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Armenia and Karabakh Officials Mark First Republic Day

YEREVAN (News.am) — The leaders of Armenia and the Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) gathered at the Sardarapat Memorial on Thursday, May 28, to mark the First Republic Day of Armenia.

The 97th anniversary of the May victories and the establishment of the First Republic of Armenia are celebrated at the memorial.

The Armenian News-NEWS.am reporter informed from the location that Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan, government members, ruling Republican Party MPs, NKR Prime Minister Arayik Harutyunyan, NKR Defense Minister and Defense Army Commander Movses Hakobyan, Yerkrpah (Defender of the Land) Volunteer Union members, members of the clergy, and foreign diplomats accredited in Armenia have visited the memorial on this day.

At this time, President Serzh Sargsyan is participating in the traditional award ceremony at the Memorial Complex of



The May 28 First Republic Day celebration

Sardarapat Battle, National Museum of Armenian Ethnography and History of Liberation Struggle.

In May 1918, the Armenian regular military forces and volunteers defeated the Turkish troops, and prevented the latter's invasion of Yerevan, the capital city of Armenia.

This triumph enabled the Armenian people to restore their statehood, which was lost centuries ago.

It was 97 years ago on this day in Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia, that the Armenian National Council declared

the independence of Armenia and the establishment of the First Republic of Armenia.

The May 28 celebrations in Armenia are traditionally held at Sardarapat Memorial, which eternalizes the memory of the Armenian heroes who prevented a Turkish invasion of Armenia back in 1918.

However, the first independent Republic of Armenia had a short life. The country lost its independence on December 2, 1920, when the 11th Red Army of Soviet Russia invaded Armenia.

Pashinyan's, Wife's Insults 'Also Educate People'

By Karine Simonian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's wife has defended his and her personal insults of their detractors and said this is now part of their ongoing campaign purportedly aimed at helping Armenians become more educated.

In a barrage of daily social media posts that began over two weeks ago, Anna Hakobyan has used words like “donkey,” “idiot” and “louse” to attack opposition activists, public figures and other citizens critical of her government-backed activities.

Hakobyan was also quick to join Pashinyan last week in lambasting senior clergymen of the Armenian Apostolic Church at odds with his government. The premier sparked an uproar from opposition leaders, prominent public figures and many ordinary citizens on Friday after using obscene language on Facebook against an unnamed bishop. (See related story on page.)

see INSULTS, page 4



Pashinyan and Wife Accuse Clergymen of Pedophilia, Violating Celibacy Vows

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

YEREVAN (OC-Media) — The Armenian government and the church are facing renewed confrontation following Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's statement that churches have been turned into “storerooms.” Afterwards, Pashinyan, his wife Anna Hakobyan, and other members of the ruling Civil Contract party accused clergymen of breaking their vow of celibacy, as well as pedophilia.

Pashinyan offered his assessment of the church conditions during a cabinet meeting on Thursday, May 29.

He claimed that Armenian churches had been turned into “storerooms,” where people could see “extra tiles, a sack of cement” and even “rusty scraps of rebar,” though he did not specify where he had personally seen such conditions.

see ACCUSATIONS, page 4

More Cross-Border Shots Reported in Armenian Village

By Robert Zargarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Another civilian house in a village on Armenia's border with Azerbaijan was hit early on Thursday, May 29, by what the Armenian Defense Ministry and local residents described as cross-border gunfire.

Photographs released by the ministry showed a bullet hole on a window of the house located in the village of Khoznavar. The gunshot was fired from nearby Azerbaijani army positions, the ministry said, urging Baku to investigate the incident.

“They shoot every day,” a Khoznavar resident told RFE/RL's Armenian Service by phone.

The house targeted by Azerbaijani forces belongs to an elderly single woman, he said, adding that she was not wounded by the cross-border fire.

The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry dismissed the reports as “disinformation.” It again claimed that its troops never fire at civilian homes or other facilities.

Several other houses in Khoznavar and the nearby village of Khnatsakh have also been reportedly damaged over the last two months by what local residents call nightly gunfire. Azerbaijani truce violations have also been reported, albeit less frequently, from other sections of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

They began shortly after official announcements on March 13 that Baku and Yerevan have bridged their differences



A bullet hole on a window of a house in the border village of Khoznavar, May 29, 2025.

on the text of an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty. The Azerbaijani leadership has made it clear that it will not sign the treaty without securing more Armenian concessions.

Armenian opposition figures and pundits have suggested that the truce violations are aimed at forcing Yerevan to make those concessions or preparing the ground for a large-scale military attack on Armenia. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan again ruled out the possibility of such an attack on May 28.

see BORDER, page 2

GERMANY

Davtyan Stuns Europe with Gold In Vault

Page 3



NEW YORK

Sheree Hovsepian Explores the Physicality of Experience

Page 13



Annual Summer Break

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

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

Happy summer!



ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

France Opens Honorary Consulate in Goris

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — France officially opened its honorary consulate in Goris on June 2, with Armenian-born Carmen Apunts appointed as the honorary consul. The consulate is located next to the Goris City Hall.

The opening ceremony was attended by French Ambassador to Armenia Olivier Decottignies, Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Vahan Kostanyan, Syunik Governor Robert Ghukasyan, and Goris Mayor Arush Arushanyan.

Ghukasyan noted that the inauguration marked the natural continuation of a series of previous events, according to Armenpress.

Ambassador Decottignies emphasized Goris's special role for the French: "Goris is the crossroads of Syunik for the French. I believe it is the Armenian city with the strongest ties to France, evidenced by sister-city partnerships, community twinning agreements, and departmental cooperation between Syunik and the French region of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes."

He stressed the honorary consulate serves a greater role. "This is more than a consulate," he said. "Honorary consulates engage in real action. People from France and Armenia, Goris and Syunik, work hand in hand here."

He noted that for 19 years, French visitors — whether there for work, assistance, or tourism — have been welcomed at Goris's Francophone Center, spearheaded by Apunts. "Long live Syunik, long live Goris, and long live Armenian-French friendship," the ambassador concluded.

Italian, Armenia Cooperation Deepening

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — President of Armenia Vahagn Khachaturyan received Italy's Ambassador to Armenia, Alessandro Ferranti, on June 2, on the occasion of Italy's National Day. The two discussed the potential for sharing Italy's successful experience in education, culture, high technologies, and related fields.

A portion of the conversation focused on the ongoing development of cooperation in preserving and restoring historical and cultural heritage.

Ferranti noted that Italy is making consistent efforts to make the process of obtaining Schengen visas more accessible and convenient for Armenian citizens.

Khachaturyan stated: "I warmly congratulate you on this special day, which symbolizes freedom and democracy for the Italian people. Italy is globally recognized as a nation of great civilizational values. The impact it has had on human history and cultural development is invaluable. The ties between Armenia and Italy, and between our peoples, are as ancient as our histories."

Senior US Diplomat Visits Armenia

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A senior US State Department official discussed with Armenian leaders bilateral ties and the Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiation process during a visit to Yerevan on May 29.

Josh Huck, the deputy assistant secretary of state for Southern Europe and the Caucasus, said he had a "great meeting" with Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan that focused on "the growing US-Armenia partnership and progress on peace."

"A strong relationship with Armenia cre-

ates greater prosperity for all our citizens," he added in a short statement released by the US Embassy in Yerevan.

According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry's readout of the talks, the two men discussed joint actions "aimed at ensuring concrete results and strengthening the resilience of Armenia." It did not give any details.

Regional security was also high on the agenda, with Mirzoyan speaking of a "real opportunity to establish peace in the re-

gion" through an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty essentially finalized in March. Mirzoyan and Huck "exchanged views on ongoing efforts to implement the peace agenda," the ministry said without elaborating.

Armen Grigoryan, the secretary of Armenia's Security Council, also stressed the importance of signing the treaty during his separate meeting with Huck.

Baku makes its signing conditional on a change of Armenia's constitution. It has also set a number of other conditions for peace, including a land corridor to Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan exclave that would pass through a key Armenian region. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev renewed in January his threats to open such a corridor by force.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said last week that there is a "real risk" of an Azerbaijani invasion of Armenia.

"We would like to prevent that from happening," Rubio told the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Wednesday again ruled out the possibility of a fresh military conflict with Azerbaijan. "There will be no war, there will be peace," he said in a speech.



US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Josh Huck at a meeting with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, May 29, 2025

Armenian Spiritual Revival Foundation Hosts Meeting of Experts

YEREVAN (Armenian Spiritual Revival Foundation) — On May 26, the Armenian Spiritual Revival Foundation (SRF) hosted a meeting of experts to present the impact assessment results of its flagship psycho-spiritual group support program, the Armenian Revival Journey (ARJ).

The meeting brought together leading professionals from Armenia's mental health community to review the program's outcomes and explore new avenues of collaboration to strengthen local capacity and

individuals reclaim personal agency after war or crisis by connecting lived experience with collective memory, identity, and meaning. The Foundation's flagship psycho-spiritual project, branded as the ARJ, is a group-based support program that integrates narrative therapy, active historical thinking, and spiritual values to spark resilience, coherence, and pro-future mindset.

During the meeting, psychologists, social workers, and institutional stakeholders were presented with both quantitative

and qualitative findings from recent ARJ program implementation round, which engaged around 550 direct beneficiaries across Armenia. A lively discussion followed, focused on strengthening the method and the project, institutionalizing its use, and expanding collaboration between SRF and Armenia's broader mental health ecosystem.

Further information is available on the SRF website at www.revival.am

More Cross-Border Shots Reported in Village

BORDER, from page 1

Pashinyan did not comment on the latest gunshots in Khoznavar during a weekly cabinet meeting in Yerevan on May 29. The secretary of Armenia's Security Council, Armen Grigoryan, claimed to be unaware of the reported damage to the local house when he spoke to journalists after attending the meeting.

"Frankly, I'm not yet aware of the details of what you are talking about," said Grigoryan.

Meanwhile, a senior pro-government lawmaker, Armen Khachatryan, insisted that Armenian troops deployed along the border have the right not to return fire in such cases.

"The Armenian government's position is that everything must be done to conclude the peace treaty and that escalatory actions should be avoided," Khachatryan told reporters.

Pashinyan's government has consistently downplayed the significance of the cease-fire violations. Its critics maintain that it is simply reluctant to admit that unilateral Armenian concessions already made to Baku will not end the conflict with Azerbaijan anytime soon.



further enhance group support and counseling models rooted in psycho-spiritual method.

SRF Executive Director Hovhannes Nikoghosyan presented the Foundation's overarching destination statement that is the rationale of its current and future projects: establish psycho-spiritual support method as an internationally recognized evidence-informed model for culturally integrated mental health care in post-conflict and humanitarian settings — rooted in Armenian legacy of survival and revival. This is the aspiration rooted in the mission of the SRF — founded by Armenian-American entrepreneur, inventor, and philanthropist Dr. Noubar Afeyan, by the blessing of Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II.

SRF's mission is to design, deliver, and scale psycho-spiritual programs that help

and qualitative findings from recent ARJ program implementation round, which engaged around 550 direct beneficiaries across Armenia. A lively discussion followed, focused on strengthening the method and the project, institutionalizing its use, and expanding collaboration between SRF and Armenia's broader mental health ecosystem.

The Foundation underscored its commitment to deepening engagement with mental health professionals and sectoral institutions, and discussed how SRF can contribute to field-wide development — through continuous training, collaborative program delivery, and the international outreach of Armenia's emerging psycho-spiritual healing model.

Founded in July 2022 by Afeyan and Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, by the



ARMENIA

Davtyan Stuns Europe with Gold in Vault



YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian gymnast Artur Davtyan, who won a gold medal at the European Gymnastics Championships in Leipzig, Germany on June 3, making him a three-time European champion, shared that even athletes from other countries approached him with congratulations.



“Athletes from other countries came up to me and said, ‘What was that you just did?’” Davtyan said. “I was surprised and happy I landed the first vault. But when I did the second one too, and stuck the landing without a step, I was stunned. I didn’t expect I could make that jump. It worked—I gave it

everything I had,” he said.

He added that there’s still room for improvement. “Of course, there’s more to work on. But the important thing is I landed and didn’t take a step. That gives a bonus now, which plays a big role,” said the European champion.

Artur Avetisyan, who earned a bronze medal at the same championship, stated that he is satisfied with his performance as long as his coaches are.

Seventeen-year-old Hamlet Manukyan, who won gold in his debut European championship at the senior level, acknowledged some mistakes that need to be corrected. “We need to train more and aim for even better results in future competitions,” he said.

“The support of senior teammates is huge—they share their experience with us. Without their support, none of this would be possible,” Manukyan added.

