info@amvn.org.



A few of the volunteers

AUA Launches Scholarship Campaign For Journalist Program

NEW YORK — The American University of Armenia (AUA) is pleased to announce the launch of its new campaign, Voice of a New Generation: Transforming Armenia's Media Landscape with AUA. This bold initiative aims to raise \$2 million to create an endowed scholarship fund in support of students studying in the University's newly launched Master of Arts in Multi-platform Journalism program.

Recognizing the vital role of a strong, independent, and innovative media sector in shaping the nation's democratic future, AUA founded the Center for Excellence in Journalism in 2023, funded by the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan. This initiative was followed in 2024 by the establishment of the University's state-of-the-art Media Lab, made possible through an \$813,135 grant from the Office of American Schools and Hospitals Abroad of the U.S. Agency for International Development. This new campaign builds upon this foundation and reflects the University's deep commitment to nurturing the next generation of journalists who will inform, inspire, and empower communities across Armenia and beyond.

AUA has already achieved more than 50 percent of its fundraising goal during the initial silent stage of the campaign. Now, the University's Office of Development has launched the next phase of this initiative with its inaugural "Reporting Live From NYC!" fundraising event, to be held on Saturday, October 25 at the Yale Club in New York City. Chaired by AUA Trustees Lusine Poghosyan and Arda Haratunian, the gala will be dedicated to celebrating AUA's achievements and supporting the continued growth of the University. Registration is already open for individuals interested in attending, and further details will be shared in the coming weeks.

Reflecting on the significance of the MAMJ program for the Armenian media landscape, the co-chairs shared the following: "As a leading institution of higher education in Armenia, AUA fosters a rich environment that values and deepens academic excellence, critical thinking, integrity, scholarship, leadership, and service to society. Aligned with these values, the University has developed a campaign to support the education of journalists, communications professionals, and digital storytellers to elevate public discourse, evolve the media landscape, and engage citizens in building a transparent, thriving Armenia. With the investment of our generous community of supporters, this vision can become a reality."



COMMUNITY NEWS

A Summer Evening Of Joy at St. Vartan Cathedral

NEW YORK — The outdoor plaza of St. Vartan Cathedral in New York City was the setting for a beautiful summer evening gathering on Thursday, June 12. Billed as a reunion of Armenian community members who came of age during the 1970s and '80s, people from throughout the region came together to share laughter and stories that had endured through the years.

The event was also, as Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan observed, a “powerful witness to God’s faithfulness and the fulfillment of long-cherished prayers.”

“Years ago,” he said in remarks, “when our Diocesan complex was nothing more



Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan

than bare concrete and dust, our fathers and grandfathers stood on this very ground with only vision and faith in their hearts. They prayed: ‘Lord, let this be a place where Your people gather. Let this be a light on a hill. Let our children and our children’s children stand here one day and praise Your name.’

Looking out to the crowd, he said: “Tonight is a visible sign that their prayer was answered. You stand where they once stood. You are the realization of their vision, the living echo of their hope, the very miracle they believed would come.”

He continued: “So let’s keep the flame

alive. Keep coming back. Bring your children. Bring your stories, your dreams, and your faith. Your ancestors built this place for you. Now it’s your turn to build for those who come after you. Build with love, with joy, and with presence.”

To conclude, the Bishop Mesrop gave his heartfelt thanks to the organizers who “brought this dream to life, and to every participant who made the evening unforgettable. Your presence, your spirit, and your faith made it shine. And one day, another generation will stand here and say: ‘I’m living in the middle of a miracle someone else once prayed for.’”



Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan and other organizers



COMMUNITY NEWS

Tekeyan Boston Celebrates Hampartsoum

By Jeanine Shememian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WATERTOWN — For the second year in a row, the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Boston Chapter observed the traditional Armenian Hampartsoum or Ascension, on Sunday, June 1 at the Baikar Building in Watertown. The celebration included a cultural program, music and a delicious menu, including Armenian barbecue, rice with pine nuts, fattoush, variety of appetizers, wine and desserts.

Dr. Aida Yavshayan, Tekeyan Boston's co-chair, started the event by welcoming the guests. She gave a brief explanation of the biblical and religious meaning of Hampartsoum in Armenian. Furthermore, she described the traditions associated with this special day, including gatnabour [rice pudding], which is made each year in Armenian households and shared with seven other neighbors or families. The "white" gatnabour is a representation of innocence, honesty and incorruptible purity.



Dr. Ayda Yavshayan, TCA Boston co-chair, welcoming guests and giving opening remarks (photo Jeanine Shememian)

In the Armenian church, the Feast of Ascension or Hampartsoum is commemorated 40 days after Easter. This feast marks the holy day of Christ's ascension into heaven, and it celebrates the final earthly event in Jesus Christ's life. Traditionally, Armenians have celebrated the cultural rituals of Hampartsoum outdoors, during the blooming of springtime and is associated with love and renewal. Some of the customs and rituals that Armenians practice have been adopted from Christian celebrations from ancient, pre-Christian times and have been passed down through many generations. The celebration is also called Jangyulum (gyul means rose) in Armenia and is still widely celebrated.

Yavshayan then shared a heartfelt stroll down memory lane of Hampartsoum celebrations during her earlier years while living in Istanbul (Constantinople). She reminisced about the days when her family lived in the same street as her relatives, in-laws, extended family and close family friends. She recalled the loving and tight knit Armenian community, of Ganatch Kyiough, or modern day Yeşilköy



Co-Treasurer Suzy Naroian and 2-year-old Suzanne Gavlakian sharing spring flowers (photo Jeanine Shememian)

(historically known as San Stefano before 1926) by the Marmara Sea. Yavshayan fondly remembered how all family members, especially her maternal aunt loved the annual Hampartsoum festivities. Every year, all the families would go to church services. Thereafter, the women and children would gather at a local park, René Park, by the seaside cliffs. There they would spread their picnic blankets with a bountiful assortment of traditional dishes for that day, including dabgots (zucchini and herb fritters) and always the gatnabour for dessert. The kids would go play and then gather flowers for the women to make garlands or flower crowns to place on their heads. Finally, the vijag or lottery game would be played and enjoyed during the festive day by the young girls looking for their future life partners. She said that she was happy that the tradition is being kept alive through the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Boston and hopes that it will continue to be celebrated for the coming generations.

During the cultural program, music was performed by two talented musicians from the Greater Boston Armenian community: award-winning pianist Marine Margarian and accomplished violinist Armenuhi Hovakimian. Maral Tanielian Der Torossian, TCA Recording Secretary, introduced the duo, who have already graced prior Tekeyan Boston events and delighted guests with their previous performance at the TCA Valentine's Dinner Soiree in February of 2025.

During the luncheon, Margarian and Hovakimian performed a collaboration of both duets and solos, including music pieces such as, Yerevan Yerebuni, Yerevani Sirun



Raffle drawing: TCA Boston youth members and Co-chair Rita Balyozian (photo Jeanine Shememian)

Aghchig, and Anush Opera's Hampartsum Yayla and Ambi Dagits. Additionally, the audience was delighted to hear classical and popular pieces from Gomidas, and other international composers, including a few pieces which were Margarian's own compositions. The guests were so delighted and inspired by the music that, in the joyful spirit of the afternoon, they joined in by enthusiastically singing along to well-known Armenian songs.

For the second year in a row, Tekeyan Boston conducted one of the main traditions and the highlight of the day, the Vijagakagh or lottery game. On this occasion, all female attendees, married or not were welcomed and joined in for the lighthearted amusement of the game. To start, each participant dropped a personal belonging such as a ring, pendant or bracelet, which would be considered a nshan ("sign") in a beautifully decorated vessel full of water and fresh spring flowers. The lovely 19-year-old Lianna Shememian was responsible for randomly retrieving items from the water, one at a time, and calling for the owner of each.

Once a person claimed her object, she selected a poetically written verse or saying about her fortune or luck from a basket. As individuals read aloud their vijag or pakhd in Armenian, the guests would respond with either applause or laughter. Although many of the vijag verses were pleasant and inspiring, others were quite amusing, since obviously, most of the written verses did not realistically reflect the "individual's destiny."

At the closing of the cultural program, TCA Boston Chapter Vice Chair Sargis Gavlakian, a poet who has published several volumes of his Armenian-language works and has been involved in TCA for many decades, took the stage. He recited two of his soon-to-be published



Sargis Gavlakian, poet and vice chair of TCA Boston, reciting his poem "Mi Pshour Arev" (photo Jeanine Shememian)

poems with much fervor. The first one, titled "Hye Robo (t)," was written on June 19, 2005 and the second, "Mi Pshour Arev," was written in October 2015. The profoundly existential and metaphoric poem about being an "Armenian Robot Man" expressed how to break free from being a modern-day robot-like man and return to being a living, breathing, feeling man – a true dignified Armenian man. He dedicated his touching second poem, "Mi Pshour Arev," to all his beloved family and friends and his co-members of the Tekeyan Boston Executive committee.

Finally, TCA Boston Chapter Assistant Treasurer Suzy Naroian announced the beautiful Armenian-themed raffle items, which were donated by chapter members. Rita Balyozian, chapter co-chair, ran the raffle with the assis-



Vijagakagh: from left, Lianna Shememian, Maral Der Torossian, Armenuhi Hovakimian, Rita Balyozian (photo Jeanine Shememian)

tance of the youth present during the event who sold the raffle tickets and chose the lucky winners.

The delicious khorovadz or barbecue was prepared and grilled on hardwood charcoal by Sargis Gavlakian and his close friends. The entire meal and program were prepared by TCA Boston Executive members including Rita Balyozian, Sossy Yogurtian, Maral Der Torossian, Aida Yavshayan, Suzy Naroian, Jeanine Shememian. The gatnabour was prepared by Aida Yavshayan, along with homemade namoura prepared by Suzy Naroian. (Special thanks to Garo Yavshayan for his contributions to the TCA Boston team.)

The TCA Boston Chapter thanked Gyumri Bakery of Watertown (<https://www.gyumriarmenianbakery.com>) for donating fresh lavash bread for the luncheon, and everyone who contributed items, baskets and gift cards for the raffle prizes, including Fastachi Gourmet Nuts, Sossy Yogurtian and Sargis Gavlakian.