Silver medalist Mamikon Khachatryan emphasized that this was the first time both he and Hamlet competed in a senior-level championship, which significantly increased the pressure and responsibility.

“Thank God, we managed to win medals and see the Armenian flag raised,” he said.

Camp Tumo Offers Teens Creativity, Innovation, and Cultural Exchange

YEREVAN — Camp Tumo is set to welcome teens from around the world for a learning experience in the heart of Armenia. Teenagers aged 13-18 will have the unique opportunity to develop skills in coding, animation, game development, music, robotics, and filmmaking while engaging in a vibrant cultural exchange program.

Starting from June 23 to July 7, one-week programs are designed to educate and engage teenagers in the world of creativity and technology. The following programs have been developed for the Yerevan program. Each student can choose two main subjects from the list, which are 3D animation, Programming, Photography, music, Robotics, Animation, Graphic Design, and Game Development. Each week’s program has one direction: Creative Technologies and Arts, Creative Technologies and Sports, Creative Technologies and AI, Cre-



ative Technologies and Heritage.

A one-week program has been developed for Dilijan from July 7 to 11: Creative Technologies and Nature & Culinary.

Camp TUMO offers a unique mixture of education and experience: participants engage in hands-on learning, gaining practical skills through real projects. Participants will work alongside industry experts, develop hands-on projects, and build lifelong friendships in a fun and interactive environment.

The camp brings together students from around the world, creating an environment of international collaboration and cultural exchange. Beyond the classroom, Camp TUMO combines education with fun and adventure through outdoor activities, exploration, entertainment, and immersion in the rich cultural heritage of Armenia.

“At Camp TUMO, we see the powerful impact of building connections among teens across the Armenian diaspora,” said Laura Barkhudaryan, camp manager. “Alongside that, they gain hands-on experience in technology and design that stays with them long after camp ends.”

Registration is open. Those interested can visit www.camptumo.com for more details and registration.



Armenian Church Responds to Attacks from Pashinyan

YEREVAN — On June 2, a meeting of the Supreme Spiritual Council was held in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, under the chairmanship of Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. It was attended by bishops and diocesan leaders from Armenia and the diaspora.

The meeting discussed issues related to the challenges facing the homeland, church-state relations, and a number of issues of concern to society.

According to the church's press released, "Particular attention was paid to the shameful anti-church campaign instigated by the Prime Minister in recent days."

The Supreme Spiritual Council's statement appears in full below:

The Prime Minister of Armenia has launched another campaign against the Holy Armenian Apostolic Church with language, insults and accusations unbecoming of a statesman, placing himself above the law.

Publications filled with profanity and obscene language are devoid of basic standards of decency, violate fundamental human rights, grossly offend the religious feelings of believers, and are disguised as justifications of false compassion.

This anti-church stance is clearly dictated by political goals and is an attempt to belittle the authority of the Armenian Church and its clergy, which are respected in national life and in international circles, to silence the voice of the church and reduce its public influence. The anti-church behavior of the head of government, the processes initiated against national values and the Church are fraught with destructive

consequences and a threat to the Armenian statehood, the unity of our people both in the homeland and in the Diaspora. Such actions divide society, weaken the spirit of the nation and the high consciousness of



The Supreme Spiritual Council Meeting in Echmiadzin

patriotism, especially in the face of current challenges. Such reprehensible initiatives serve the ambitions of external Armenophobic forces, being to some extent connected with the slander and false accusations directed at the Armenian people and the Armenian Church by the Azerbaijani propaganda machine.

The Armenian Church, conscious of its commitments, will steadfastly continue its mission of spiritual salvation and national preservation, opposing nationally harmful

and destructive processes and constantly pursuing the protection of the paramount interests of the state and nation, our sacred values.

Church issues are resolved in accor-

faithful children of our Holy Church to be united, to overcome all the challenges facing our people with loyalty and strong faith in their homeland and the Holy Church, and to never allow the foundations of our

dance with church orders and rules and are beyond the jurisdiction of state and political figures. The Armenian Apostolic Holy Church is a single entity with its believing children and enlisted clergy, headed by the nationally elected Catholicos of All Armenians. We call on the competent state bodies to stop this illegal and short-sighted policy of the Prime Minister. There is no need to involve the church in artificial agendas and push it into counter-action.

In the face of this new trial, we urge the

nation to be shaken. May these reprehensible machinations not become a cause for disappointment and temptation.

We pray to our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, that harmful phenomena will not disrupt our homeland, and that our people throughout the world may live in peace, prosperity, and progress. May the Lord keep the Armenian statehood unshakable and our Holy Armenian Apostolic Church and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, with all its faithful children, bright.

Pashinyan and Wife Accuse Clergymen of Pedophilia, Violating Celibacy Vows

ACCUSATIONS, from page 1

Instead, a day after Pashinyan's remarks, his Deputy Chief of Staff, Taron Chakhoyan, posted photos on Facebook to support the Prime Minister's claims. The images were taken at the 7th-century Saint Gayane Church, located near the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in Vagharshapat, and they showed items such as plastic bottles, brooms, buckets, sacks, and other non-religious objects.

After facing criticism from church members, the opposition, and other critics over his remarks, Pashinyan responded with a series of social media posts starting Friday morning, in which he accused members of the clergy of various forms of misconduct.

He began his series of posts by quoting the Bible, referencing the passage where Jesus drove out all who "sold and bought in the temple," saying, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

In the consequent posts, Pashinyan accused an unnamed high-ranking clergyman of being involved with his uncle's wife. Next, he posed the question of whether episcopates were "truly faithful to their vow of celibacy."

In another post he further noted the consequences when a celibate clergyman is found to have broken his vow, saying that he is stripped of his office, rank, and vestments.

"So then, which is morally more honest: to resign voluntarily, or to fall into a mental anguish, wondering whether there will be an investigation, whether the truth will come to light?," Pashinyan wrote.

He also stated all clergymen "who have broken their vow of celibacy must step away from spiritual service".

Aside from Pashinyan's accusations,

members of the ruling Civil Contract party as well as his wife sided with him — either supporting his claims or adding further accusations of their own.

Hakobyan, who has been counter-attacking her critics using verbal insults since earlier in May, called clergymen "the country's chief pedophiles" and "the country's chief maniacal perverts."

Calls to 'Curse' Pashinyan

Pashinyan's rhetoric against the church sparked a storm on social media, drawing widespread criticism over his harsh language and the lack of accountability for making serious accusations without providing any evidence. Others speculated that compromising footage that would support his claims might soon be leaked.

Around 15 NGOs "strongly condemned" Pashinyan's post targeting the alleged mistress of the clergyman, calling on him to remove it and "issue a public apology for the discriminatory statement and the disclosure of information about the alleged partner."

The joint statement said Pashinyan's contrition would serve "as a precedent for other politicians" and also would prevent "continued negative consequences" of his original posts.

Human rights defender Zara Hovhannysyan also proposed to draft a bill restricting the use of social media by officials, arguing that the enforcement of ethical standards by high-ranking officials is "not being properly carried out."

"Of course, I am a supporter of an open society, but such 'openness' is simply unacceptable; we cannot be shocked every day by inappropriate posts," Hovhannysyan wrote.

Others suggested the church start to 'curse' Pashinyan.

The antipathy between the government and the church's leadership became more open in the aftermath of Armenia's defeat in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, when the head of the church joined calls for Pashinyan's resignation.

In April 2023, Karekin II again reaffirmed his call for Pashinyan to resign, prompting Pashinyan state that "if the church wants to carry out political activities, Armenia is a democratic country".

In another clash between Pashinyan and

the church, Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan led a major opposition rally and protests against his government in May 2024 — mirroring tactics employed by Pashinyan during the Velvet Revolution — in which he marched from the village of Kirants in Armenia's northeastern Tavush Province to Yerevan in protest of Armenia's delimitation process with Azerbaijan.

Critics of the move characterized it as a 'unilateral handover of territories' to Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan's, Wife's Insults 'Also Educate People'

INSULTS, from page 1

Critics have condemned Hakobyan's offensive rhetoric, saying that it has exposed her and her husband's true selves. They say it also makes mockery of her "Getting Educated Is Fashionable" campaign launched a few months ago.

Hakobyan has been visiting towns and villages across the country and holding indoor meetings with local residents as part of that campaign. Pashinyan has spoken during some of those meetings attended by many local government officials and other public sector employees.

The couple made another joint public appearance in the northern city of Vanadzor over the weekend. An RFE/RL correspondent was among several hundred pre-registered participants of the indoor meeting that included many schoolteachers.

Hakobyan took a few questions from the audience. In particular, the journalist wondered whether her and Pashinyan's offensive comments are compatible with the declared aim of her campaign.

"This is also a way of educating," replied Pashinyan's wife. "We have descended to their level so that we can raise these people from there."

Hakobyan said that she had for years ignored slanderous claims about herself and her family and is now simply responding to insults with insults.

Like Pashinyan, Hakobyan is a former journalist and newspaper editor. The 47-year-old mother of four has kept a high profile throughout her husband's seven-year rule, fueling opposition speculation that she exerts strong influence on his decisions and policies.

A charity founded and led by Hakobyan has come under growing opposition and media scrutiny in the last few years. In one of her controversial posts, she angrily denied allegations of a lack of financial transparency in her activities.



INTERNATIONAL



The “Religious Freedom: Preserving the Armenian Spiritual, Cultural, and Historical Heritage in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh” is held in Bern, Switzerland

International Conference in Bern Focuses on Preserving Armenian Spiritual and Cultural Heritage

At the initiative of Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, an international conference titled “Religious Freedom: Preserving the Armenian Spiritual, Cultural, and Historical Heritage in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh” was held in Bern, Switzerland, May 26 to 28.

The event was organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Protestant Church of Switzerland.

At the opening on May 27, the Catholicos expressed his gratitude to Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches; Rev. Rita Famos, president of the Protestant Church of Switzerland; the members of the WCC governing body; and the organizers and supporters of the conference — thanks to whose efforts, once again, the challenges faced by the Armenian people in the aftermath of the occupation of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh are being raised on the international stage.

“In the 21st century — a time that should have been marked in the life of nations and states by the triumph of peace, solidarity and justice — we are, tragically, witnessing genocidal acts and ethnic cleansing fueled by war, hatred, and enmity, as well as deplorable violations of religious freedom and fundamental human rights. Our people, too, have endured such calamities as a result of Azerbaijan’s aggression and atrocities against Artsakh, carried out with the military support of Turkey.

During the 44-day war unleashed in 2020 and the large-scale military operations of 2023, Artsakh was occupied and entirely emptied of its Armenian population. Significant and strategically vital territories along the borders of the Republic of Armenia have also been seized, and new demands continue to be imposed in the course of ongoing peace treaty negotiations.

Azerbaijan continues to hold the political leadership, civilians, and prisoners of war of Artsakh as hostages, subjecting them to show trials and fabricated charges, in gross violation of international legal norms. These unlawful acts and degrad-

ing cruelties are motivated by ethnic hatred and anti-Armenian sentiment — the same animus that underlies the assaults on Armenian spiritual and cultural heritage, and sacred historical sites,” stated the Catholicos of All Armenians.

He emphasized that for centuries, the Armenians of Artsakh — steadfast in their devotion to their homeland, faith, and national identity—lived with dignity, contributing richly to the heritage of global culture through their accomplishments in education and the arts.”

Catholicos Karekin II sorrowfully noted that since the occupation of Artsakh, Azerbaijan’s barbaric destruction of Armenian monuments, Christian shrines, settlements, and cemeteries has continued unabated.

Pursuing a policy to erase Armenian identity, Azerbaijan is cunningly reclassifying the historic Armenian monasteries and churches of Artsakh as “Albanian” heritage.

“The Azerbaijani authorities persistently ignore international appeals. They have refused to comply with the European Parliament’s 2022 Resolution No. 2582 on the destruction of cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh and rejected UNESCO’s initiative for a fact-finding mission to assess the condition of Armenian heritage sites in Artsakh.

Complicit in Azerbaijan’s anti-Armenian propaganda is Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, head of the Caucasus Muslim Board, who recently issued false and slanderous statements,” added the Catholicos, recalling that this same pattern of hatred led to the destruction of Armenian holy sites in Nakhijevan and, exactly twenty years ago—in 2005—the total demolition of some six thousand monument cross-stones (khachkars) in Old Jugha.

“Cultural crimes, tragically, recognize no geographical boundaries. They occur wherever human and national rights are violated, where xenophobia and intolerance prevail, and where the noble value and significance of spiritual heritage are disregarded. Assaults on cultural heritage are rightly regarded not merely as offens-

es against a single nation but as crimes against universal human values.

The impunity for such barbaric acts fosters a climate of lawlessness—not only enabling Azerbaijan to persist in its campaign of cultural destruction, but also setting a dangerous precedent that may encourage similar or even more grievous crimes elsewhere in the world,” stated the Catholicos of All Armenians.

He affirmed that the protection of cultural values is not only a sacred duty for all but also an essential commitment to preserving the history, faith, and identity of nations and peoples.

Addressing the participants of the conference, the Catholicos emphasized: “Today, more than ever, the protection of the spiritual, cultural, and historical heritage of Artsakh is an urgent priority.

The forcibly displaced people of Artsakh have been deprived of the right to live and create on their native land, and to safeguard and develop the culture they built through faith over centuries.

Such horrifying assaults on humanity and human dignity, which strike at the heart of freedom, justice, and the rule of law, must not be tolerated in our modern world. Yes, conflicts between nations must be resolved peacefully, through justice, mutual understanding, and in full respect for national identity and human dignity.

Highlighting the vital importance of such conferences, the Catholicos expressed hope that the international community and relevant institutions will take effective measures to preserve the spiritual and cultural heritage of Artsakh, ensure the safe return of the Armenians to their ancestral homeland, restore their rightful freedom and dignity, and secure the swift release of Armenian captives.

In conclusion, the Catholicos extended his gratitude to the sister churches and ecumenical organizations for their steadfast support of the Armenian people and the Church during this difficult time, as well as for their unwavering commitment to defending the rights of the Armenians of Artsakh, wishing the conference fruitful deliberations.

INTERNATIONAL

30th Anniversary Of Catholicos Aram I’s Enthronement Celebrated in Greece

ATHENS (Panorama.am) — On May 31, an official banquet took place at the Marriott Hotel in Athens to honor the 30th anniversary of His Holiness Aram I’s enthronement as Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia. The event brought together members of the Greek Armenian community and representatives from the Greek Orthodox Church, the Catholicosate of Cilicia reported.

The ceremony began with opening remarks by Shoghig Dadoyan, a member of the Executive Council of the Armenian Prelacy of Greece. Following her address, Executive Council Chairman Takvor Hovagumian commended His Holiness for the spiritual enrichment he has brought to the Greek Armenian community. The keynote address was delivered by Kerop Ekizian, editor-in-chief of the Azad Or daily, who underlined the Catholicos’ contributions to ecumenical and international efforts throughout his tenure.

Bishop Sahak Yemishian, Prelate of the Armenian Prelacy of Greece, invited the Catholicos to deliver his address. His Holiness Aram I reflected on his thirty years of service, emphasizing the expanded mission of the Holy See of Cilicia to the worldwide Armenian community.

The program also featured a commemorative video produced by Cilicia TV.

Members of Armenian Church in France Issue Statement of Concern

PARIS — Members of the clergy in the Armenian Apostolic Church in France this week issued a statement expressing their “deep concern” about recent events in Armenia.

“In flagrant violation of the universal principle of separation of Church and State, the Armenian authorities are undermining the constitutionally and internationally recognized right of the Armenian Apostolic Church to freely organize its internal life,” the statement notes.

“We, the priests of the diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in France, condemn in the strongest possible terms the actions of Nikol Pashinyan and those acting at his instigation. We call on all the faithful of our diocese to make their voices heard in the face of this manifest injustice, orchestrated by the authorities of the Republic of Armenia. We also urge the competent judicial bodies to react appropriately, mobilizing the necessary legal instruments to put an end to this attack on the Armenian Apostolic Church, and to hold accountable anyone who has manifestly violated the Constitution, criminal law or civil law, whatever their public function,” the statement adds.



INTERNATIONAL

Summit in Lachin: New Stage of Strategic Partnership Between Azerbaijan, Turkey and Pakistan

The trilateral summit in Lachin on May 28, bringing together the leaders of Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Pakistan, is seen as a key strategic move, signaling the emergence of a new geopolitical structure in the region.

Although the summit was organized to mark Azerbaijan's Republic Day, the event was not purely symbolic. It served as a platform to present plans for deepening political, economic, and military integration. On the same day, the Lachin International Airport was inaugurated, becoming one of the infrastructural pillars of this process.

The summit also gained particular importance through bilateral and multilateral meetings between leaders, the signing of agreements, and the demonstration of shared political will.

The Lachin summit and the opening of Lachin International Airport on the same day are seen as a strategic symbol from both a technical and political perspective. Located at an altitude of 1,800 meters, the facility has become the third airport built on territories reclaimed by Azerbaijan after the 2020 war, and the fifth civilian airport in the country overall.

According to information provided by the President.az website, the airport is equipped with a 3,000-meter runway, a terminal capable of handling 200 passengers per hour, a VIP lounge, and air traffic control systems that meet ICAO and IATA standards. The terminal covers 5,000 square meters and can accommodate multiple international flights simultaneously.

President Erdoğan described the airport as “a reflection of Azerbaijan's vision for the future”, stressing that it would serve not only as a transport hub but also as a gateway for trade and tourism. President Aliyev, in turn, said the airport would be a key tool for the economic reintegration of the liberated territories and for expanding regional connectivity. It is also emphasized that the airport will strengthen links with Shusha, Kalbajar and other districts, significantly

boosting the region's tourism and logistics potential.

The newly inaugurated Lachin International Airport has become Azerbaijan's 13th civilian airport and the fifth in the Karabakh region. Officials claim the construction of new airports is aimed at developing tourism. However, local economists argue that the lack of a competitive environment and weak tourism infrastructure hinder tangible progress in this area.

Vahid Ahmedov, a member of the Milli Majlis, told the BBC that the airports in Karabakh may have not only political and economic but potentially also military significance:

“I think this is more connected to the military sphere. There may be aspects of such projects that are not disclosed to the public.”

According to him, airports are being built in tourist regions where sanatoriums and recreation areas are planned, and in this context, their construction is justified.

The Lachin meeting is regarded as a pivotal turning point in the regional balance of power. Attended by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the summit aimed to transform the emerging “brotherly alliance” between the three nations into a strategic partnership. This alliance could serve as an alternative platform for cooperation not only within the region but also within the broader global political framework.

In his speech Erdoğan highlighted that the combined economic output of the three countries exceeds \$1.5 trillion, with a total population of 350 million. According to him, under the guidance of foreign ministers, this trilateral cooperation will soon take on an institutional structure and translate into concrete plans in areas such as transport, energy, trade, defense, and counterterrorism. The leaders agreed to hold regular and consistent meetings in this format.

Shehbaz Sharif, for his part, stressed that

the partnership should serve the well-being of their peoples and contribute to regional peace and stability. He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to peace — hinting at recent clashes with India — and praised the support shown by Turkey and Azerbaijan in this process.

At the summit, Aliyev stated that Azerbaijan has already invested over \$20 billion in the Turkish economy. For Pakistan, an investment package worth \$2 billion is also planned. These funds will be directed towards development in the fields of energy, industry, trade, digital transformation, and agriculture. The agenda also includes joint economic forums, reciprocal visits by investment delegations, and the creation of new financial institutions.

Aliyev also noted that cooperation with Pakistan's defense industry will be expanded. This includes an agreement to increase the number of JF-17 Block III fighter jets purchased by Azerbaijan from 16 to 40 units. The value of the contract is approximately \$4.2 billion, underscoring the deepening integration of the three countries in the defense sector. The summit also addressed two key transport projects: the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route) and the North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). These routes form a geostrategic network linking China, India, Central Asia and Europe. The Middle Corridor is particularly significant as an alternative route between China and Europe, connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

The INSTC is a 7,200-kilometre multimodal route linking India, Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia. These corridors are intended to boost trade volumes, improve logistical efficiency, and strengthen the region's geo-economic relevance. The heads of state emphasized the importance of coordinated action by the three countries within these projects.

At the summit, mutual support was expressed on the issues of Karabakh, Kashmir, and Northern Cyprus. According to Tribune

and Arab News, Shehbaz Sharif described this solidarity as a “meeting of hearts and souls of sincere friends.” President Aliyev, recalling the importance of decisions in line with the UN Charter, called for dialogue regarding the conflict between Pakistan and India.

The summit was also characterized as a reaffirmation of Turkey's and Pakistan's support for Azerbaijan during the 2020 war, and of Azerbaijan's moral and diplomatic support for Islamabad amid recent clashes between India and Pakistan.

(This article originally appeared on the site Jam-News.net on May 29.)

Azerbaijan Intensifies Militarization with Help From Pakistan

YEREVAN (News.am) — Azerbaijan has significantly increased its order for JF-17 Thunder light multi-role fighter jets from the original 16 to 40 vehicles. The value of the deal is estimated at about \$4.2 billion.

According to Defense Arabic on June 2, the aircraft are the newest and most powerful version of the JF-17 family - the “Block 3” version - a generation 4.5 fighter jointly developed by Pakistan and China.

If Azerbaijan increases its purchase of JF-17s to 40 aircraft, it will become the largest export buyer of the Thunder series and will become Pakistan's largest fighter export deal in history, surpassing previous sales to Nigeria and Myanmar.

Azerbaijan has already officially received 16 JF-17 Block III fighter jets in 2023.

These aircraft are expected to replace the outdated Russian-made MiG-29 fighters. It is noted that Baku is seeking to reduce its dependence on traditional suppliers such as Russia.

Is Georgia Doing Russia's Dirty Work to Make Armenia Pay?

Russia has long used the food and beverage industry as an instrument of coercion. Georgians have experienced such pressure over the past two decades. And now some Armenians suspect Russia of doing the same to them, only this time, Moscow is using Georgians as enforcers.

In recent weeks, Armenian exporters have been experiencing lots of hassles transporting alcoholic beverages through Georgia destined for Russia, in particular enhanced customs inspections by Georgian officials. Exporters report prolonged checks and spontaneous laboratory testing are causing lengthy transit delays and serious financial losses, threatening access to lucrative export markets in Russia and the Baltic states.

On May 13, representatives of several Armenian alcoholic beverage exporters staged a protest outside the Georgian Embassy in Yerevan. The producers say that their shipments are not intended for sale within Georgia and thus they questioned the need for alcohol testing of transit cargo.

“We're now paying \$100 a day for every truck stuck in Georgia,” said Hayk Shahnazarian, owner of one of the affected companies, speaking to RFE/RL's Armenian Service. “But that's not our biggest loss. We could lose a market because

of this and find ourselves on the brink of bankruptcy.”

On May 15, Armenia's Economy Minister Gevorg Papoyan publicly addressed the issue, stating that “the reasons [for the delays] are not clear to us.” He also announced an intention to travel to Georgia to resolve the matter in person. This came just a week after Georgian Economy Minister Levan Davitashvili visited Yerevan to attend a bilateral business forum, where no mention of transit issues appeared in official statements.

Papoyan's visit, however, has not happened yet. Just a week after his May 15 comments, the minister told reporters that Armenia was in the midst of “very active discussions” with Georgia, but that the situation was developing in a way that made his visit unlikely to have any effect.

Some in Yerevan suspect that Georgian officials are acting at the behest of Russia to disrupt Armenian exports. They note that over the past two years Georgia and Armenia have, in effect, traded geopolitical places: Yerevan was long the Kremlin's strategic partner in the South Caucasus, but of late has tried to distance itself from Moscow while drawing closer to the United States and European Union. The Georgian Dream government has done the exact

opposite over the same period — shunning Western values while reviving ties with Russia.

Russia has a history of using its trade leverage to punish what it sees as geopolitical disobedience. Georgians should know this better than anyone in the region. In 2006, as then-Georgian leader Mikheil Saakashvili pursued policies designed to qualify Georgia to join the EU and NATO, Russia imposed an embargo on Georgian wine that kneecapped the economy.

Despite Armenian worries about Tbilisi's motives, Georgian authorities are reticent when discussing the matter. Representatives of the Georgian Revenue Service, a key agency overseeing customs operations, denied any change in policy or practice.

“Nothing out of the ordinary was taking place, standard customs procedures were being followed,” an agency representative told Eurasianet. “Some trucks had already left the country, while others were scheduled to depart soon. The Armenian Minister of Economy himself stated that an explanation would be provided. From our side, there was nothing unusual. Nothing has changed, regular border control procedures were in place before and continue as usual.”

Meanwhile, on May 15, the Russian

newspaper *Izvestia* published a report on a meeting in Moscow between Georgian and Russian business representatives. The discussions reportedly touched on concerns over the quality of Georgian products, including cognac. The article stated that “the Georgian side promised to organize a new laboratory for these purposes in the near future” and mentioned plans to “tighten control over what is being transported through” the Upper Lars checkpoint, a major transit route for Armenian exports.