COMMUNITY NEWS

The Armenia Project Announces Winners of First Micro-Grant Program

YEREVAN — The Armenia Project (TAP) this week announced the recipients of its inaugural Micro-Grant Program, launched in May 2025 to help high-impact storytelling from Armenia achieve global resonance. From over 30 submissions, two projects were selected for their compelling narratives and international potential.

The TAP Micro-Grant Program empowers registered Armenian organizations to develop documentaries, multimedia stories, podcasts, and innovative media that elevate Armenia’s voice on the world stage. This year’s selected projects spotlight the human impact of displacement and the endurance of culture in the face of adversity.

Selected Projects

“Galina’s Departure: A Story of Displacement and Resilience”

This multimedia report will be produced by *Hetq* video journalist Rima Grigoryan and acclaimed freelance reporter Siranush Sargsyan, herself displaced from Artsakh. The series follows Galina, a singer and cultural icon from

Artsakh, and her four-generation family as they prepare to leave Armenia due to post-war hardship and lack of support. The grant will fund the full production and global outreach campaign.

“This documentary captures the heartbreak and resilience of Gohar, a renowned singer from Artsakh, as she faces displacement yet again - this time leaving Armenia for Russia. We aim to share her story and that of her family’s four generations, shedding light on the struggles of families forced from their homes,” said Siranush Sargsyan.

“AYG” – Short Documentary Film

Directed by emerging filmmakers Maria Martinyan, Siranush Vardanyan, and Arnold Ghazaryan, AYG (“Dawn”), Short Documentary Film, tells the story of two childhood friends from Artsakh navigating life after displacement. The film was previously selected for screenings at KinoAsyl and One Shot film festivals. With TAP’s support, the team will complete post-production, add multilingual subtitles, and launch an international promotional campaign, including festival

submissions and educational screenings.

“AYG [dawn] gives voice to a generation shaped by war and resilience. It is a story of rising through loss and embracing a new beginning.” Siranush, Maria and Arnold / AYG directors.

“The Armenia Project aims to empower storytellers. We were thrilled to receive so many impressive applications - it made our job incredibly difficult. We’re proud to support these two projects and help them reach global audiences,” said Shant Petrossian, TAP’s Global Director.

TAP plans to expand the Micro-Grant Program in the coming year, creating new opportunities for Armenian narratives to reach beyond national borders through diverse formats. By supporting both emerging and seasoned storytellers, TAP is fostering narratives that are locally grounded yet universally resonant.

TAP, an initiative of the H. Hovnanian Family Foundation, is an educational non-profit that promotes the democratic and economic development of Armenia by advancing the country’s communications ecosystem.

Harabedian Advances Bill to Expand Mental Health Support For Wildfire Victims

PASADENA, Calif. (Pasadena Now) — Assemblymember John Harabedian (D-Pasadena) and Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas (D-Salinas) advanced legislation earlier in June aimed at addressing the growing behavioral health needs of Californians impacted by wildfires.

The legislation comes in the wake of wildfires like the 2024 Eaton Fire, which led to the deaths of 18 people, destroyed more than 9,000 structures, scorched over 14,000 acres, forced evacuations, and left lasting trauma in Altadena and Pasadena. Mental health professionals and emergency response teams have reported a sharp increase in anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms in the months following the disaster.

“My community members are witnessing a 62% surge of all calls related to mental and behavioral health needs coming from Southern California as a result of the wildfires,” said Harabedian. “Alongside Speaker Rivas, I am committed to addressing these urgent needs by ensuring equitable access to mental health care and providing avenues for long-term recovery through expert support.”

Assembly Bill 1032 would require health care plans and insurers to cover up to 12 additional annual visits with a licensed behavioral health provider — beyond a patient’s existing in-network access — for up to a year following the end of a declared emergency. The bill is designed to bolster long-term recovery efforts in communities affected by wildfire disasters, particularly in Southern California.

AB 1032 is scheduled to be heard by a Senate policy committee this summer.

Speaker Rivas echoed the urgency, stating, “As Californians recover from the devastating impacts of wildfires, we have a duty to ensure they’re supported, including by access to behavioral health care. This bill reflects our broader commitment to care, recovery and resilience.”

Albert Shirakian Joins Armenian EyeCare Project Board of Directors

SHIRAKIAN, from page 8 passionately dedicated to improving health-care delivery, expanding patient access and championing initiatives that positively impact community health and wellness. These strengths will undoubtedly make Shirakian a perfect addition to AECP’s Board of Directors.

“AECP is thrilled to welcome Albert as a trusted and dedicated board member,” Dr. John Hovanesian, who serves as vice president of the organization, said. “In his first few months, Albert has already contributed significant financial guidance and helped us improve relations with the eye care industry. The addition of Albert makes a strong team even stronger.”

Shirakian shared a similar enthusiasm about joining AECP’s board. “What resonates deeply with me is AECP’s long-term vision — not only to provide care, but to invest in Armenia’s capacity to deliver that care independently,” Shirakian said. “I’m honored to join the board and support AECP’s continued growth alongside its outstanding leadership, partners and staff.”



2025 GRAND CONVOCATON
GRAND HYATT HOTEL

Armenian Dinner Dance
July 18, 2025
7:00 pm - Midnight
\$150/person



The FAB-4 All Stars
from Detroit,
Milwaukee, & Toronto



Special performance by local
Armenian Hip Hop recording
artist Marc2Ray at 10:00 PM

Tickets <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1349253396229?aff=oddtcreator>



COMMUNITY NEWS

Community-minded: Alumnus Ara Topouzian Connects Artists, Organizations to Michigan's Creative Industries

DETROIT (Wayne State University Press) — Through an unconventional career path, Wayne State University alumnus Ara Topouzian '93 has assumed many roles, including entrepreneur, musician and economic development specialist.

Currently, he's executive director of Michigan Venture Capital Association and host of the "Michigan Creates" podcast, where he connects listeners with gifted artists and organizations in Michigan's rich cultural landscape.

But When Topouzian chose to pursue his college degree, he aimed to follow in his mother's footsteps and become a journalist.

"Attending Wayne State was a no-brainer," he said. "My father went there, my friends were attending, and WSU was known for its journalism program."

And while he never became a journalist, the knowledge and skills he developed in Wayne State's journalism program in the College of Fine, Performing and Communication Arts — including real-world insight and education from legendary Prof. Ben Burns — helped prepare Topouzian for the distinct career he's created today.

"Ben Burns was a stickler, but I really respected him because he was no nonsense," Topouzian said. "To this day, I use journalism. I think we all use a bit of journalism in everything that we do, whether we know it or not."

Upon graduation, Topouzian struggled

to find a position in the field. After a short stint in sales, his father suggested they go into business together. While their initial venture proved unsuccessful, the endeavor nurtured Topouzian's entrepreneurial spirit and his natural inclination for marketing and promotion — skills he's honed throughout his career.

In his next venture, Topouzian, who plays the Kanun, a traditional Middle Eastern stringed instrument, focused on the Armenian and Middle Eastern music he always admired.

"I particularly enjoyed watching these masterful musicians on stage, and I got the bug! I wanted to do that; I wanted to be on stage and play that kind of music," he said. "To me, it was party music."

The Topouzians pivoted their business to promote ancestral village/folk music, launching American Recording Productions as a platform to sell Armenian and Middle Eastern music created by Ara and other artists.

While building the record company, Topouzian joined the Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce.

"Over time, my volunteer work opened new doors. I landed a job developing programs and events for the Farmington Chamber of Commerce, that role led to other positions within chambers and associations, and the rest is history," he said.

Over the next 20 years, Topouzian built a



Ara Topouzian

robust resumé of managerial and economic development experience in Michigan. He had run some of the most well-regarded chambers of commerce in the state when he began considering new challenges.

He seized the opportunity to join Michigan Venture Capital Association, drawing on his diverse skill set and deep connections in Michigan's business community while advancing a new understanding of the venture capital landscape.

"I knew very little about venture capital until I took that role," he said. "I think there is a mystique about venture capital based on what people see on television, but members of the venture community can be the first 'boots on the ground' to help entrepreneurs and startups. They deploy capital into the ecosystem, and it's gratifying to support those who work with the entrepreneur community."

Throughout his career, Topouzian continued to play the Kanun. In 2012 he received a Kresge Fellowship award for his talents, sparking his involvement in the Detroit arts and culture community.

"Once I received that fellowship, my eyes opened to the possibilities of where I could be playing this music and the audience for it. It really expanded the horizons for me," Topouzian said.

Topouzian became more involved in the Detroit arts and culture scene and was appointed to serve on the Michigan Arts and Culture Council by both Governors Rick Snyder and Gretchen Whitmer.

It would be hard to overstate the economic impact of art and culture on the state of Michigan; according to The Arts Action Fund, in 2022 Arts and Culture was an \$18.4 billion industry, representing nearly 121,000 jobs. (pdf)

"What I saw over the years is that artists are great at their art, but they're not always great at the business end of it, through no fault of their own," said Topouzian. "Most artists did not have that promotional wherewithal, and I always wondered how I could help."

Working at the state level, Topouzian saw the breadth of arts and cultural organizations in Michigan and wondered what could happen if he could connect the artists and organizations. Similarly, at the Michigan Venture Capital Association, one of the missions of Topouzian's team is to connect its members to one another and the entrepreneurial community.

And his latest endeavor, "Michigan Creates," pairs his passion for community with his love of music, bringing 15-to-20-minute interviews that shine a spotlight on the arts and culture industry.

"For artists, we hope to reach anyone who might seek to hire them or get to know more about them," Topouzian said. "For art organizations, we hope to reach individuals who may become supportive of the organization, be that financially or by volunteerism."

OBITUARY

Armen Sanossian Veteran, Dedicated to Kindness

GARDEN CITY, N.Y. — Armen Sanossian, a longtime resident of Garden City, passed away peacefully in his sleep early on the morning of June 3, 2025 at the age of 95.

Known to generations of Garden City residents as "George," he was the proprietor of Bicycle Country (previously known as George's) where he sold bicycles to village residents for nearly fifty years. It was his greatest joy to see a resident who as a child peered through the glass at the shiny new Schwinn Sting Ray bikes come back many years later to purchase a bicycle for their own child.