Although the *Izvestia* report did not mention Armenia or its products specifically, it coincides with the ongoing delays at the Georgian border. Allegations of quality shortcomings surrounding Armenian beverages are not new in the Russian market.

Georgian media outlets have reported a significant decline in cross-border traffic from Armenia. In April, land transit from Armenia through Georgia fell by 20.3 percent, compared to the same month in 2024, while total cargo volume declined by 30.2 percent. Border testing procedures, including on-the-spot laboratory checks, have reportedly been in place for approximately a month and a half.

(This article originally appeared on www.eurasianet.org on May 27.)



INTERNATIONAL

Meet the Canadian Businesses that Are Betting Big on Home Turf

By Dorcas Marfo

TORONTO (CTV) — When global trade tensions began rattling supply chains, Alex Sagherian didn't want to see how it would all shake out.

Rather than wait, Sagherian, executive vice-president of NLI International Corp., redirected his Mississauga-based firm inwards — redirecting its resources towards Canadian operations.

"It was almost immediate," Sagherian said in a phone interview with CTVNews.ca, "The faster you can take action and lead by example, the better it is—for your people, staff and (the) companies you do work with. To give that sense of confidence that we're going to focus more on Canada."

NLI is a third-party logistics (3PL) company that provides distribution, warehousing, transportation, fulfillment, storage and more for companies — essentially a one-stop shop.

Following Trump's tariff announcements, NLI invested more than \$1 million into its domestic operations. That included expanding warehousing capacity in Ontario and growing its presence in B.C., as well as acquiring AAA Express, a GTA-based long-standing transport company.

Sagherian says the acquisition helps simplify services for clients and improves NLI's ability to meet demands across Canada.

A few months ago, to help staff weather the uncertainty, NLI raised salaries by 15 per cent company-wide.

"We understand a lot of basic commodities are going to be more expensive and we want to give our staff some light at the end of the tunnel," he said.

According to Sagherian, businesses he deals with are putting Canada first.

"Everyone's making the framework for long, lasting relationships with Canadian companies, where in the past, that was probably outsourced to the U.S. or other countries around the world."

"We want Canada first. We want Canadians to be stronger. We want Canadians to have more confidence," Sagherian said.

As the Canada-U.S. trade relationship grows increasingly uncertain due to tariffs imposed under the Trump administration, a growing number of Canadian

small- and medium-sized businesses are pivoting away from cross-border commerce and looking inward for stability.

"We're seeing a drop in the confidence and optimism level," Jasmin Guénette, vice-president of National Affairs at the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses (CFIB), told CTVNews.ca in a phone interview.

"Many small business owners are quite worried about the future of their business, the future of their operation, and what will be the outcome," he added.

According to CFIB's latest survey with responses from nearly 4,000 businesses across Canada, four out of five businesses have been affected by the current trade environment. The impacts range from higher input costs to reduced customer demand, prompting many owners to rethink their strategies.

Guénette noted that businesses are also dealing with the disruption to the business climate, finding new clients and suppliers outside the U.S., and a decline in trust in the U.S. as a reliable trading partner.

Among those strategic shifts, many businesses are turning towards domestic markets. According to CFIB's survey, 32 per cent of business owners have taken measures to shift their domestic suppliers and markets within Canada, while another 30 per cent are considering it.

But shifting to domestic markets isn't without challenges.

"There are many barriers to food products, alcohol, and free movement of labor within Canada," Guénette explained. "There's also a cost associated with adding businesses in multiple provinces with licensing fees and regulatory compliance."

To address this, CFIB is calling on provincial and federal governments to adopt a principle of mutual recognition— if a product is good enough to be built and sold in one province or territory, it should be available in every other province and territory, without additional regulatory requirements.

"Instead of agreeing on all exemptions and policy, because provinces will never agree on everything, if they adopt the principle of mutual recognition, then barriers are teared down that way," Guénette said.

Improving interprovincial trade barriers cannot and should not be something that has a best before date to it Guénette warned.

Guénette said that even trade with the U.S. stabilizes, it's good economic policy to make sure that within Canada our businesses have the least possible roadblocks to develop and sell their products and hire people locally.

Buy Canadian

Pierre Cléroux, chief economist of Businesses Development Bank of Canada (BDC), said people should understand buying Canada has a positive impact on the Canadian economy.

Research by the BDC claims if every Canadian household allocated \$25 or more per week to Canadian-made goods, it could create 60,000 jobs in Canada.

"This a pretty strong movement and I think this is going to stick around, even if tariffs are changing every day," Cléroux said. "The impact is real."

As consumer demand of Canadian products has surged, Cléroux says some businesses are experiencing growth.

"One of our clients, Green Beaver, they sell and manufacture personal care products, and their sales are up by 40 per cent," he explained.

A Narrative Research poll shows there is still a strong desire to "buy Canadian" across the country.

Approximately 68 per cent of those surveyed are actively searching for Canadian products when they shop. This number is up five points since last February, when the movement to buy Canadian started gaining momentum.

Another driver of this moment is a strategic pivot in supply chain management. Cléroux says businesses are actively seeing Canadian suppliers to diversify their sources.

"Manufacturers are seeing a demand for Canadian products," Cléroux said, adding that grocery stores are at the forefront of this pivot.

To support this movement, BDC launched the "Buy Five, High Five" campaign, which encourages Canadians to share and promote five Canadian products they love.

For businesses reconsidering their reliance on the U.S. market, Cléroux says BDC is encouraging diversification across different sectors within Canada, suggesting businesses in the auto sector may find new demand in the aerospace, shipbuilding or even nuclear industries.

Tumo Expands into Asia with Center in Japan

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — On June 1, the first Tumo Center in Asia officially opened in Takasaki, a city in Japan's Gunma Prefecture, under the name Tumo Gunma.

Deputy Speaker of Armenia's Nation-

The launch of Tumo Gunma undoubtedly reflects our shared commitment to youth and innovation, while also embodying the spirit of cultural and intellectual exchange that has been a cornerstone of Armenian-Japanese friendship for decades. Though geographically distant, our nations are united by shared values—democracy, resilience, reverence for knowledge, and deep respect for cultural heritage. Tumo Gunma will soon serve around 1,500 teenagers from across the prefecture, becoming a platform for bilateral cooperation and inspiration in innovation between Armenia and Japan. I hope this is only the beginning.

It is part of our broader vision to expand Tumo's educational program to other Japanese cities, offering more youth access to this modern and dynamic educational model," he said.

Future plans include launching new centers and Tumo Boxes in the cities of Maebashi and Kusatsu, further extending access to Tumo's educational program to more teenagers across Japan.

The opening was attended by Tumo founders Sam and Sylva Simonian, Governor of Gunma Prefecture Ichita Yamamoto, former Minister of Digital Transformation Taro Kono, Armenian Deputy Speaker Hakob Arshakyan, Armenia's Ambassador to

Japan Monika Simonyan, Tumo's Executive Director Marie Lou Papazian, Development Director Bekor Papazian, Head of International Programs Chris Shahinyan, Head of Partnerships and Development Steven Bridges, among others.



The official opening ceremony in Takasaki, Japan

al Assembly Hakob Arshakyan delivered a welcoming speech, highlighting the significance of this initiative within the framework of Armenia-Japan educational cooperation, according to the National Assembly's press service.

"It is a great honor for me to stand before you today and mark the opening of Asia's first Tumo center here, in the heart of Japan, the city of Takasaki.

US Embassy Halts Funding for Armenian Students in Georgia

for Armenian students enrolled at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA) in Tbilisi, while financial support for Azerbaijani students remains uninterrupted. This development has placed Armenian students in a precarious position, facing both financial and emotional challenges, according to Epress.am on June 2.

For nearly two decades, the US Embassy has facilitated a program enabling students from Armenia and Azerbaijan to pursue journalism and media management studies at GIPA. However, for the 2024–2026 academic cycle, only the tuition for the fall semester was covered for Armenian students. Starting from the spring semester, Armenian students were informed by GIPA administration — not the U.S. Embassy — that their funding had been discontinued. Conversely, Azerbaijani students continue to receive full financial support, including tuition and living expenses, AzerNews reported.

This disparity has led to significant dis-

tress among Armenian students, who had left their jobs and relocated to Georgia based on the program's assurances. The sudden withdrawal of support has left them struggling to afford tuition and living costs, jeopardizing their ability to continue their studies.

On April 23, Armenian students sent a formal letter to S. Ambassador Kristina Kvi- en, expressing their concerns and requesting clarification. As of over a month later, they have not received a response. The lack of communication from the embassy, which is responsible for student selection and program administration, has been perceived as dismissive.

The students are calling for the US Embassy to provide an official explanation, reconsider the funding decision, and ensure equitable treatment for all participants in the program. They emphasize the importance of upholding the commitments made to them and maintaining trust in US-Armenia educational collaborations.



Community News

Dr. Hakem Al-Rustom Discusses Enduring Erasures Of Armenians in Modern Turkey

By Anahid Valencia

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (Hye Sharzhoom) — Dr. Hakem Al-Rustom, Manoogian Professor of Modern History at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, gave a lecture titled “From Natives to Foreigners: Enduring Erasures of Armenians in Turkey” on Friday, March 21, at Fresno State.

The presentation was organized by the Armenian Studies Program and the Ralph Shabazian Armenian Memorial Fund.

Dr. Al-Rustom grew up in Cairo, Egypt and is the author of the forthcoming book, *Enduring Erasures: Afterlives of the Armenian Genocide* (Columbia University Press, Sept. 2025). His lecture was centered around the concept of “denativization,” a topic explored in his new book. “Denativization,” as Al-Rustom explained, is “the process by which Armenians were erased and deemed foreigners in their homeland following the Armenian Genocide.”

“It is an ongoing structure that continues to this very day,” stated Al-Rustom. With the events taking place in Artsakh from 2020 until the present, his statement holds significance beyond mere remembrance.

Al-Rustom recounted how he was approximately 700 feet away from the site of Hrant Dink’s assassination in Istanbul in 2007, which prompted his quest for answers and ultimately the writing of his book.

Al-Rustom began the lecture by telling the story of Houri, a woman from Sassoun. “As soon as we met, she told me, ‘my own heritage is dying, the Armenian dialect of Sassoun is slowly being forgotten,’” Al-Rustom said.

“Her grandparents faced annihilation, her parents endured forced displacement and she herself lives with the weight of these histories, both inherited and ongoing in the present.”

Houri’s story was used to convey the exclusion felt by many Armenians from both their oppressors and Armenians themselves.

Al-Rustom explained that Houri’s Sassoun dialect of Armenian was considered “fake Armenian” by members of her own Armenian community.

“What makes an Armenian an Armenian — these are always questions that are important to remember, [and] that history is repeating itself in unfortunate ways,” said attendee and Armenian General Benevolent Union Executive member Linda Shekerjian after the lecture.

This is part of the concept of “denativization” — to feel separate from one’s own people because of differences in language and geography. Some may even argue that this system has been set in place by the oppressor to divide a people, in this case, the Armenians.

see ERASURES, page 10



Eric Esrailian at Ellis Island during the award ceremony (courtesy of Eric Esrailian)

A Duty to Help Others: UCLA’s Eric Esrailian Receives Ellis Island Medal of Honor

LOS ANGELES — As a child, UCLA’s Dr. Eric Esrailian listened to his great-grandmother’s stories of how she and his great-grandfather had survived the Armenian Genocide and ultimately made their way to America. In those reminiscences, he said, one key element always stood out — how his forebears had benefited from the help and generosity of others.

That lesson never left him.

Throughout his multifarious career as a UCLA physician, public health practitioner, film producer, philanthropist, fundraiser, entrepreneur, educator and human rights activist, Esrailian’s aim has been singular: helping his fellow human beings.

On Saturday, May 10, his transformative work was recognized with the prestigious Ellis Island Medal of Honor. The annual awards, presented on Ellis Island in New York City, celebrate immigrants and their progeny who embody the best of the American spirit — embracing diversity, promoting cultural unity and dedicating their lives to the betterment of others.

For Esrailian, the medal — which has been bestowed on presidents, Nobel Prize winners, Supreme Court justices, civil rights leaders and celebrated artists — has a special resonance.

“I am truly honored to receive the Ellis Island Medal of Honor and to join so many people I have admired over the years as recipients,” he said. “For me, this award represents the incredible legacy of those who came before us and the continued contributions of immigrants and their descendants to the United States of America. As someone who has been fortunate to experience the opportunities this country provides, I am reminded daily of the importance of serving our communities — through our professions, cultural contributions and civic engagement.”