As a young man, Armen Sanossian attended City College of New York, where he earned a BS in psychology. He would go on to work serving patients at Bellevue Hospital, before being sent to Asia to serve his country in the Korean Conflict. He rose to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant and would receive the Purple Heart after being wounded in action. He would later appear at his parents' doorstep, unannounced, on Christmas Day 1953, after receiving an Honorable Discharge.

He married the love of his life, Virginia (nee Ketigian) in 1956, and together they raised two sons, Steven and David. He had four grandchildren, Paige, Arden, Gregory, and Suzanne, who were also raised in Garden City under his loving and watchful eye.

Armen was an avid golfer and often enjoyed rounds with his golfing buddies at Cherry Valley Club, where he would later go on to enjoy many family celebrations with his wife, children and grandchildren.

In his later years, he relocated to Mooresville, NC, together with his son David, daughter-in law Cecilia, and grandchildren



Paige and Arden. During his years there he enjoyed spending time with new friends on Lake Norman, watching his son perform at local music venues, and going to the neighborhood breweries for a taste of the latest local ales.

Armen Sanossian leaves behind a legacy of service, kindness and selflessness. He served as a role model for all who were fortunate enough to have known him. He loved being a resident of the village and was blessed with many years of friendship and respect as a local businessman.

He was predeceased by his wife Virginia and his son Steven, and is survived by his son David, daughter-in law Cecilia, and his four grandchildren.

He will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery following a celebration of life to be held in North Carolina.

Condolences may be made to the family at www.cavin-cook.com.

Telephone (617) 924-7400

Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Inc.

Continuous Service By The Bedrosian Family Since 1945

558 MOUNT AUBURN STREET
WATERTOWN, MA 02472

MARION BEDROSIAN
PAUL BEDROSIAN
LARRY BEDROSIAN

James "Jack" Giragosian, CPC

Mark J. Giragosian

Giragosian
FUNERAL HOME

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

Nardolillo Funeral Home

Est. 1906

John K. Najarian, Jr.

Rhode Island's Only Licensed Armenian Funeral Director

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

www.nardolillo.com



Arts & Culture

Armenian Museum of Fresno to Host Dual Exhibition Featuring Sound And Photography

FRESNO — A powerful dual exhibition, “Fresno Armenians: 50 Years Ago,” along with the sound installation “From the Fields of Fresno,” opened on June 25, at the Armenian Museum of Fresno. It will run through August 27.

“Fresno Armenians: 50 Years Ago,” features more than 300 captivating photographs by Robby Antoyan, taken at Armenian picnics and other community gatherings in Fresno during the 1970s. These rare and intimate images document the vibrant social life, traditions, and enduring spirit of Fresno’s Armenian-American community.



Robby Antoyan



Joseph Bohigian, PhD

Running alongside the photo exhibition is “From the Fields of Fresno,” a sound installation by composer Joseph Bohigian. The work is a tribute to those generations who established a new home in Fresno and blends oral histories of descendants of Armenian Genocide survivors with Armenian folk music and ambient sounds exploring themes of memory displacement, and connection to place. It takes as its sources that sounds of Armenian Fresno: recordings made as part of the Works Progress Administration’s California Folk Music Project in 1939 by the American ethnomusicologist Sidney Robertson Cowell, and a 1984 recording of the artist’s great-grandmother recounting here journey to America. These recordings illustrate the sounds and stories of the community in its earliest decades, a combination of the

se FRESNO, page 17



Charentsavan - Evgenii Avramenko - Russia

Echo of a Dream Organ Music’s New Chapter in Armenia

By Nare Sukiasyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Armenia is witnessing a sustained organ music revival, led by a community of professionals dedicated to preserving and expanding the country’s organ traditions. At the heart of this movement is the legacy of Vahagn Stamboltsyan, a renowned organist and teacher whose vision for creating a robust organ culture in Armenia is finally taking shape.

The sound of the organ that filled the hall of the Yerevan Komitas Chamber Music Hall last fall was unlike any concert that had taken place before; it was pure, ethereal, sacred and even mystical. Perhaps it was the tone of the newly restored organ. Or perhaps it was the sound of a dream come true: the dream of a man who had the courage to dream big.

Following that concert in an informal setting with Armenian organists and the festival organizers, I was moved by how this small community carries the responsibility of preserving Armenia’s organ tradition with passion, deep devotion, and love. Organist Tereza Voskanyan called the instrument “sacred,” describing the music of Bach and Komitas as “the highest form of musical expression.”

To understand the roots of this dedication, we must go back to the last century, when the instrument first entered the Armenian cultural sphere.

Secular vs. Religious Instrument

Unlike in the West, where this originally secular instrument became closely associated with the Catholic liturgy, pipe organ entered the Armenian realm as a secular instrument in the 1960s and remains so to this day. A smaller, portable pump organ had already been introduced as a choral accompaniment in the Armenian Apostolic Church in the second half of the 19th century, which was exceptional given that the Orthodox Church traditionally forbids any instruments in its services.

see MUSIC, page 15



Peter Cleinert - Germany

World Music Day with an International Flavor at Holy Cross Catholic Church

BELMONT, Mass. — On Saturday, June 21, the sanctuary of Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church resonated with the sounds of unity and diversity as violinist Haig Hovsepian and cellist Dilshod Narzillaev presented The Universal Language, a concert in honor of World Music Day.

Drawing a warm and enthusiastic audience, the performance showcased a thoughtfully curated program that highlighted music’s power to transcend borders. Hovsepian and Narzillaev selected works by composers of varying nationalities, backgrounds, and musical styles — each piece offering a unique voice, contributing to a shared message of global connection.



Haig Hovsepian

The program featured works by Ludwig van Beethoven, Andrea Casarrubios, Reinhold Glière, Astor Piazzolla, Komitas/Aslamazyan and Handel/Halvorsen. Each composer brought a distinct cultural and stylistic voice to the evening, from classical masterworks to folk-inspired arrangements and contemporary reflections. Together, the selections created a vibrant musical journey across time and geography, embodying the spirit of World Music Day.

The duo’s performance wove to-



Dilshod Narzillaev

gether cultural threads from across the world, reminding listeners that while languages may differ, music speaks to all. The program reflected the spirit of World Music Day with both elegance and intention, embracing the richness of international artistry through the intimate and expressive voices of violin and cello.

see CONCERT, page 16



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Greek Lemon Garlic Sheet Pan Salmon with Potatoes

“I love a good sheet pan meal. Not only is it less dishes for me to wash, but they are versatile, and family-friendly. This sheet pan salmon recipe is just that. It’s delicious, nutritious, and can easily become one of your staple weeknight meals. Salmon is a great source of protein with heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. It helps support your heart health by helping reduce your cholesterol and blood pressure. Salmon is a staple in our house because it’s versatile. I buy BAP-certified salmon and other seafood,” says Maria Koutsogiannis Camacho, the plant-based vegan chef, food stylist, and author at FoodByMaria. (“BAP-certified seafood is an aquaculture, or fish farming, certification program that exists to ensure your seafood is being sourced responsibly. It ensures that seafood meets four key requirements—environmental, social, food safety, and animal health throughout the production chain so you can feel confident in what you’re eating.”)

FoodByMaria is on a mission to change the way people eat and understand food. From recipes, a cookbook, photography, recipe development, and much more. Koutsogiannis shares recipes of all kinds, with particular focuses on Greek food, creative vegan alternatives, and gluten-free meals. She has amassed a following on social media across multiple platforms. “It’s where I post my Mediterranean Greek recipes, it started as a plant-based blog and it transformed over the years,” she explained. “I began my Instagram in 2014 with my husband. I eventually ended up quitting a full-time job to become a content creator and it was something that none of us really could have expected. I went to school to become an accountant, and a recipe developer was not something I expected to become.”

Koutsogiannis wants to stay true to her Greek roots, as her parents immigrated from Greece to Canada only 40 years ago. Her family owned a small restaurant and bar in Swift Current in Saskatchewan, and she grew up with the cultural influence all around her. “My parents owned Kabos,” she stated. “I grew up in the small Greek community there, eating good, healthy food. I just followed my heart and ended up cooking.”

“FoodByMaria has become more than I ever imagined. I am thankful to bring my food, ingrained in my family history, and the recipes I grew up with from my Greek mama and yia-yia into your homes. This recipe requires just a few simple ingredients and about 40 minutes to make. Serve with your favorite dip or sauce, and whatever fresh herbs you have on hand.”



Maria’s Greek family in the kitchen Photos courtesy FoodByMaria

INGREDIENTS:

1 1/2 lbs. baby potatoes, halved
4 BAP certified salmon filets
1 pint baby tomatoes, halved and seasoned with a big pinch of salt
1 large lemon, sliced

For the lemon garlic sauce:

Juice of 1 large lemon
1/4 cup olive oil
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon dried oregano
3 garlic cloves, pressed (or 1 tablespoon garlic powder)
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper

Greek tzatziki sauce:

1 cup cubed or crumbled feta cheese
1/4 cup chopped fresh dill
1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley

Variations:

Protein: Choose another type of seafood you enjoy or use chicken instead
Vegetables: Swap out the veggies with any veggies you desire like carrots, sweet potatoes, brussels sprouts, etc.
Serving: Serve with your favorite dip or sauce, and whatever fresh herbs you have on hand

PREPARATION:

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Make the lemon garlic sauce: Whisk together lemon juice, olive oil, Dijon mustard, dried oregano, pressed garlic cloves and salt and pepper. Set aside. To a large sheet pan add halved baby potatoes. Drizzle with half of the lemon garlic sauce, toss and then roast for 20 minutes.

Once the potatoes have roasted, add the halved tomatoes to the sheet pan, and gently toss. Nestle the salmon filets in between the potatoes and tomatoes on the pan. Divide the rest of the lemon garlic sauce evenly between the filets, drizzling on top of each. Finally, add the lemon slices to the sheet pan, on the salmon filets and nestled into the potatoes and tomatoes. Place back in the oven for 8-12 minutes or until the salmon is cooked through to your desired temperature. Serve topped with cubed/crumbled feta, fresh herbs and Greek tzatziki sauce.

For this recipe: <https://www.foodbymaria.com/sheet-pan-salmon/>

For gluten-free recipes: <https://www.foodbymaria.com/recipes/gluten-free/>

For the video, go to: <https://www.foodbymaria.com/sheet-pan-salmon/>

For Greek recipes: <https://www.foodbymaria.com/recipes/greek/>

For Maria Koutsogiannis’s Plant-Based Summer Moussaka, see: <https://thekit.ca/living/maria-koutsogiannis-vegetarian-moussaka-recipe/>

For Maria’s recipe for Steelhead Trout: <https://www.foodbymaria.com/steelhead-trout-recipe/>

Also: <https://mirrorspectator.com/2024/08/01/chicken-kebab-recipe-build-your-own-kebab-board/>

Mindful Vegan Meals: Food is Your Friend Paperback – June 12 2018 by Maria Koutsogiannis

In her cookbook, Maria Koutsogiannis, creator of FoodByMaria, shares the vibrant vegan recipes that paved her way to healing and self-acceptance. Every nutrient-packed recipe marks a milestone for Maria—follow along as she makes delicious discoveries. Mushroom and White Truffle Oil Risotto is a reminder that carbs are not the enemy, Self-Love Buddha Bowl with Baked Falafel is Maria’s go-to when she needs an energy boost and Easy Thai-Infused Coleslaw Salad represents a trip abroad that changed her whole way of thinking. Find recipes for homemade sauces and dressings, as well as naturally sweetened juices, snacks and treats to fuel your body and mind. Maria’s recipes have been featured in Impact Magazine, Spoonful: A Guide to Food and Laughter, Whole Foods, and Food Network Canada. She has over 2.2M Instagram followers and lives in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Order at: <https://www.amazon.com/Mindful-Vegan-Meals-Food-Friend/dp/1624145752>

Connect at:

<https://www.facebook.com/Foodbymariaofficial/>

<https://www.instagram.com/foodbymaria/>

<https://www.youtube.com/c/foodbymaria>

<https://www.pinterest.ca/foodbymaria/>

<https://www.threads.net/@foodbymaria>

<https://lnk.bio/foodbymaria>

<https://www.tiktok.com/@foodbymaria>

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/35kiEBb8IvjS1ky2nLI0f6>

© FoodByMaria 2025





ARTS & CULTURE

Organ Music's New Chapter in Armenia

MUSIC, from page 13

A real wind-powered pipe organ was finally installed in 1964 in the hall of the Union of Composers. However, the true soul of the Armenian organ was not the instrument itself, but the man who played it: Vahagn Stamboltsyan.

Immediately returning to Yerevan after graduating from the Leningrad Conservatory (currently the St. Petersburg State Conservatory), Stamboltsyan became a driving force in popularizing the organ in Armenia. He arranged Armenian liturgical music for the organ, and for the first time the Armenian public heard the music of Komitas, Makar Yekmalyan through the sounds of this ancient European instrument. Reflecting on those early performances, Archbishop Nathan Hovhannisian recalls, “The first time I heard Stamboltsyan play the Armenian liturgy on the organ, I understood that our monodic music was not only meant for choir — it could live beautifully through the organ as well.”

Remarkably, this cultural movement took place under Soviet rule when his concerts became almost ritualistic, filled with both reverence and revolution. In the early

take them on “tour lessons” through Armenian mountains, teaching them to channel the natural beauty into music. Stamboltsyan’s career combined teaching with a strong commitment to the development of organ art in the country. Stamboltsyan’s advocacy led to the installation of pipe organs in the cities of Charentsavan and Kapan. Notably, the organ brought to Kapan was sourced from the historic Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg and was installed in the concert hall of Kapan College in 1976.

Stamboltsyan’s greatest dream was the establishment of a systematic and international Organ Festival in Armenia. While occasional festivals had already been held, such as the 1969 one commemorating the Komitas centenary, he envisioned a long-term platform that could transform the social perception of the instrument.

Organ Festival

Symbolically, that dream came true 11 years after his passing. In 2022, the first International Organ Festival named in his honor was held in Armenia. It was organized by the National Centre of Chamber Music which has long been associated with the work of the maestro and now serves



Vahagn Stamboltsyan

formed in Gyumri, Charentsavan, and Kapan, further extending the festival’s reach beyond Yerevan.

The opening concert of the first festival featured remarks from several of Stamboltsyan’s fellow visionaries. Archbishop Nathan Hovhannisian reflected: “When we spoke of the organ, we thought of Vahagn, and vice versa. Stamboltsyan became such a noble figure that his name became a common noun associated with organ”. Ethnographer Gagik Ginosyan added: “Stamboltsyan gave the organ an Armenian passport.”

The 2022 Kapan concert held a special significance. It took place shortly after the Armenian-Azerbaijani war, when the city had just come under heavy shelling. At that moment, the sound of the organ became a voice of resistance and relief. The image of the gunshot-damaged organ, sounding like a prayer, served as a powerful reaffirmation of Stamboltsyan’s long-held belief that organ music has immense healing power, especially in times of national crisis.

The second festival, which took place in 2024, was also marked by the restoration of the organ at the National Centre of Chamber Music; one of the most unique organs in the region built in 1979 with the support of Catholicos Vazgen I, the Gulbenkian Foundation, and Stamboltsyan himself.

The Dutch-built famous Flentrop organ fell into disrepair in the 1990s caused by heating problems. Armenia does not have organ craftsmen, and although it was partially restored in 2007, a major maintenance project was needed to restore the organ’s sound. The head of Flentrop maintenance service Marinus Koole traveled to Armenia to inspect a complete restoration plan, as a result all 1,116 pipes had been thoroughly cleaned and inspected. During a concert by Dutch organist Jochem Schurman on October 24, following Dutch tradition, Koole returned the organ keys to the festival’s artistic director, Armen Sukiasyan; a beautiful symbolic gesture that signifies new life to both the organ and the future of the instrument in this hall.

After that concert, organist Schurman expressed his surprise about the enthusiasm of the young and energetic audience. He noted that “in many parts of Europe it is becoming increasingly rare to see young people attending classical organ concerts. But here in Armenia, it is amazing to see so many young faces deeply committed to this music. It gives hope for the future of the organ.”

Currently, there are about two dozen professional organists in Armenia. Remarkably, all of these organists are students of Vahagn Stamboltsyan who carry forward his vision and unwavering belief in the spiritual and expressive power of the organ.

These musicians also tackle the challenge of modernizing organ as a dynamic and ver-

satile instrument for the 21st century audience. Through their concerts, they explore a wide spectrum of repertoire ranging from classical organ music to Armenian spiritual works and even modern compositions. Recent highlights at National Centre of Chamber Music are Organ-Jazz concerts featuring modal jazz standards and the premiere of Organ Tales – A Magical Journey into the World of the Organ on June 17 this year, a special interactive children’s organ concert designed to engage young audiences.

Future Musicians

Despite this cultural revival, however, challenges remain in the Armenian organ scene. Yerevan’s largest organ, located in the Aram Khachaturian Concert Hall, is no longer in use, limiting the ability to host large-scale organ concerts. Moreover, with only one organist student at the Yerevan State Conservatory, there is an urgent need to train future professionals.

In a significant step forward, the National Centre of Chamber Music recently created official positions for organists. This long-awaited recognition not only honors musicians who have performed out of passion for decades, but also signals to youth that there is now a real and sustainable path forward in the profession.

The festival is expected to continue to grow in size and significance, becoming a key platform for cultural exchange between local, international, and diaspora musicians. Scheduled for this fall, it will feature renowned organists such as Vincent Dubois, principal organist of Notre-Dame de Paris; Jonathan Scott, celebrated British soloist with major orchestras; and Adriaan Hoek, organist of the city of Rotterdam.

The vision to which Vahagn Stamboltsyan dedicated his life is finally taking root. Organ music has found a new resonance in Armenia, especially among the younger generation. What was once a rare – young faces in the audience – has now become a defining feature of the festival. As Vahagn Stamboltsyan said, “The oldest musical instrument in the world is the youngest in Armenia.” And perhaps its sound is just beginning to be heard. Though Stamboltsyan didn’t live to see its fulfillment, his vision endures. Each note now carries his legacy: a reminder that what begins as a dream can resonate through generations.

(Nare Sukiasyan holds a BA in Choreography from the Yerevan State Institute of Theatre and Cinematography and an MA in Political Science and International Relations from the American University of Armenia, having focused her capstone research on Armenian Cultural Diplomacy. A former ballerina with the Armenian National Opera and Ballet Theatre, she remains deeply interested in cultural and artistic initiatives. She currently serves as MSP Sales Growth Manager at the cybersecurity company EasyDMARC.)



Closing concert

years, interest was so great that the same programs had to be performed twice on consecutive days to accommodate the audience.

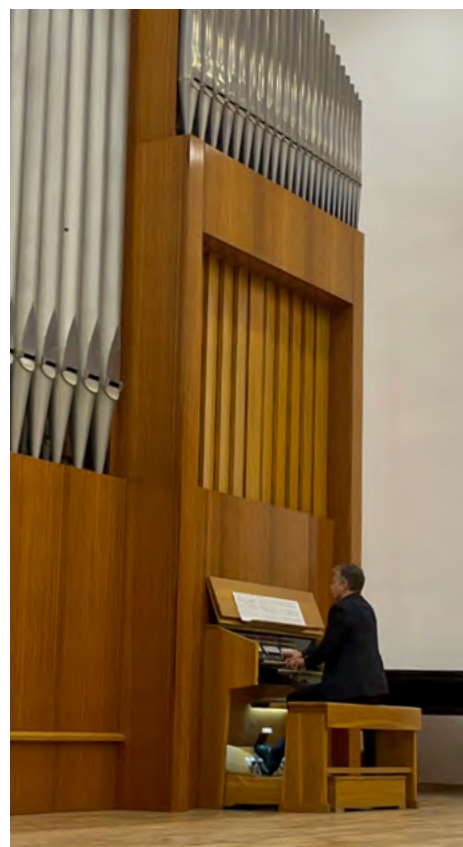
Born Vladimir, he decided to reclaim his Armenian roots hailing from Kars by renaming himself Vahagn, the pagan god of fire. Being a popular guest at various international organ festivals and having solo concerts on international stages, when asked what the secret of his unique voice was, he said: “I play Bach in Armenian, and this is the secret.”