From Helping Patients to Helping Society

After completing his medical fellowship in gastroenterology at UCLA, where he also earned a master’s in public health, Esrailian joined the faculty of the David Geffen School of Medicine. Today, as the Lincy Foundation Professor of Clinical Gastroenterology at the medical school and chief of UCLA Health’s Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Division of Digestive Diseases, he is widely known for his clinical work and research.

see AWARD, page 9

Businessman Accused of Orchestrating Attacks on Journalists

By David Enrich

BOSTON (*New York Times*) — A federal grand jury indicted a former New Hampshire businessman this week on charges that he orchestrated attacks on the homes of journalists who had investigated claims of sexual misconduct against him.

The grand jury in Boston indicted the businessman, Eric Spofford, on four stalking-related charges after prosecutors said he had paid an associate \$20,000 to vandalize the homes of a reporter and an editor at New Hampshire Public Radio, as well as the home of the reporter’s parents, on May 30.

A lawyer for Spofford declined to comment.

Spofford owned one of the largest networks of drug-rehabilitation centers in New England until he sold the business for what he said was \$115 million in 2021. The next year, New Hampshire Public Radio aired a report that quoted former patients and staff members saying he had engaged in sexual misconduct.

Spofford denied the allegations and threatened to sue New Hampshire Public Radio and Lauren Chooljian, the reporter who led the investigation. (His subsequent defamation lawsuit was dismissed in 2023.)

After a lawyer for New Hampshire Public Radio rebuffed Spofford’s demands for a retraction in the spring of 2022, men vandalized homes belonging to Chooljian, her editor and her parents, as well as a house where Chooljian previously lived. They smashed the homes’ windows with rocks and bricks. One of the vandals spray-painted “Just the beginning!” on an outside wall of Chooljian’s home near Boston.

The vandalism was part of a growing trend of physical attacks against journalists in the United States.

At the time, Spofford, who has said he overcame drug addiction and a history of violence, denied any involvement in or knowledge of the attacks.

Federal prosecutors later charged four men — at least one of whom, Eric Labarge, was an associate of Spofford’s — with organizing or conducting the vandalism. All four pleaded guilty and were sentenced to prison.

The grand jury indictment accused Spofford of having “devised a scheme to harass and terrorize” Chooljian and the other victims. The indictment said Spofford had instructed Labarge to arrange for the homes to be vandalized and paid him \$20,000, at least some of which Labarge used to pay men he enlisted to carry out the vandalism.

After selling his business, Spofford moved to Miami. He regularly posts videos of his luxurious lifestyle and coaches followers on how to build their personal brands.



COMMUNITY NEWS



Archbishop Vicken Aykazian receiving his honorary doctorate

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian Awarded Doctor of Theology, Honoris Causa, From Catholic University of America

WASHINGTON — On May 17, Archbishop Vicken Aykazian received an honorary doctorate in theology from the Catholic University of America, a recognition honoring his decades of leadership in ecumenical dialogue, inter-faith advocacy, and defense of persecuted Christian communities around the world.

A private dinner in honor of this year's honorary degree recipients was hosted the evening before by University President Dr. Peter Kilpatrick. Among the guests were Bishop Daniel Findikyan and Fr. Hovsep Karapetyan, who attended in support of Aykazian.

Aykazian, ecumenical director and Diocesan Legate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, has long been a tireless champion of Christian unity. He has served as president of the National Council of Churches, as a member of the World Council of Churches Central Committee, and as a prominent advocate for religious freedom and justice in the Middle East.

Also honored with Aykazian were Bishop Robert Barron, Catholic media evangelist and founder of Word on Fire; Monsignor John Enzler, longtime leader of Catholic Charities DC; Jeanne Mancini, former president of the March for Life; Dr. Steven Muncy, humanitarian and refugee advocate; and Congressman Christopher Smith, human rights legislator and defender of the unborn.

Aykazian's recognition not only honors his personal ministry, but also reflects the enduring presence and witness of the Armenian Church in the ecumenical and humanitarian arena. His vision, compassion, and dedication continue to inspire unity in a divided world.

UCLA's Eric Esrailian Receives Ellis Island Medal of Honor

AWARD, from page 8

But he often wondered how he might have an impact beyond the examination room. He has answered that in myriad ways, and his leadership and generosity — spurred, he says, by the example of many mentors — have reverberated not only within UCLA's health enterprise but across the campus, Los Angeles and the world.

Beyond being a founding donor of the California Institute for Immunology and Immunotherapy at UCLA — which is helping to create a nexus for scientific discovery and innovation at the new UCLA Research Park — he has played a key role in some of the most significant health-related philanthropic donations in UCLA Health's recent history. His outreach and advocacy helped establish the Robert G. Kardashian Center for Esophageal Health in 2019, the Goodman-Luskin Microbiome Center in 2023 and the Walter and Shirley Wang Center for Integrative Digestive Health this spring.

His speaker series and mentorship programs have connected health scholars and students with the wisdom of some of the world's most influential and successful leaders, and he has championed initiatives in medical education, biomedical innovation and philanthropic support for students, scientists and faculty.

"Dr. Esrailian has uplifted our university and UCLA Health through his steadfast commitment to excellence in patient care, research, teaching and service over many years," said Dr. John Mazziotta, vice chancellor for health sciences and CEO of UCLA Health. "We are grateful for his dedication, compassion and entrepreneurial vision, which provide a model worth emulating as we strive to benefit society at large."

Outside the health field, Esrailian has been a dedicated advocate for social justice, for refugees and victims of human rights abuses, and for educational access and opportunity, having helped scores of students from educationally and economically under-resourced communities realize their dream of attending college.

The Armenian Genocide and The Promise Institute at UCLA

But perhaps his most personal work has

been promoting Armenian culture and heritage and raising public awareness about the Armenian Genocide — efforts that dovetail with his deep commitment to humanitarianism and global human rights.

Taking the helm of a project originally envisioned by his mentor and close friend Kirk Kerkorian, the entrepreneur and philanthropist who died in 2015, Esrailian became lead producer on the 2017 theatrical film "The Promise," starring Christian Bale, and its accompanying Emmy-nominated documentary, "Intent to Destroy," which shone a light on the systematic murder of 1.5 million Armenians by the forces of the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and

1923 and the long-running, organized efforts to deny the atrocity.

At the same time, he was spearheading the creation of The Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA School of Law. Supported in large part by a \$20 million gift from Kerkorian's estate and proceeds from "The Promise," the institute, which opened in 2017, has become a national leader in human rights education and advocacy and a training ground for human rights advocates.

"UCLA and the UCLA School of Law are making a commitment to keep the promise to the victims of human rights abuses — that we will create the tools and

train people of integrity and talent to address these crises," he said at the time. "Out of the darkness of the Armenian Genocide and our film, we will bring light into the world to help people who need it today."

In 2023, with Esrailian's support, UCLA Law broadened that mission, launching Promise Europe in the Hague to bring the university's excellence in research, teaching and advocacy on human rights law and policy into the international arena.

Esrailian also played a pivotal role in establishing The Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA in 2019, a hub for research, education and outreach related to Armenian history and culture, and just last month, he made a gift to support Armenian language instruction at UC Berkeley, where he earned his bachelor's degree.

For his human rights work, which has included his association with the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, his achievements in medicine, his cultural preservation efforts and his commitment to fostering international peace and understanding, Esrailian has received numerous honors, including the Benemerenti Medal, presented to him in 2021 by Pope Francis at the Vatican for his humanitarianism locally and globally.

In receiving the 2025 Ellis Island Medal of Honor, Esrailian joined Christiane Amanpour, Adrien Brody and more than 75 others who, in the words of Nasser J. Kazeminy, chair of the Ellis Island Honors Society, "exemplify a life dedicated to community service" and who "preserve and celebrate the history, traditions and values of their ancestry."

"This award," Esrailian said, "is for my ancestors, my family, for the people who have helped me along the way, and for everyone who continues to carry the torch of resilience, perseverance, hope and determination."

UCLA faculty, staff and alumni who have previously received the medal include engineer and philanthropist Henry Samueli, engineering adjunct professor Dariush Divsalar, engineering professor Yahya Rahmat-Sami, cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Abbas Ardehali, and executive director and CEO of ASUCLA Pouria Abassi.



Eric Esrailian, left, with actor Oscar Isaac on the set of "The Promise"



COMMUNITY NEWS

SAS Awards Graduate Research and Conference Grants To Students in the Field of Armenian Studies

FRESNO — The Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) announces the recipients of its Spring 2025 Graduate Research and Conference Grants. The five recipients are: Annika Topelian, for her research that investigates the acquisition of Western Armenian by children living in diaspora communities, Lori Pirinjian to present her paper entitled “Caught Between Two Powers: Gender, Nationalism, and Armenia’s Domestic Violence Law” at the 29th Annual World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN), Anoush Sargsyan for her research on the adaptation of the Zodiac Man diagrams in the Armenian manuscript tradition, Hayarpi Hakobyan for her research on medieval Armenian book production and illumination in the Lake Van region, also known as Vaspurakan, from the last quarter of the thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth century, and Başak Yağmur Karaca for her research analyzing the role of the Amiras, in the urbanization and functioning of the city, across imperial, communal, and spatial levels.

Each of the winning recipients received a \$1,000 grant awarded by the Society.

SAS President Barlow Der Mugrdchian said, “We are proud to fund such excellent graduate students. The nature and the depth of their work demonstrates the multi-disciplinary aspect of Armenian Studies as a field of inquiry,” said Der Mugrdchian. “I would like to encourage all those who are

interested in the activities of SAS to support us so that we can support such promising young scholars to achieve their goals.”

Annika Topelian: “I am extremely grateful to the Society for Armenian Studies for sponsoring this award and selecting me as a recipient. These funds will allow me to complete my dissertation research on the acquisition of Western Armenian in diaspora communities and fulfill the requirements for my Ph.D. in Linguistics. As an aspiring Armenian Studies scholar, it is incredibly encouraging to receive support from an organization which does so much to promote and further the field. It is my hope that the research this award supports will also serve the greater Armenian community by contributing to current and future maintenance efforts for the Western Armenian language in the diaspora.”

Lori Pirinjian: “Having the support of SAS as part of my academic endeavors has been invaluable. It is through SAS’s generosity that I am able to travel across the country to present research, publicize my work, and meet potential future collaborators. SAS has played no small part in my continued academic growth, and, for that, I am incredibly grateful.”

Anoush Sargsyan: “The SAS Graduate Research and Conference Grant enabled me to participate in an exceptional international workshop on tables and diagrams in Middle Eastern manuscript traditions, orga-

nized by the ERC project ZODIAC at Freie Universität Berlin (Mathieu Ossendrijver), in cooperation with the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (George A. Kiraz, Sabine Schmidtke), and the renowned independent scholar Sonja Brentjes. Presenting my research on Armenian manuscript diagrams alongside leading scholars in the field was a deeply enriching experience that will significantly shape the future direction of my work.”

Hayarpi Hakobyan: “In the context of my research on manuscripts produced in the Lake Van region before 1350, the collection of the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice holds particular importance. It represents the second most significant corpus after the Matenadaran. A brief research stay in Venice will allow for essential first-hand examination of key manuscripts. This visit marks a crucial step toward the completion of my dissertation. I am deeply grateful to SAS for their generous support, which has made this phase of my work possible.”

Basak Yağmur Karaca: “I truly appreciate the research grant from the Society of Armenian Studies (SAS). This wonderful support will allow me to dive deeper into my archival research on the significant impact of Armenian moneylenders in shaping the urban landscape and infrastructure of Istanbul during the 19th century. I appreciate SAS for their financial support in promoting scholarship in Armenian studies.”

The Society of Armenian Studies is an international body, composed of scholars and students, whose aims are to promote the study of Armenian culture and society, including history, language, literature, and social, political, and economic questions; to facilitate the exchange of scholarly information pertaining to Armenian studies around the world; and to sponsor panels and conferences on Armenian studies.

The SAS Graduate Research and Conference Grants were made possible through the generous institutional support of the Robert Aram and Marianne Kaloosdian and Stephen and Marian Mugar Chair of Armenian Genocide Studies, Clark University; the Armenian Studies Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; the Meghrouni Family Presidential Chair in Armenian Studies, University of California, Irvine; the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR); the Armenian Communities Department, Gulbenkian Foundation; the Armenian Studies Program, California State University, Fresno; the Institute of Armenian Studies, University of Southern California, the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center, the UCLA Promise Armenian Institute; the Armenian Studies Program, University of California Berkeley; and the Mashtots Chair in Armenian Studies, Harvard University.



Members of the Lowell Armenian-American Organization Veterans

Lowell Armenian-American Veterans Honor Memory of Deceased Members

LOWELL, Mass. — On Memorial Day Weekend, members of the Armenian-American

Veterans of Lowell conducted a gravesite service for some 80 veterans of Armenian, heritage thus fulfilling a 50-year tradition established by the post’s founders.

American flags were placed on the graves of deceased members giving the dead comrades a hero’s salute.

This year, a special service was held in memory of a newly deceased veteran, Mike Manoian, which included a color guard, a firing squad and a bugler playing taps.

The organization was formed in 1947, when a number of Armenian-American veterans of World War II returned home and gathered at the Pine Tree Potato Chip Company in Lowell to form a group that would provide mutual support, advocate for veterans’ rights and benefits, and foster a sense of community among the veterans. The outcome of this meeting was the creation of a group named the Armenian American Veterans of Lowell, which went onto to obtain a state charter in 1952.

Over the years, in addition to working with other ethnic veterans’ groups to provide assistance to veterans in need, the Lowell Armenian Veterans organization has been proud of their heritage by supporting the local Armenian Church schools, organizing Christmas parties, giving Easter baskets to the Armenian children, and participating in the annual commemoration of the Armenian Genocide held at Lowell City Hall.

“Though we are a relatively small group, we are one of the oldest ethnic veterans’ organizations participating in the Lowell Veterans Council. New veterans are always welcome to join to the Lowell organization,” commented Post Commander, Richard Juknavorian.

For further information, go to <https://armenianamericanveterans.org>.

Dr. Hakem Al-Rustom Discusses Enduring Erasures of Armenians in Modern Turkey

ERASURES, from page 8

“We have to understand that there are multiple ways of being Armenian,” said Al-Rustom. “Also, the fact that some Armenians lost the language has to do with the genocide, so it’s an implication that many people in the diaspora have to live with.”

Al-Rustom also related the story of a man named Ara, who is from the village of Everek near Kayseri in Turkey. Ara, though he tried, could not find his home village because the Turks destroyed any traces of it. The church in Everek, as Dr. Al-Rustom would discover, was converted from Sourp Toros to a mosque, Fatih Camii.

“Ara said, ‘even if there are a few thousand remaining Armenians left in Istanbul

today, the Armenians will continue to constitute a threat,’” Al-Rustom stated.

He further explained that, because of this so-called threat, Turkey will continue to re-script the past and remove Armenians from the picture, casting Armenian heritage as simply “Anatolian” history. “Turkey is built on the ruins of Armenians,” he said.

Al-Rustom mentioned a Turkish journalist who claims to be “sympathetic” toward the Armenian Genocide, yet continued to use language that refuses to blame the Turkish government.

This unfortunate reality was discussed not to paint Armenians as helpless, but rather to emphasize their unwavering endurance that has survived through centuries of persecution.



From left, Dr. Hagop Ohanessian, Dr. David Zakarian, Dr. Hakem Al-Rustom, Dr. Talin Suciyan, and Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdchian.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenia Lacrosse Players Visit Armenian Museum

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Museum of America hosted the athletes, coaches, and families of Armenia Lacrosse Official on Thursday, May 22, ahead of the team competing in the Heritage Cup Tournament in Boston.

This year, Armenia became the 93rd member of World Lacrosse and the 36th member of the European Lacrosse Federation. Armenia Lacrosse fielded three teams — Men’s, Women’s, and Men’s U-19 — at one of the largest international lacrosse events, which brings together 112 teams from 36 countries across six divisions and features over 2,000 athletes. The Men’s Team won the competition and the Women’s Team placed seventh.



One of the Men’s teams pictured in the galleries on May 22.



The Women’s Team pictured with the Artsakh Cleats designed by Berj Najarian and donated to the Museum by Michele Kolligian and Bob Khederian.



The Armenia Lacrosse Teams visited the Armenian Museum of America.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Boston University and HENAR Launch Medical Education Program in Armenia

YEREVAN — April 22, a two-day conference on the transformation of post-graduate medical education took place in Yerevan. Entitled “Advancing Competency-based Medical Training in Armenia through a Master’s Degree in Health Professions Education,” the conference kicked off a program designed to promote reforms in medical residency education in Armenia.

“Today we are announcing the launch of a very important initiative, the Master’s degree in Health Professions Education,” said Arman Voskerchyan, co-founder of the Health Network for Armenia (HENAR). HENAR, in conjunction with the Boston University – Armenia Medical Partnership (BU-AMP) has developed a hybrid version of Boston University’s Master’s degree program for residency program leaders in Armenia. The program is designed to equip Armenian physicians, clinical educators, and healthcare professional with contemporary competencies in leadership, teaching, research, and monitoring and evaluation skills.

“We are embarking on another system-changing program, one that aims to lay the foundation... to transform the entire landscape of postgraduate medical education,” said Minister of Health Anahit Avanesyan in her opening remarks. The pro-

gram is designed to train medical residency directors to transform their departments’ residency programs to be based on demonstrating clinical competency in hands-on patient care rather than on just testing of theoretical knowledge of medicine.

“Critical to the development of an efficient and cost-effective healthcare system is the development of a systems-based medical training program,” said Aram Kaligian, director of the BU-AMP. “This two-day session has been an important step in ensuring all stakeholders have a shared understanding of program goals and success metrics.” In attendance was Jeff Markuns, the director of the Global Health Collaborative at Boston University Chobanian Avedisian School of Medicine and the director of the Master’s in HPE program. Markuns gave a presentation on how he and his colleagues have transformed primary care systems over the last 20 years in southeast Asia, most notably in Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia.

The one-year Master’s degree program will teach competency-based medical curriculum development and evaluation skills, and the participants will then run bi-weekly Training-of-Trainer (ToT) programs in their respective departments to transform their own training programs. At the end of

the year, the participants will have developed a new medical curriculum, evaluation tools, and trained their respective departments in the use of such skills, rather than simply writing a master’s thesis.

“I want to emphasize the importance of today’s occasion,” said Minister of Education Zhanna Andreasyan in her opening remarks. “Enhancing the competitiveness of our universities is a key goal within the ongoing reforms in Armenia’s higher education and science sector.” Key partners in the program are Yerevan State Medical University (YSMU) and the Armenian National Institute of Health (ANIH), the only two institutions in Armenia accredited to run medical residency programs. YSMU Vice-Rector Garnik Avetisyan and ANIH Director Aleksander Bazarchyan also attended with many of their faculty. Speakers highlighted the program’s potential as a roadmap for modernizing Armenia’s post-graduate medical training system.

The two-day event provided a critical platform for collaboration and professional dialogue. On April 22, discussions focused on national policy and the structure of competency-based medical education programs. Participants had the opportunity to identify key priorities and challenges in the field and jointly outline the next steps forward. The second day of the conference featured interactive workshops. Participants engaged in hands-on exploration of the HPE program’s instructional modules through role-play, team-based activity, and practical assessment tools. The long-term goal of the program is to lay the foundation for a sustainable and innovative medical education system that meets the modern needs of training medical residents and healthcare professionals. The Master’s Degree in Health Professions Education program is actively recruiting and screening



“ENHANCING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF OUR UNIVERSITIES IS A KEY GOAL WITHIN THE ONGOING REFORMS IN ARMENIA’S HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENCE SECTOR.”

—ZHANNA ANDREASYAN
MINISTER OF EDUCATION

candidates and is scheduled to begin at the start of the school year, in September 2025.

The Boston University-Armenia Medical Partnership (BU-AMP) is a multi-disciplinary program to coordinate collaboration for the improvement of healthcare in Armenia between the Aram V. Chobanian & Edward Avedisian School of Medicine and health policy and care entities in Armenia. For more information, contact Aram Kaligian, Director of the BU-AMP.

OBITUARY

Elvira Ouzounian Noted Opera Star of Armenia

WATERTOWN — Elvira Ouzounian of Watertown passed away peacefully at home, surrounded by her family on May 28, 2025. She was 91 years old.

Elvira was born in Tbilisi, Georgia on January 2, 1934, to the late Gregor and Seranik (Zakarian) Ouzounian.

Elvira was a star of Armenian opera in a career that lasted more than three decades. She made her stage debut in Yerevan in 1963 as Violetta in “La Traviata” after being invited to join the Armenian State Opera House while still a student at Tbilisi State Conservatoire.

As principal soloist at the State Opera, she played the leading female roles of almost all the classics and performed as Maria in the first staging in the Soviet Union of Bernstein’s “West Side Story.”

Elvira also had a distinguished recording career, giving more than 100 performances for the Soviet national radio network in Moscow.

For many years, her name was synonymous with the tragic heroine Anush after her debut performance in the Armenian classic opera of that name. Elvira’s enthusiasm for works by composers of Armenian national opera and folk songs was a distinctive and enduring aspect of her stage career. Part of that legacy was preserved on CD recordings of her performing arias and folk songs.

She toured internationally, including in Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Egypt, Bulgaria and Southeast Asia as well as in Canada and the United States. Her debut concert tour in the US included a performance at New York’s Carnegie Hall in 1970. Elvira was awarded as People’s Artist of Armenia in 1978 and People’s Artist of Georgia in 1985, one of only a few performers to receive the highest state honor from more than one constituent republic of the Soviet Union.

Following the Soviet Union’s collapse, Elvira made her home in Belmont and later Watertown, where she devoted her energies



to helping the next generation of musical talent. She delighted in the opportunity to foster the development of young Armenian singers through a philanthropic fund she founded, Help Young Talents.

Elvira sought to give exposure to Armenian artists through concerts that included pairing musicians from the Yerevan State Conservatory with Boston’s Longy School of Music. She worked together with the New Names of Armenia organization to help bring gifted children to Boston for performances, including at a memorable 2003 concert marking the centenary of composer Aram Khachaturian’s birth.

She was the wife of the late Robert Markaryan who predeceased her in 2016. She is survived by her sister Lora Ouzounian of Watertown, her daughter Zara Ouzounian-Halpin and granddaughter Lara Ouzounian-Halpin and her son-in-law Anthony Halpin, all of London.

Funeral Services were held at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont on June 3. The services were preceded by a brief musical tribute followed by the funeral service. Interment was private. Those wishing to make a donation in her memory instead may do so to Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church.

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Arts & Culture

Vahan Tekeyan's Poetry Recited on Armenian Cultural Day in Pasadena

PASADENA, Calif. — On Saturday, May 31, the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter participated in Armenian Cultural Day at the Pasadena Public Library – Lamanda Park Branch. The Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Society, Nor Serount Cultural Association and Tekeyan Cultural Association united to present an afternoon of traditional Armenian song, dance, music and poetry. The goal of the Lamanda Park Library's staff was to showcase the ancient and rich Armenian culture to a non-Armenian audience.

The Tekeyan Cultural Association presented a variety of Armenian poetry translated from Armenian to English for the edification of non-Armenians. In her remarks, TCA Metro Los Angeles Chapter Vice-Chairwoman Sevan Deirbadrossian noted that, spanning centuries, the Armenian people have demonstrated a great love for poetry. Deirbadrossian welcomed Aleen Yadegarian of the same chapter and a senior at Clark



Aleen Yadegarian of the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter recited the poems "Ascent" and "Judgement" by Vahan Tekeyan

Magnet High School in Glendale to the podium to recite "Ascent," which was written by Vahan Tekeyan in 1920. Yadegarian continued with a recitation of Tekeyan's "Judgement." Deirbadrossian shared the following astute observations about the "Prince of Armenian Poetry:" "Vahan Tekeyan's poems and sonnets often examine the questions of evil, the consequences of the Armenian Genocide, the diaspora, love for one's homeland and love for humanity."

Tekeyan chapter board member Mihran Toumajan recited "Woman Cleaning Lentils" by Zareh Yaldizciyan, who used the pen name Zahrad. Deirbadrossian remarked: "Some of the themes of Zahrad's poetry are the embattled common-man, the weight of being an Armenian in Istanbul and his ironic look at the absurdity of human existence."

see POETRY, page 17



Yaro Zabavskiy Teaching and Creating in Dilijan

By **Artsvi Bakhchinyan**
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/DILIJAN — Yaro (Yaroslav) Zabavskiy is a practicing artist, visual arts teacher, and head of the Arts Department at United World College Dilijan. Originally from Moscow, his curiosity and passion for the arts have taken him on a journey across the globe. Yaro discovered his love for photography in 2007, when he was admitted to UWC Atlantic College in Wales, UK. He later studied studio (applied) arts at Earlham College in Indiana, in the US, where he developed a deep interest in ceramics.