Stamboltsyan not only declared his patriotism but also expressed it in action. In 1965, he initiated what is believed to be the first public concert in Yerevan commemorating the Armenian Genocide — a bold gesture at the time. He invited Lusine Zakaryan, a rising young soprano mainly known for her soulful liturgical singing at the Holy Mother of God Church in Echmiadzin. The collaboration turned out to be electric, brave, glorious. and it was the beginning of something powerful.

Each April thereafter, Stamboltsyan dedicated his concerts on international stages to the memory of the Armenian Genocide becoming one of the few Soviet Armenian artists who courageously raised this historical truth both locally and internationally.

In 1970, Stamboltsyan opened Armenia’s first organ class at the Yerevan State Conservatory and passed on his vision and passion for the organ to his students. Among them, organists Anna Bakunts and Lusine Harutyunyan still remember how he would

as a key hub for Armenian organists. Two years later the second festival was held and together they sparked a cultural wave. The two festivals featured performances by local organists and ten renowned organists from Italy, Russia, Germany, France, and the Netherlands, including Eugenio Maria Fagiani, Peter Kleinert, and Konstantin Volostnov. Notably, several artists also per-



Evgenii Avramenko of Russia in Kapan



ARTS & CULTURE

Aramazd Stepanian

*With Bilingual Acting,
Directing, Writing*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/GLENDALE – Aramazd Stepanian (born 1951, Abadan, Iran) is an Armenian theatre, film and television actor, producer, director, playwright, and translator. After graduating from Kooshesh-Davtian Armenian High School in Tehran, he moved to England, where he lived for 20 years. In London, he studied politics and drama at Thames Polytechnic (now the University of Greenwich), and completed courses in acting and stage directing. Between the years 1976 and 1989, Stepanian produced some 25 theatrical performances in both Armenian and English in London. He also founded a theatre there, Alperton Performing Arts Centre, staging plays in both languages for three years. In 1990, he relocated to California, USA. Over the course of 35 years, he has staged at least 100 plays in English and Armenian. In 2006, he opened Luna Playhouse in Glendale, where he served as artistic director and producer. Luna Playhouse presented 12 different productions during its first year alone, more than some 60 productions, shows, concerts in total, establishing it as one of the most active theatres and performance arts centers in the area. He closed the theatre in 2011, as rising rents and more importantly the lack of any serious interest from other theatre and performing artists made continuation very costly and artistically unsatisfactory, as he was spending all his energy to cover the expenses rather than doing serious theatre work. Stepanian is the author of eight books published in both Armenian and English.

Aramazd, your creative biography is impressive. What would you say is your most remarkable achievement?

I just love the theatre (and the arts in general), especially the rehearsals, and the camaraderie that is created amongst people who maybe of very different character, so much so that you one would never associate with them outside of the rehearsals and performances, but you work harmoniously on your common love.

And I persevere (a trait I have inherited from my mother). And I initiate and take risks (my father). I have established two theatres in my life, one in London, one in Glendale. Neither survived, but I did it. I also led the team of Iranian Armenian students in Manchester, England, who cleared 150 years of debris and damp of the cellar type space under the Armenian church and turned into a community center that has served the Armenians of Manchester for fifty years. I staged around 25 productions in London and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. But in the 1970's and 1980's, the London community was small in numbers. And only a few thousand could be counted on to ever participate in any kind of Armenian cultural event. Fewer people meant fewer theatre practitioners. And none of the Armenian associations were interested in staging plays. I'd estimate that in the 15 years or so that I was active, there were maybe 4 or 5 other theatre plays staged in London.

If I have the means and the resources, and the people who want to work with me, I undertake major projects, I do a big production, or three big productions. In 2024 I staged three contemporary Armenian plays, in both the original Armenian and in English translation — six productions in total, rehearsed and staged in about ten weeks. If I don't have the resources, the Armenian speaking actors, then I do three small scale plays with non-Armenians — in English. In 35 years in the US, I think there have only been two years, when I did not stage a play, and one was the Covid year, which I used to publish *Armenian Playwrights Volume 1* and the Samad Behrangi book.

By the way, I've read your translation of *The Little Black Fish* by Behrangi. You intentionally used the Iranian-Armenian dialect. That same stylistic choice is evident in the title of your other translation, *My Grandpa's Journey* by Gabrielle O'Sullivan. How justified is it, in your opinion, to use a specific dialect in literary translation?



Aramazd Stepanian acting

That's the dialect I know, although I am not sure it should be called a dialect. I can't speak and write like an Armenian from Gyumri, or even Yerevan. I speak Eastern Armenian, the same as people of Armenia, but it is influenced by Persian, and now the added effect of 55 years of life in English speaking countries. I can probably translate a non-fiction work into a more literary language, but In Behrangi's case I was retelling a story, and the Iranian Armenian language seemed more appropriate. The same with *My Grandpa's Journey*. My wife wrote that based on my own father's decline, as he lived with us, and my small son lived through that experience. I would add the following: I have never liked translations of European and American plays done in Armenia. There is hardly ever any attempt to make the dialogue conversational. If it is a play, the actor must speak the lines as a normal person would and not recite them. And that's what I wanted to do with the two works, also some plays I have adapted. For example, I loved Khachik Dashtents's *Khodedan*, and I love his translations of Shakespeare, but his translation of *The Cavedwellers* by William Saroyan is not "actable," really. Doesn't sound natural.

You're one of the rare Armenian diaspora artists involved in the lesser-known field of Armenian literature — playwriting. American-Armenian director Nishan Parlakian was a pioneer in this regard, translating Armenian playwrights and even staging Shirvanzade's "For Honor" with an all-American cast in New York in 1976. Gerald Papasian has also translated and staged several Armenian plays and operas in English and French. You've translated and staged at least 15 original Armenian plays yourself. In your opinion, how appealing can Armenian dramaturgy be to non-Armenian audiences?

As a general rule, any good play from any culture, if done well (translation, acting, direction, etc.) should and would appeal to the "theatre-going" public, whether it is an audience that seeks light entertainment, or one that is looking for more meaningful work — work that does more than provide a pastime. It does, however, require a reasonable appreciation and understanding of the culture of the original by the production team. Another factor — to a lesser extent — is what the general audiences of any given community (including the media and critics) have been exposed to, and are used to seeing in a theatre. In the case of the reception my work, I would say British audiences appreciated and reacted more positively to my productions of Armenian plays done in English, than the American (Los Angeles) audiences did. But again, this was as much to do with the actors who had comparatively limited experience of world theatre than British based actors (Armenians and non-Armenians). Most US based actors are unfamiliar with the work of the great playwrights. They are not staged often. Consequently, the audiences are not used to seeing different plays from different cultures.

Your translated anthology *Armenian Playwrights* is unusual, having included *Arshak and Shapoor*, a dramatized retelling of a story by the 5th-century historian Pavstos

Buzand, and the work by contemporary playwright Kariné Khodikyan. How has the book been received, and do you plan to continue this series?

Beyond the occasional pleasantry and congratulatory remark, I have not had any serious comment or reaction to the publication of the book. The same with the volume of the plays of Karine Khodikyan in English. No Armenian publication or media in the USA has offered a critic of either volume. No Armenian theatre practitioner has spoken to me about them. It is because we have no theatre here. But I suppose hardly anything is said or written (as part of a public discourse) about any Armenian book.

I intend to publish at least three more. I have had the second volume almost ready for a few years. *Armenian Playwrights Volume II* has the subtitle *Plays of Early Post-Soviet Era*. The main reason I have been hesitant in publishing it is the 'darkness' of the themes and subjects of the plays. It was the time of the blockade among other changes and upheavals. My search for at least one comedy of that period, to be included in the volume to "cheer-it-up" a little, has not been successful. But I will publish it, and another volume of one-acts. A fourth (possible) volume would be Armenian classics. I would love to publish at least two plays by Gabriel Sundukian (although not *Pepo*). Of course he writes in the dialect of Tbilisi, and structurally his works can be a little rambling, so they would have to be adaptations, rather than translations, but he is so good. He writes plays like Henrik Ibsen. Levon Shant is another. Also, I might tackle *Ara the Beautiful*, although that is poetry, and I may not be good enough to translate poetry.

I have adapted plays and have adapted other literary works into plays. It could be said that I have written only one play, Kaj Nazar Junior, but even that had many elements taken from other literary sources and plays (Hamlet, Kaj Nazar, Bernard Shaw, etc.).

You've acted in 19 films, and it was a pleasant surprise to see you as an Orthodox Archbishop in the Coen brothers' film "Hail, Caesar!" What was it like working with such renowned filmmakers?

Nothing much really! They did not speak to me much, or any of the other three 'religious leaders' with me in the scene. In the second audition, the younger brother introduced himself and welcomed me, but the older one didn't say anything (but I made him laugh more than once with my acting). They did not give me any instructions during the one day shoot either. Actually, almost all the films and tv programs I have been in, I receive no instructions—maybe a word or two (of course I have not had any major roles). You go to the location, do the make-up and costume, you wait around, then you go on the set, they shoot, you go back to the waiting area or dressing room for them to re-position the camera, you go back on set, they film you from a different angle, and that is it. That is why I personally find theatre work so much more satisfying. You study, you explore ideas, different way of doing things...

World Music Day with an International Flavor at Holy Cross Catholic Church

CONCERT, from page 13

The evening opened with a warm welcome from Very Rev. Ghazar Bedrossian, pastor of Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, who offered words of reflection on the universal power of music to uplift the human spirit and bring people together. To the importance of music, Fr. Ghazar said, "To preserve our songs is to preserve our souls."

The concert concluded with a standing ovation, a testament to the performers' artistry and the emotional resonance of the evening. Hovsepian, a violinist known for his commitment to cultural dialogue through music, and Narzilaev, a distinguished cellist with an equally global perspective, offered more than a recital — they offered a moment of connection and celebration through sound.

The Universal Language was presented by Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, adding to the cultural vibrancy of Belmont's Armenian-American community and affirming the role of music as a bridge between peoples.

Following the event, the audience was invited to the Nishan and Margrit Atinjian hall for an elegant reception offered by the Ladies Guild as a testament to their hospitality giving the attendees the opportunity to bond, mingle and reflect.



ARTS & CULTURE

Leaning Into Loneliness Saved ‘Elio’

By Bill Desowitz

LOS ANGELES (Indiewire.com) — Pixar’s “Elio” is the latest reminder of how hard it is for original animation to succeed theatrically, especially with the kind of personal stories being made under Pete Docter’s leadership. The storytelling struggle was so difficult, in fact, that it prompted a course correction. First-time director Adrian Molina (“Coco”) departed his alien abduction comedy-adventure to rejoin Lee Unkrich on “Coco 2” as co-director once again. But he tapped “Coco” story artist Madeline Sharafian to succeed him, trusting her to complete his pet project.

Molina was in good hands: Sharafian deeply connected with “Elio’s” theme of loneliness and the search for belonging, and contributed some wonderful early concept drawings. She even stuck up for Molina during meetings with the Brain Trust when there was pushback.

“I remember being in some of those later meetings with Adrian fighting for some of the scenes in the movie,” Sharafian told IndieWire. “One was that early scene where Elio watched the Golden Record Voyager leave Earth, and there were some voices in the room that didn’t think it was necessary. I could see Adrian’s face sort of stricken, and I was like, ‘No, you have to ease the audience into the movie. This is thematically relevant, it’s about Elio connecting with that [NASA] satellite in space.’”

Sharafian was soon joined by “Turning Red” director Domee Shi. Spurred on by “WALL-E” director Andrew Stanton’s rallying cry to “make me care,” they resolved to strengthen Elio’s (Yonas Kibreab) motivation to escape his lonely existence on an Air Force base and find a new home with aliens who appreciate him. This meant turning his traditional alien abduction into a weird obsession.

“With Adrian, he had grown up as an artsy kid,” recalled producer Mary Alice Drumm (associate producer on “Coco”). “His dad was a military dentist, and he would talk about being this kid that didn’t fit in and feeling lonely. And I think Maddie

and Domi both have that similar story and overlap a lot. They’re like a Venn Diagram of taste. And so I think the more we can ground ourselves in a personal connection with the character, the more it resonates,” Drumm said. “And then, honestly, with loneliness, the more we started talking to the crew about it, they really grabbed onto that idea. It really galvanized us. It became our North Star... a weird boy who learns to connect with aliens in outer space. That’s what we were tracking.”

The first important change was to raise the emotional stakes by making Elio an orphan with the death of his parents, turning his mom, Olga, into his stressed-out aunt (Oscar winner Zoe Saldaña, who replaced America Ferrera when she was no longer available).

“So that was heavy, but it was really necessary because it makes him feel truly alone at the beginning of the movie,” Sharafian said. “And we understand immediately why space is this escape for him, like this beacon of hope for this lonely boy. It’s the answer to all of his problems in that moment. And it was the right choice to not show the moment when he loses his parents, but the moment when he falls in love with space in the exhibit, as he’s lying down and listening to Kate Mulgrew’s voice wash over him and he’s connecting with Voyager.”

This enabled Sharafian, who specializes in insightful character intros, to create the funny and quirky montage of Elio pleading to get abducted, underscored by *Once in a Lifetime* by the Talking Heads. “It just lets the audience be on board with his wackiness and his insane mission to be abducted,” added Shi. “Like when he puts on the colander, and he’s listening to radio signals, and he’s ignoring other kids, and he’s fighting with his aunt. You know him more, you understand him more, and you’re a little bit more forgiving of his wackiness.”

This completely subverts the abduction scene, with Elio excitedly beaming up to the heavenly Commuiverse interplanetary space station, instead of being afraid in the first teaser trailer (“No thanks”). This makes it even more of a blast for Elio pretending to be Earth’s leader.

“We were leaning into our love of sci-fi and horror, and it felt like a fun opportunity as well,” Shi continued. “Pixar movies make you laugh or they make you cry, but I feel like movies can make you thrilled or on the edge of your seat, or gasping, surprised, and I love getting those reactions out of audiences, too.”

One of the highlights is an “Alien” parody with the introduction of worm-like Glordon (Remy Edgerly), who appears scary at first but is just a lost and lonely kid like Elio. In fact, it was more effective having Elio bond with Glordon than with Glordon’s militaristic dad, Lord Grigon (Brad Garrett), as he did in the earlier version. Now, Grigon becomes an aggressive obstacle to Elio from the very beginning. He wears an armored shell that protects him emotionally as well as physically, and his distant relationship with Glordon mirrors

Olga’s with Elio. The tender reconciliation between father and son was the result of a late rewrite by screenwriter Julia Cho.

There is also some fun horror subversion with Elio’s ever-pleasing clone, who replaces him on Earth. The scares turn funny during key plot points. This has the added effect of developing Olga’s arc to bring her closer to Elio. Olga immediately realizes this perfect Elio is a fake, and longs to be with her imperfect nephew. She gets her wish during a heartfelt reunion on the beach, which concludes with the removal of Elio’s eye patch.

“It was always part of his design because I think it was something that made him feel insecure and othered on earth,” Sharafian said. “But when he’s in space, all of a sudden, this eye patch and the [green] cape make him look dashing like a space pirate, like a hero. It just helps add to the feeling for him that space is where he should be, and everything kind of works for him there.”

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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

OCTOBER 4 — National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) - "Celebrating 70 Years- Building the Future of Armenian Studies" Gala at the Fairmont Copley Plaza in Boston. Honorees, Pamela Avedisian and Yervant Chekijian. For tickets and sponsorship opportunities please go to <http://naasr.org/gala70>

NOVEMBER 21 — AMAA's Boston Child Care Committee presents an evening supporting the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan, Armenia, FEATURING COMEDIAN KEV 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.

Armenian Museum of Fresno to Host Dual Exhibition Featuring Sound And Photography

FRESNO, from page 13

music they brought with them from the homeland and the influence of their new, American home.

Together, these two exhibitions offer a rich, immersive reflection on heritage, identity, and the stories that shape a community.

“This pairing of photography and sound, representing the artistry of two generations. The exhibit invites visitors to experience Fresno’s Armenian past in deeply emotional and sensory ways,” said Varoujan Der Simonian, director of the Armenian Museum of Fresno.

The exhibition and opening reception are free and open to the public. For more information, please visit www.armof.org.

Robby Antoyan is a Fresno native whose upbringing was deeply influenced by the rich cultural fabric of the local Armenian community. Like many of his Armenian peers, Robby grew up surrounded by those who had relocated to Fresno following the Armenian Genocide of 1915, as well as later waves of immigration from Russia in the 1940s and ’50s, and from the Middle East in the ’70s. These older generations of Armenians carried themselves with a quiet authenticity — never trying to be anything other than who they were — and that left a

lasting impression on him.

After his first year away at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo where he received his degree in architecture, Robby returned home and began photographing this generation. An amateur with a newly purchased Minolta SRT101 and manual focus lens, he set out to document Armenians aged 60 and up, capturing them at church picnics, family gatherings, and everyday moments. His photos offer a candid, heartfelt portrait of a resilient community and a generation shaped by memory, migration, and cultural pride.

Joseph Bohigian, PhD, is a Fresno native. His music often explores themes of memory, culture, and the experiences of the Armenian-American community. Influenced by his own heritage and upbringing, Bohigian’s work incorporates archival materials such as sound recordings, interviews, and ancient musical notations to breathe new life into forgotten histories. His compositions have been performed globally, including in Armenia, Australia, Ireland, Montreal, the Disney Concert Hall, and the Temescal Arts Center in Oakland.

museum is located in the University of California Center at 550 E. Shaw Avenue in Fresno, across from Fashion Fair mall. The museum is open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and admission is free.

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE
UNITED STATES

EDITOR

Alin K. Gregorian

MANAGING EDITOR

Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

CONTRIBUTORS

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

REGIONAL CORRESPONDENTS

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

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

VIDEO CORRESPONDENT

Haykaram Nahapetyan

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

Baika Association, Inc.

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

Telephone: 617-924-4420

FAX: 617-924-2887

www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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

ISSN 0004-234X

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

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

Implications of the Iran-Israel Conflict for Armenia

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

On June 13, Israel launched a series of airstrikes against Iran, conducting “Operation Rising Lion.” This direct use of force signified a serious escalation of the tense relations between the countries, leading them to conduct airstrikes against one another for more than a week now. As of June 18, Israel has launched more than 400 ballistic missiles and hundreds of UAVs. The Israeli government claims that the strike was a “preemptive” one, meant to address an immediate, inevitable threat because “Tehran already had the capacity to build nine nuclear bombs.” Israel has managed to hit more than 100 major targets in Iran, including nuclear facilities (the Natanz nuclear site and the nuclear research center in Isfahan) and killed numerous senior military commanders and scientists.

Furthermore, on June 22, President Trump authorized US military strikes targeting Iranian nuclear infrastructure deemed directly involved in the ongoing conflict. In response to the American strikes, Iran retaliated by targeting US military bases in Qatar and Iraq, while also intensifying its attacks on Israel.

The escalation followed the United Nations’ nuclear watchdog report stating “Iran has further increased its stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels.” Simultaneously, the Trump administration was trying to reach a peace deal with Iran but to no avail after a few rounds of negotiations. In his social media outlet Truth, Trump said that he had given it a 60-day ultimatum to make a deal, and, perhaps not coincidentally, the day of the attack was day 61. The G7 leaders have also expressed their support for Israel in a statement affirming that “Israel has a right to defend itself.”

Among the countries affected by this conflict is Armenia. For Armenia it is fraught with numerous challenges affecting its security and economy as well as demographic factors. Against the backdrop of this conflict Azerbaijan and Turkey are conducting military drills in the Nakhijevan region bordering Armenia. According to the press service of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense, “Tank, mechanized, and sabotage units will carry out various training-combat tasks with the support of artillery, air defense units, and aviation.” This is especially alarming when we take into account the fact that between July and August in 2020, just before Azerbaijan launched a full-scale war against Artsakh and Armenia, it also conducted joint drills with Turkey in the Nakhijevan region.

In addition, Azerbaijan continues to raise the issue of the so-called “Zangezur Corridor.” Hikmet Hajiyev, Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan, during the GLOBSEC 2025 forum in the Czech Republic on June 14 demanded the “Zangezur Corridor” be opened when responding to a question about Armenia’s Crossroads of Peace proposal. Given that Iran, the only major power in the region directly opposing the idea of opening this corridor, is currently in a dire state, it will not be able to oppose this decision if the Armenian authorities, Azerbaijan and Turkey

decide to open the corridor, with the latter two countries taking advantage of the current situation in the region. On top of that, the US embassy in Armenia has issued a warning to exercise caution in Armenia, including avoiding certain locations connected to the Iranian government such as the Iranian Embassy in Yerevan, the Iranian Consulate in Syunik, the Iran Trade Center, and the Blue Mosque.