After working at the British Higher School of Art and Design in Moscow, an opportunity arose to join the faculty at UWC Dilijan. He moved to Armenia in 2016 and has been living there happily ever since.

In his artistic practice, Yaro seeks a balance between control and letting go. He values the beauty of accidents and reflects on the natural elegance of his surroundings, shaped by the forces of nature. His work in ceramics and photography has been exhibited internationally.

Dear Yaro, ceramics and photography have become the twin guiding lights in your life. Humanity has been working with ceramics since ancient times — what new directions can ceramics take in the 21st century?

I believe that the hands-on crafts and in particular the ceramics medium are becoming increasingly popular the more we immerse ourselves and surround ourselves with digital technology. Working with clay restores our sense of touch that we abandoned when got preoccupied with scrolling and swiping; that is the most important thing. Artistically, ceramics has been steadily rising as one of the hot media for contemporary arts over the last few decades. It is now at its peak in galleries and museums around the world. Look at who represented Armenia at the 60th Venice Biennale —Nina Khemchyan with her wonderful ceramic spheres. I felt so proud when I learned about it, both as Armenian citizen and a ceramicist.

Yes, last year I admired Nina Khemchyan's works in Venice! Yaro, you also practice analog photography. In today's world, where classical photography is gradually declining and being largely replaced by advanced digital technologies, what drives you to continue working with film?

I would actually disagree with this statement. After its decline in the 1990s, darkroom, film-based photography has also been on the rise. More and more film and photo paper manufacturers are returning to the market; Kodak is back in business after its bankruptcy. There are even new film cameras being produced. However, what is important to note here is that darkroom photography has returned largely as an artform, an artistic medium much like print-making, not as a tool to document reality, necessarily. Advanced digital technologies will be the mainstream, of course, they are efficient at serving many purposes of our contemporary visual culture. But film photography and many so called alternative photographic processes took their niche as creative media which place value on the originality and the presence of the human hand. As in the case with ceramics, it allows people to touch, to handle and have as a result a tangible object that exists in the material world.

see YARO, page 15

In Tactile New Works, Sheree Hovsepien Explores the Physicality of Experience

By **Dan Duray**

NEW YORK (*Observer*) — Earlier in May, Sheree Hovsepien opened "Figure Ground," her second solo exhibition at Uffner & Liu (formerly Rachel Uffner Gallery). The show features four distinct bodies of output—traditional silver gelatin photographs, ink-on-paper drawings, mixed media assemblages and bronze sculptures—and constitutes a major offering of new pieces from a celebrated artist whose work is held in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Studio Museum in Harlem, among other institutions. We recently caught up with Hovsepien to hear more about the show, which is up until June 21.

What can you tell our readers about the central ideas you're exploring in this newest body of work?

I am navigating the complexities of identity and memory through the lens of embodiment, archival processes and the interplay of the indexical and the unknown. My work is deeply informed by the dichotomy of the body as an archive—where the physical exists distinct from the psyche—allowing me to explore the physicality of experience and primordial desire.

Your work often blends photography with materials like string, wood and fabric. How do you choose which materials to incorporate, and what draws you to these tactile elements?

I am drawn to photography's indexical nature and its perception as a record of "truth" or "having been." In my collages, I work with analog photography because I am inspired by the tactility of the photography process. The ceremony of the studio as a place to make the photographs, the romance of the black-and-white darkroom process and the feel of silver gelatin paper are all core to my practice.

I love to work with my hands, which is mostly considered antithetical to photography. There is a transient state that I can tap into when my hands are busy and my mind is free to wander. The string becomes a form of mark-making and has a strong association with crafts and textile arts, which I used to do with my mother. There is a meditative quality that I am drawn to in working with the string.

Ceramic has an interesting tie with analog photography. Both take an impression and go through a chemical process, and there is a threat of failure.

You often work with quiet gestures—thread, texture, space—rather than overt narrative. Do you think of your work as a kind of visual language or poetry?

Absolutely. My hope is to create a visual language that lies somewhere
see HOVSEPIAN, page 14



ARTS & CULTURE

Sheree Hovsepian Explores the Physicality of Experience

HOVSEPIAN, from page 13
between the indexical and the unknown.

I understand that this will be your first time showing traditional photographs on their own at the gallery. Can you speak about that decision, especially juxtaposed with these larger-scale sculptural works?

Photography serves as a central medium in my exploration, embodying an indexical nature that reflects a trace of the subject while simultaneously existing as an abstract entity. I think about photography as holding a duality as both a mirror and a portal, embodying a threshold of subject and object.

I also love to think about the relationship to time that the two mediums possess. Bronze casting is an ancient method to make sculptures known for its permanence and resistance to time. It invokes antiquity and a lineage of art-making. The photograph, on the other hand, captures a moment. It has a strong association with memory and mortality. It is an ephemeral medium that is literally and figuratively disappearing every day.

Are there themes or ideas that you feel translate better in your photographs than in your collage works or vice versa?

My work often feeds on itself, meaning I may have an idea for a photograph and then revisit that idea in another way. I believe this is why my work can exist through different mediums.

This exhibition also marks a significant shift towards larger-scale sculpture. How has your relationship with sculpture evolved, and what led you in this direction?

I was interested in making a sculpture that could represent my body in space. The size of these works is to create a stand-in for me within the gallery's frame.

You've spoken about your Iranian heritage and feminist ideas influencing your work. How do these personal and political themes surface materially in your pieces, especially in such a precarious sociopolitical moment?

I think my work has more to do with my personal history as an Iranian immigrant growing up in the Midwest more than any idea of "Iranian-ness." I think my focus on the body and the idea of documenting myself within space and archival legacy is because I was made to feel like an outsider growing up. I want to cement a place where I belong, where I am and have been. I think as an artist, the only thing I can do is talk about my own experience. "The



Sheree Hovsepian (photo Levi Walton)

personal is political," as they say.

What questions are you asking yourself in the studio these days? Are there new directions or mediums you're excited to explore?

I am going to spend two weeks in the fall at the Toledo Museum of Art Glass studio as part of an artist residency.

This is incredibly exciting for me because I grew up in Toledo, and I feel like being there can be really inspiring for me. Also, I will be working with glass, which is a new material for me. I am excited to see what I can learn from working with glass about form, perception and vulnerability.



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ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Susan Jebejian's Ararat Home Kadayif

Kadayif (kadaif, kataifi) refers to shredded phyllo dough used to make a number of popular Middle Eastern desserts. Several varieties exist, including tel kadayif, yassi kadayif and ekmek kadayif. This recipe by the late Susan Jebejian is filled with a rich cream and sweetened with simple syrup. The recipe is featured in *Reflections of an Armenian Kitchen, a Special Collection of Favorite Recipes* originally printed in 1995 by the Ladies Guilds of Ararat Home in Los Angeles. In the cookbook's 8th edition from 2016, all recipes remain as they appeared in the previous printings from 1995 to 2008.

Susan was born in Istanbul and immigrated with her family to the United States in 1921. She grew up in Detroit and moved to Los Angeles in 1936. She and her beloved husband, Dick, were instrumental in the planning and building of the Ararat Home for the Armenian elderly in Los Angeles. She served as president and treasurer of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Home. She took great pride in the Home and the contributions of service and dedication the Jebejian family made to it. Susan, who passed away in 2011, was an active member of the St. James Armenian Apostolic Church in Los Angeles. She loved to cook and entertain, and was eager to volunteer her talents to the Ladies Guilds kitchen crew.

Kadayif comes from the plural of the Arabic word "qatifah," the plural for velvet. The same ingredient is called "kunafa" in Arabic, which refers to another dessert similar to kadayif but stuffed with cheese. The name first appeared in an Ottoman translation of the Arabic cookbook *Kitab al-Tabikh* translated by Muhammed bin Mahmud Şirvani, a 15th century Ottoman physician. According to

oral tradition in Diyarbakır, formerly Diyarbekir, the first kadayif vendor in the city was an Armenian shop owner named Agop. (See Notes). A version filled with walnuts or pistachios flavored with cinnamon was traditionally served by the Sephardic Jewish community of Jerusalem during Rosh Hashanah and Purim.

INGREDIENTS:

2 lbs. kadayif dough, completely thawed out and at room temperature (It is usually found in Middle Eastern stores and markets. Thaw properly before using. Place the box in the refrigerator the night before you will use it.)

- 1 1/2 cups unsalted butter, melted
- 1 quart half and half
- 2 pints whipping cream
- 3/4 cup cornstarch
- 3/4 cup milk

Syrup:

- 4 cups sugar
- 3 cups water
- Few drops fresh lemon juice

PREPARATION:

Cut and fluff 1 lb. kadayif dough in a large bowl with hands. Add half the melted butter and mix until strands are evenly coated. Spread evenly in lightly buttered 13x17-inch baking sheet pan.

Combine the half and half and heavy cream in large saucepan. Bring to slow boil over low heat.

Combine the cornstarch and milk, stirring until cornstarch is dissolved. Slowly add to the cream mixture, stirring constantly, until mixture returns to a slow boil. Spread hot cream filling over kadayif in pan.

Cut and fluff remaining 1 lb. of kadayif in the bowl. Add remaining melted butter and mix with hands until strands are evenly coated. Spread over the top of the cream layer, pressing down firmly to form an even surface. Place on lowest oven rack and bake at 450°F for about 20 to 25 minutes, or until golden. If not golden, move pan to top rack and bake 5 to 10 minutes longer.

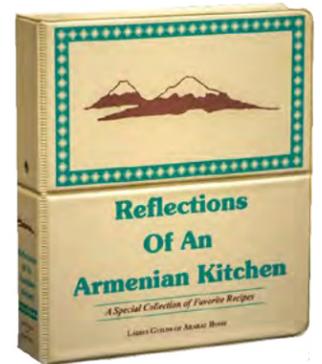
Prepare syrup: Combine sugar and water in a saucepan and boil 5 to 10 minutes, stirring. Add a few drops of lemon juice. Cool. Pour cold syrup evenly over kadayif as soon as it is removed from the oven. Allow the pastry to fully absorb the syrup and serve. Cut into squares.

Makes 24-30 servings

For this recipe, go to: <https://obaozio.github.io/baozi/projects/rit/iste140/exercises/ice09/recipe2.html>

Note: A story in AL-MONITOR states that Diyarbakir owes its famous dessert, kadaif, to the 18th century Armenian population. "Turks, Greeks and Middle Easterners claim kadaif, a delicious dessert that can be made into different shapes. In the southeastern Turkish city of Diyarbakir, locals believe that the dessert was first baked in the Armenian houses of the cosmopolitan city in the 18th century."

The Ararat Home cookbook is dedicated to "the men and women who reside and are cared for at Ararat Home. They represent older men and women in this country who have a rich and interesting knowledge of traditional dishes from our Armenian heritage." Cookbooks are on sale for \$30 each in the Ararat Home Gift Shop or can be ordered by writing to: info@ararathome.org or calling (818) 365-3000. Go to: <https://ararathome.org/general-news/ararat-home-cookbook-in-its-8th-edition>



Yaro Zabavskiy: Teaching and Creating in Dilijan

YARO, from page 13

It will soon be 10 years since you moved to Armenia. Has the local environment and culture influenced your art — and if so, how?

When I was moving to Armenia, I had no idea I would stay here for this long. But I fell in love with the country, its people, their beautiful land and their rich and vibrant culture. Much like with romantic love, the feeling grew into something deeper and I got officially "married" to Armenia by becoming its citizen in 2022. In my ceramic practice I am mostly inspired by the diverse topography and seasonal changes that I observe while travelling around Armenia. Rock formations around lake Sevan and lush greenery of Dilijan all make their way into my clay works, photography and recently — printmaking as well.

I once had the pleasure of attending your students' exhibition at UWC Dilijan — it left a lasting impression thanks to its unique atmosphere. What makes UWC Dilijan, and teaching there, different from other similar schools?

UWC Dilijan is a unique institution where I am being empowered as an art teacher to bring out the best in my students. That empowerment happens through respect for the arts from administration, through wonderful facilities, the right tools and generous budget. But I believe one of the most important elements in this equation is trust. I am trusted to do my very best job and that trust both elevates and places a huge responsibility on me and on everyone at the school. That does not save anyone from making mistakes, by the way, but it does open a gateway to meaning and freedom and I am glad to hear that it translates to the students' artworks.

Over the years, you've taught several generations of students. Are there any suc-

cess stories that particularly stand out?