The Armenian economy also faces serious problems now. Currently a number of cargoes are standing in the port of Bandar Abbas, and others standing on the roads not being able to cross the border. So, export and import issues arise not to and from Iran but also those cargos that are just transported through Iranian territory.

After Trump’s statement that “Everyone should immediately evacuate Tehran!” a lot of Iranians fled the country. Having a border with Iran, Armenia is one of the countries to which they chose to flee. The bordering Armenian region, Syunik, faces serious danger, as there is a possibility that a huge number of Turkic-speaking refugees from northern Iran can enter Syunik. Currently there are massive buildups of cargo trucks and people at the border. Trucks are parked in a row on the right side of the road for about 2 kilometers. Iranians crossing the border are trying to travel to Yerevan, increasing taxi prices up to \$350. Armenian servicemen working on the border stated that crossings of the Armenia-Iran border by Iranian residents have increased several times since the start of the military operations.

If we look at the situation geopolitically, the US-Iran negotiations, which effectively collapsed due to the Israel-Iran war, would have undoubtedly had positive outcomes for Armenia if an agreement had been reached. The same applies, of course, to the normalization of US-Russia relations, where there has also been no significant progress. These are processes of vital importance for Armenia. Their failure — and the resulting weakening of Russia and Iran’s positions, and consequently their diminishing influence in the South Caucasus, particularly against the backdrop of the United States’ passive stance, disrupts the already fragile balance of power in the region. As a

result, Turkey is becoming an increasingly influential and powerful player in the South Caucasus, capable of advancing its regional interests through Azerbaijan. This includes the so-called Zangezur Corridor, which not only would connect Azerbaijan and Turkey but also may serve as a link to the broader Turkic world. If, in the coming days, Trump announces his intention to join in certain actions against Iran or to provide Israel with unprecedented military assistance, the situation will become even more complicated for Armenia.

(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.)



EU Rewards Azerbaijan Despite Atrocious Rights Record

By Mahmud Rzayev

As global political trends lurch rightward, the European Union seems to be wrestling with reappraising the collective meaning of European values. This internal struggle is perhaps most evident in the EU’s external dealings with Azerbaijan.

Brussels has effectively rewarded Azerbaijan, despite its dreadful rights record, with the recent announcement that Baku will host the European Political Communi-

ty (EPC) summit in 2028. The gathering is intended to promote unity and shared values among European nations.

The decision raises a key question that may help define the union’s future as it tries to balance values that Brussels has traditionally prioritized, especially tolerance, openness and inclusion, against recent trends and shifting economic needs. Boiled down to its essence, is the EU trading its democratic ideals for energy security?

It is no secret Baku’s role as a supplier of

energy makes it strategically vital for Brussels. EU imports of Azerbaijani gas have increased significantly, with deliveries projected to reach 20 billion cubic meters annually by 2027, although questions remain about Baku’s ability to meet this target. The growing energy partnership has coincided with increased foreign direct investment (FDI) from EU countries into Azerbaijan. A notable indicator is that French FDI in Azerbaijan reached \$121.91 million, see REWARD, page 20



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

UCLA Compiles List of Armenian Properties Confiscated by Turkey During the Genocide

The Armenian Genocide Research Program (AGRP) within The Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA launched last week a ground-breaking project enabling Armenians to seek restitution of their properties confiscated by the Turkish government during and after the Genocide.

In addition to the mass killing 1.5 million Armenians, the Turkish government occupied their homeland of Western Armenia and seized their properties. Thanks to the UCLA initiative, for the first time all the missing information is gathered in a single depository.

During a June 16 webinar, Prof. Taner Akçam, AGRP Director, shed light on the systematic expropriation and redistribution of Armenian wealth during and after the Genocide, described by the Turkish government as “Abandoned Properties” (Emval-i Metruke).

Independent Turkish researcher Sait Cetinoglu spent years collecting the government’s auction notices for these properties which had appeared in local newspapers across 34 Turkish cities and towns in the 1920’s and 1930’s. Cetinoglu has turned over these notices to UCLA which has digitized and translated them from Ottoman Turkish into modern Turkish and English. They are available at: www.international.ucla.edu/armenia/stolenarmenianproperties.

In a comprehensive 31-page report posted on the UCLA website, Cetinoglu detailed the Turkish government’s contradictory and deceptive orders for disposing the confiscated Armenian properties: “an official order was issued on May 27, 1915, and the widespread seizure of Armenian property followed shortly thereafter. On May 31, 1915, the Ottoman Council of Ministers issued a decree formally regulating the ‘confiscation’ of Armenian assets, followed by a more detailed 34-article decree on June 10. Throughout the summer, special circulars were sent to various provinces, culminating in a formal law on September 26, 1915, and an implementation decree on November 8 of the same year. These laws and decrees stipulated that all movable and immovable Armenian assets must be recorded in official registries and their values be allocated to Armenians in their new settlements.... [However], a 1918 report by a joint commission of the Ottoman Ministries of Justice, Finance, and Internal Affairs explicitly stated that not a single Armenian had been compensated for their confiscated properties. In effect, the Ottoman state became the principal beneficiary of the plunder, using these assets and the proceeds from their sales to fund various state institutions.”

Cetinoglu explained that after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922, the newly established Turkish Republic “assumed control over much of the remaining Armenian property. However, the fledgling state faced significant financial challenges. As a result, beginning in 1923, various state institutions began auctioning off these looted Armenian properties. Official notices of these sales were regularly published in local Turkish newspapers.”

For example, a notice in the Diyarbakir (Dickranagerd) newspaper on Sept. 14, 1931, announced that an auction will be held on Sept. 17, 1931 for a house registered in the name of Hatun (Khatun), daughter of Ohan, in Ali pinar village, sold to Sheymus (son of Ahmet) of Kara Kilise refugees, for 20 Liras.

It is estimated that the total confiscated Armenian properties, including hundreds of thousands of homes and buildings, factories, mines, over a million acres of land, vineyards, olive groves, mulberry gardens, around 2,500 churches, and 1,000 schools, are now worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

The confiscated Armenian properties were distributed to various Turkish entities. According to Cetinoglu, “just as in the period of the Committee of Union and Progress,” the Republic of Turkey transferred some of these properties “to companies in order to develop a national industry and a Muslim bourgeoisie, and some of them were allocated to the Republican People’s Party -- the only party of the period.... Many real estate properties were distributed, according to need, to various institutions such as associations, state institutions, municipalities, chambers of commerce, industry, and agriculture, the Red Crescent, and banks. In short, it could be said that every segment of [Turkish] society benefited from Armenian properties.”

During the Kemalist period, the confiscated Armenian properties were distributed as follows:

1. “Sale and land distribution to Muslims”;
2. “Allocation and sale to immigrants (muhacir)”;
3. “Transfer and allocation to state institutions”;
4. “Allocation to the military”;
- 5 “Allocation and leasing to banks, the Chamber of Commerce, and the commodities exchange”;
6. “Sale to companies”;
7. “Allocation, leasing, and sale to institutions linked to the regime, such as the Turkish Hearth, the Red Crescent, the Teachers Union, and the Trabzon Sports Club”;
8. “Allocation to the families of Unionist leaders” who were murdered by Armenians, such as Talat and Cemal Pashas, Cemal Azmi, and Bahaeddin Shakir, according to a law adopted by the Turkish Parliament on May 31, 1926.

It is now up to the Armenian community to take this valuable information compiled by UCLA and file lawsuits against Turkey in U.S. federal courts demanding just compensation for the confiscated Armenian properties.

As I wrote last month, Armenian-Americans should urge the U.S. Congress to pass a law to be signed by the President of the United States enabling lawsuits against the Republic of Turkey to receive compensation for the confiscated properties. This new law would allow Armenians to file lawsuits long after the Statute of Limitations has expired.

U.S. courts could issue binding judgments against Turkey to pay restitution to Armenians for their losses. If Turkey refuses to comply, the courts could then order the confiscation of all Turkish government-owned assets in the United States, such as buildings, bank accounts, and planes belonging to Turkish Airlines.

UCLA, as an academic institution, has done its part of compiling this valuable list of the Armenian confiscated properties. It is now the Armenian community’s turn to initiate legal actions to seek full restitution from Turkey.

Iranian-Israeli Conflict Highlights Armenia’s Difficult Geopolitical Position

By Seamus Duffy

It is too early to say whether an uneasy ceasefire between Iran and Israel will hold, granting Armenia a reprieve from the ominous strategic implications of the conflict. With the prospect of continued war hanging over Tehran, Armenia may find itself cut off from a crucial trade outlet, as well as have a weakened ability to resist Russian and Azerbaijani diplomatic pressure on issues with significant implications for Armenian sovereignty.

Prior to the start of the Iranian-Israeli conflict on June 13, Iran could be considered Armenia’s sole reliable trade link to the outside world, and even then, the Iranian route was plagued by bottlenecks. Turkish and Azerbaijani borders remain largely closed to Armenian trade, and Georgia in recent months has taken action – some analysts believe at the behest of the Kremlin – to disrupt Russia-bound exports.

Armenian trade turnover already has taken a big hit so far this year due to a Kremlin decision to curtail Armenia’s re-export of gems and precious metals; any reduction of exports via Iranian routes could only exacerbate Yerevan’s trade woes.

Iran also has been a crucial diplomatic backer of Armenia in the ongoing wrangling over the Zangezur Corridor, a proposed land bridge across Armenian territory that would connect Azerbaijan proper to its Nakhichevan exclave. To date, Armenia has adamantly opposed giving Azerbaijan any extraterritorial privileges on the Zangezur route, and Iranian officials feel the establishment of a corridor would jeopardize trade ties along the two nations’ “strategic” border.

Armenian observers now worry that Baku, judging Iran to be strategically debilitated, may try to increase the diplomatic and military pressure on Yerevan.

“Iran has long played a pivotal role in preserving Armenia’s territorial integrity and preventing the establishment of the ‘Zangezur Corridor,’” wrote Yeghia Tashjian, in a com-

mentary published by Armenian Weekly, adding that “Baku and Ankara view Tehran’s weakness as a window of opportunity to exert pressure on a regionally isolated Armenia.”

The issue seems important enough for Iran that, even as Tehran was exchanging rocket barrages with Israel, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on June 17 cautioned Azerbaijan against taking any unilateral action, characterizing the Zangezur issue as a “redline” for Iran.

It is far from certain at this point whether such Iranian rhetoric is sufficient to deter Baku. Ilham Aliyev’s administration seems intent on keeping its options open, while ratcheting up the pressure on Yerevan. On June 14, a presidential foreign policy adviser, Hikmet Hajiyev, called on Armenia to “take the first significant step toward opening the Zangezur Corridor.” And in remarks delivered in Baku on June 18, Aliyev stated that Armenia should facilitate the return of Azerbaijanis to what Azerbaijan describes as the West Zangezur region, or Armenia’s Syunik Province. Aliyev claims that hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis were forcibly pushed out of the area during the early 20th century.

“Historical justice requires ensuring the peaceful and safe return of these people to their homeland,” Aliyev stated.

While menacing Armenia, Azerbaijani officials took steps to reassure Iran that their country would remain on the sidelines in the Iranian-Israeli confrontation, despite Baku’s strong defense and security ties with Israel. In a June 14 phone conversation with Araghchi, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov stated Azerbaijan “will under no circumstances allow its airspace or territory to be used for attacks against Iran or any other countries,” Iran’s Mehr New Agency reported.

Azerbaijani trade is also threatened by the Iranian-Israeli conflict, especially along the North-South corridor, which handles goods moving from Asia via Iran and Azerbaijan to Russia. Iran is the key node in the network. Although far

from fully developed, the North-South corridor is an important lifeline for the Kremlin, which uses it to mitigate the impact of Western sanctions and keep its war effort in Ukraine going. Trade along the corridor boomed in 2024, especially trans-Caspian, bilateral commerce between Iran and Russia.

The Kremlin remains acutely interested in continuing the development of the North-South network. “No matter how this conflict unfolds, after the war is over, this project will continue to be implemented,” the official TASS news agency quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying.

A developing East-West trade route involving Iran and Azerbaijan, known as the Aras Corridor, also seems vulnerable to disruption. The Aras route is projected as an alternative to the Zangezur option, traversing Iranian territory to connect mainland Azerbaijan with Nakhichevan, with an onward link to Turkey. The Iranian-Israeli conflict could prompt Azerbaijani officials to conclude the Aras route is untenable, thus increasing their determination to secure Zangezur.

Russia — which is angling for a role as a security guarantor for Zangezur, enabling Moscow to retain a strong on-the-ground security presence in the Caucasus — may well join Azerbaijan in pressing for an Armenian concession. Russia also is seeking additional leverage to prevent Armenia from making a geopolitical pivot away from the Kremlin toward the West.

(Seamus Duffy is a JD-PhD candidate at the University of Chicago who currently works as a Summer Associate at the Office of the Representative on International Legal Matters for the Republic of Armenia. The analysis contained in this article represents the author’s personal views, and in no way reflects the official policy or position of the Office of the Representative on International Legal Matters or the Republic of Armenia. This analysis originally appeared on www.eurasianet.org on June 24.)



COMMENTARY

Cosmic Ray Division: State-Protected Center of Scientific and Cultural Heritage

YEREVAN — In early 2026 the Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska-Curi Actions Doctoral Network program, the “GRAIL” project, will commence training a new generation of international PhD researchers in advanced topics including cosmic ray physics, astrophysics, and space science. As a recognized leader and center of excellence, with one of the world’s most extensive terrestrial cosmic ray research facilities, the Cosmic Ray Division (CRD) will provide students access to its facilities where they will participate in CRD’s research programs.

In October 2023, the CRD of the Yerevan Physics Institute (Alikhanyan National Science Laboratory) became an associate member of the Virtual Alpine Observatory, a network of 12 countries with high-altitude research laboratories studying space weather, atmospheric physics and the effects of climate change; a topic of special importance in high-altitude mountainous regions like Armenia.

The CRD was established in 1943 by renowned physicists and brothers Abraham and Artem Alikhanyan. The Aragats and Nor Ambert cosmic ray research stations, established on Mt. Aragats at 3200- and 2000-meters altitude respectively, provided the foundation for the Yerevan physics institute which now includes a number of other divisions as well. Cosmic Ray experiments provided fundamental information

on particle physics well before the advent of powerful particle accelerators.

Funding for science vanished following the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Overcoming numerous hardships, research continued due to CRD’s dedicated staff and Prof. Ashot Chil-ingarian’s leadership.

In August 2001, at the international Cosmic Ray conference in Hamburg, Germany, Armenia was cited as one of the top 5 countries engaged in Cosmic Ray Research together with Germany, Japan, Russia and the United States. Two years later, in December 2003 at the World Summit on Information Society, CRD received the award for best content in the e-science category. Their website, Data Visualization Interactive Network (DVIN), was nominated for this prestigious award.

CRD continues to receive international acclaim, participating in numerous international collaborations and providing

leadership in many areas of international research. Recognizing CRD’s numerous achievements, on January 28, 2025 during the first session of the Expert Commission of the Armenian Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports, the Aragats

and Nor Amberd Cosmic Ray research stations and surrounding regions were designated as State-Protected Centers of Scientific and Cultural Heritage. As a result, these CRD’s facilities, with the surrounding areas, will become protected areas.



The Cosmic Ray Division high up on Mt. Aragats

EU Rewards Azerbaijan Despite Atrocious Rights Record

REWARD, from page 18
despite strained diplomatic relations between the two governments.

“Azerbaijan has become an important energy supplier to the EU, particularly via the Southern Gas Corridor, and is also involved in early-stage renewable initiatives such as the Black Sea Submarine Cable Project,” states a report published in May by the European Centre for International Political Economy.

“However, the relationship remains complicated by enduring concerns related to governance, human rights, and democratic norms,” the report adds.

A breakthrough in EU-Azerbaijani relations appeared to occur in late April when the two sides appeared to concentrate on developing economic and trade relations, setting aside differences over Baku’s rights record, including the smothering of all forms of dissent. EU Foreign Policy Chief

Kaja Kallas called Azerbaijan an “important partner for the EU in the South Caucasus,” while Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev stated that Brussels had exhibited a willingness to “abandon previous stereotypes and recognize Azerbaijan as a key partner.”

Officials in Brussels privately hope that bringing European leaders to Baku will cement Azerbaijan’s integration into EU connectivity projects. In short, hosting EPC 2028 in Baku is seen in Brussels as a strategic endorsement. It is also a bit of a balancing act, given that Armenia will be hosting the EPC summit next year.

Azerbaijani leaders and media trumpeted the EPC hosting announcement as proof of Azerbaijan’s “growing international authority.”

The EU’s stance can be considered pragmatic, but it nevertheless undermines its credibility as a standard bearer for political pluralism and universal economic prog-

ress for all citizens. It ignores the fact that since early 2024, Azerbaijan has escalated its repression of independent media, with at least 25 journalists arrested, and has crushed political opposition.

The European Parliament has expressed concern over Azerbaijan’s human rights record, adopting a resolution in October 2024 condemning the Aliyev administration’s actions. The decision to hold the EPC summit in Baku highlights the disconnect among EU institutions, as well as the internal contradictions involving the union’s stated values and its actions.

Brussels’ stance toward Baku differs markedly from that taken towards another state with dictatorial political features, Belarus. The EU has been much tougher in imposing sanctions on Aleksandr Lukashenko’s regime than it has on Aliyev’s. Energy and trade priorities explain the difference.

Elsewhere, top editors from across the EU in May assailed Hungary for proposed legislation that could suppress independent media and civil society, likening it to Russia’s “foreign agent” law.

The EU’s differences in its dealings with authoritarian-minded leaderships expose the fact that it is starting to lose touch with its founding ideals.

French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, perhaps the chief architect of European unity, wrote back in 1950 that “Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity.” The differing approaches on authoritarianism in its neighborhood suggest that the solidarity achieved since the EU’s formation is now coming undone.

(This commentary originally appeared on www.eurasianet.org on June 17.)

Syrian Christian Leader Chides President over Deadly Church Bombing

By **Firas Makdesi**

DAMASCUS (Reuters) — Syria’s top Christian leader said on Tuesday, June 24, at the funeral for victims of a deadly church bombing that President Ahmed al-Sharaa’s government bore responsibility for not protecting minorities and his condolences were insufficient.

At least 25 worshippers died on Sunday when a suicide bomber blew himself up at the Mar Elias Church in Damascus, the first such attack since Sharaa’s Islamist-led government seized power in December after the Assad family dynasty’s toppling.

The attack, which the government blamed on the Islamic State militant group, reinforced doubts among minorities about

whether they can rely on government assurances of protection.

“With love and with all due respect, Mr. President, you spoke yesterday by phone... to express your condolences. That is not enough for us,” the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, John (X) Yazigi, said at the funeral, drawing applause.

“We are grateful for the phone call. But the crime that took place is a little bigger than that.”

The U.S. State Department condemned what its spokesperson Tammy Bruce described as “a brutal and cowardly attack” and called on the Syrian government to hold all perpetrators of violence accountable and ensure the security of all Syrians, including members of religious and ethnic

minorities.

She said Washington continued to support the Syrian government “as it fights against forces seeking to create instability and fear in their country and in the broader region.”

Christians made up around 10 percent of Syria’s pre-war population of 22 million, but their numbers shrunk significantly during the 14-year conflict, mainly through emigration. Only a few hundred thousand are now estimated to be living in Syria.

Yazigi said the government must prioritize protection for all. “What is important to me - and I will say it - is that the government bears responsibility in full,” Yazigi said of the church attack.

Hundreds were at the service in the nearby Church of the Holy Cross to bury nine of the victims, whose bodies were placed in simple white coffins adorned with white flowers.

Social affairs minister Hind Kabawat - the only Christian and only woman in Syria’s new government - attended.

On Monday, Sharaa said the attack was a crime hurting all Syrians but did not use the word “Christians” or “church”.

The government said security forces raided hideouts used by Islamic State, killing two of its members including one who facilitated the suicide bomber’s entry into Mar Elias Church.

IS did not issue a statement of responsibility.