In the more conventional definition of a success story, I have cases every year when choosing to study the visual arts (they have a freedom to choose or not to choose an arts subject) changes their life plans and they pursue higher education in the arts with an intention to pursue a career in the world of art and design. But I also sometimes hear back from students who message me saying that they are studying medicine or law in university and continue to paint or photograph or sculpt in their free time. That to me is not less of a success story.

Most foreigners in Armenia settle in Yerevan, yet UWC Dilijan feels like an oasis. Do you consider yourself a Dilijantsi now — especially after you became an Armenian citizen?

Absolutely — yes, I totally consider myself a Dilijantsi now. While many foreign-

ers move to Yerevan for the traffic jams, flat whites, cool bars and the joy of arguing with taxi drivers, I made the obviously superior choice: I chose Dilijan — the land of the morning mountain fog, forests and the not so guilty pleasures of village life. I know which potholes are seasonal, which butcher to go for the best *chalahaj* (pork chop), which Molokan family to order dairy from. After nearly a decade here I have survived more town-wide water shutoffs than I can count and have earned the right to call myself a Dilijantsi!

Thank you for your answers, Yaro! I wish you continued inspiration in creating and teaching in an Armenia that finds peace and dignity. And may Ruben Vardanyan, co-founder of UWCD, return soon from imprisonment, along with all other Armenian detainees.

Thank you! All of my prayers are now with Ruben Vardanyan and his family. May he and every single Armenian illegally detained in Baku return to their homeland as soon as possible.

Amen!



ARTS & CULTURE

Armenian Museum of America Celebrates Opening Night of Artist-in-Residence Program

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Museum of America welcomed a full house for the opening night of its new “Music in Color: Artist-in-Residence” program, on May 22, headlined by violinist Haig Hovsepien and pianist Matias Nestor Cuevas.

This immersive performance series, sponsored by Nancy Kolligian, launches a new chapter in the museum’s mission to fuse Armenian heritage with global artistic expression.

Held in the Adele and Haig Der Manuelian Galleries, the evening featured a curated program spanning centuries and cultures, all while enhancing the visitor experience through a unique blend of visual and musical storytelling.



Sarah Hayes

“This series is about more than music — it’s about conversation across time, tradition, and identity,” said Executive Director Jason Sohigian. “Through Haig’s artistry, we begin to hear how Armenian heritage continues to resonate far beyond its borders.”

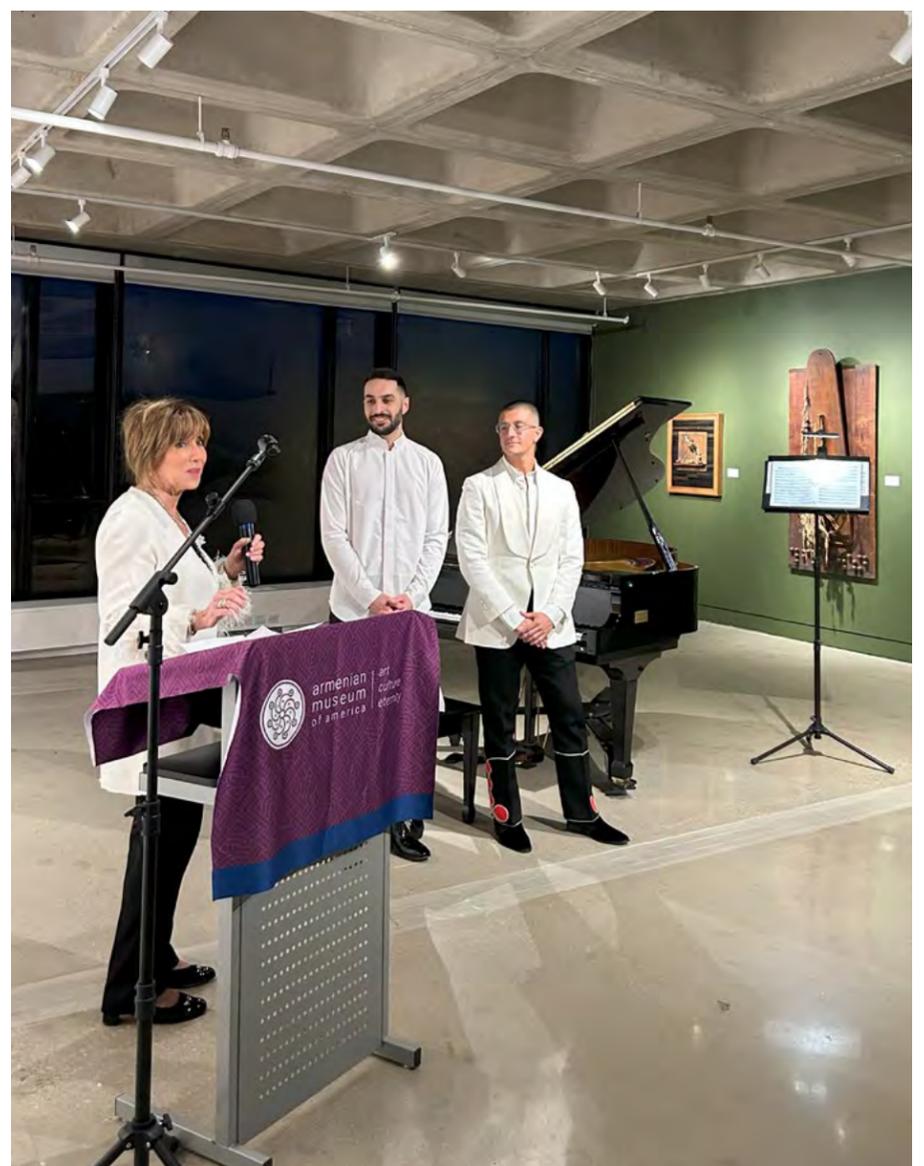
Hovsepien’s performance embodied the program’s spirit of cultural dialogue and artistic excellence, weaving Armenian identity with European classics and modern reflections. The duo captivated audiences with pieces ranging from Bartók’s earthy *Romanian Folk Dances* to Schnittke’s witty *Suite in the Old Style*, concluding with Milhaud’s richly expressive *Sonata No. 1*. Each composition, thoughtfully contextualized with references to the works of late Armenian-American artist Varujan Boghosian, resonated deeply with the Museum’s ongoing commitment to connecting past and present.



Haig Hovsepien on violin and pianist Matias Nestor Cuevas



From left, Haig Hovsepien, Sarah Hayes, Nancy Kolligian and Matias Nestor Cuevas



Nancy Kolligian, left



ARTS & CULTURE

Vahan Tekeyan's Poetry Recited on Armenian Cultural Day in Pasadena

POETRY, from page 7

To conclude the poetry portion, Toumajan recited "Deprivation" by Missak Manouchian, a genocide survivor, poet and hero of the French Resistance against Nazism. Manouchian was executed by a Nazi firing squad in 1944 at age 34. In 2024, Manouchian and his wife, Mélinée, were laid to rest in Paris' Panthéon mausoleum alongside other French national heroes.

On behalf of the Tekeyan Cultural Association, Deirbadrossian presented the books *Death Marches Past the Front Door: Clara and Fritz Sigrist-Hilty, Swiss Eyewitnesses to the Armenian Dante-Inferno in Turkey (1915-1918)*, *A Legacy of Armenian Treasures: Testimony to a People* and *Vahan Tekeyan: Selected Poems* to Christine K. Reeder, Senior Librarian. Reeder expressed her appreciation and noted the three books will be catalogued and available at the Pasadena Public Library - Lamanda Park Branch very shortly.



Metro Los Angeles Chapter Vice-Chairwoman Sevan Deirbadrossian provided brief biographies about the poets Vahan Tekeyan, Zahrad and Missak Manouchian



TCA Metro Los Angeles Chapter board member Mihran Toumajan recited "Woman Cleaning Lentils" by Zahrad and "Deprivation" by Missak Manouchian



Organizers of the program from Tekeyan, Nor Serount and Hamazkayin.

Exhibit on Rescued Armenian Rugs and Tapestries at Ararat-Eskijian Museum

MISSION HILLS, Calif. — The Ararat-Eskijian-Museum and Research Center (AEMRC), California State University, Northridge Armenian Studies Department and the Armenian Rug Society presents "Threads of Hope: Collections of Heirlooms Rescued from Suffering to reflect on the Miraculous Revival of Armenian Life."

The exhibition will continue to be open on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 12 pm to 5 pm on June 5th, 7, 8th, 12, 14 & 15.

For more than 30 years, the AEMRC has been collecting embroideries from families and their loved ones to be preserved for future generations. Alone, the embroidery collection at our museum has exceeded over one thousand pieces, out of which two hundred fifty pieces will be displayed.

The oldest collection is from Eregly, Konarya, dated 1870. Most of the embroideries have been preserved by families as these heirlooms survived during the genocide as a testament of our young maiden's creative world. The 19th century-Armenian home featured an abundance of laces, embroidered textiles, especially during weddings and feasts, when they displayed their finest. These intricate needle works are the outcome of a society where there was no rights or prestige for the young maidens. Therefore, their embroideries became their "voice"; stitches instead of words, became their inner world.

This exhibition shares with the community the resilience of Armenian women and their survival after their horrific ordeal and their zeal to re-establish their lives.

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

- MAY 18-JUNE 21** — Events at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church.
- Sunday, May 18, 10:30 a.m., with Holy Mass Dedicated to Our Beloved Mothers at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in Belmont, followed by the Raffle.
 - Monday, May 19, Khachkar Café (For Men), at 6:30 p.m., Nishan & Margrit Atinikian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont.
 - Saturday, June 7, Jubilee Year Pilgrimage, with departure at 9 a.m. from the church to St. John Paul II Shrine of Divine Mercy, Salem. For tickets email holycrossbostonma@gmail.com
 - Saturday, June 21, World Music Day Concert featuring violinist Haig Hovsepian and cellist Dilshod Narzillae, 6 p.m. 200 Lexington ST., Belmont. Reception to follow. For tickets email holycrossbostonma@gmail.com.
- JUNE 8** — St. James Armenian Festival – Annual Picnic! Delicious Armenian food, Live Armenian music, children's activities, inflatable slide, and more! Sunday, Rain or shine. Noon-5 p.m. St. James Armenian Church - 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown. For more info visit www.stjameswatertown.org/festival or call 617.923.8860.
- JUNE 12** — Under the Strawberry Moon. Thursday at 8:30 pm. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Meet & greet, old friends & new. enjoy luscious chocolate dipped strawberries, hosted by Ovenbird Café, owner/chef Jason Reed. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org
- JUNE 22** — Celebrating What Unites Us! Sunday at 4 pm. highlights: Ghana. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org
- JULY 2** — St. James Armenian Church in Watertown will host His Beatitude Archbishop Sahak II Mashalian, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, as he visits the Boston community during his visit to the United States. A community-wide hrshapar service will take place at St. James in the early evening, followed by a reception. All are welcome. Please save the date - full details to follow.
- JULY 10** — Under the July Moon. Thursday at 8 pm. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Meet & greet, old friends & new. Enjoy grilled chicken satay with the bone sauce, hosted by chef Joe Johnson, owner & founder. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org
- JULY 20** — Celebrating What Unites Us! Sunday at 4 pm. Highlights: Ireland. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org
- JULY 28** — St. James Armenian Church, 25th Annual Harold Partamian Golf Tournament, Oakley Country Club, rain or shine, scramble format, raffle & silent auction, following golf-cocktails, appetizers and banquet dinner at Oakley Country Club. Monday. Please see church website for full information, church office 617-923-8860
- AUGUST 3** — Under the August Moon. Sunday at 7.30 pm. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Meet & greet, old friends & new. Enjoy Dan Teager's Black Sea Salsa Combo while sipping on refreshing citrus spritzers. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org
- AUGUST 17** — Celebrating What Unites Us! Sunday at 4 pm. Highlights: Italy. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org
- SEPTEMBER 20** — Celebrate Armenia! Heritage. Culture. Traditions. Saturday, 1:30-8 pm. On the occasion of Armenian Independence Day on September 21. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Rain date: September 27. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org
- NOVEMBER 21** — AMAA's Boston Child Care Committee presents an evening supporting the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan, Armenia, FEATURING COMEDIAN 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.

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



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Why I Participated In the Oslo Freedom Forum and What I Learned

By Jonathan Spangenberg

In 2024, Azerbaijan, a country ruled by the genocidal dictator Ilham Aliyev and notorious for its long-standing record of grave human rights violations, played host to COP29, the UN Climate Conference. The decision to grant such a platform to a regime responsible for the genocide of Armenians in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), carried out through a nine-month hunger blockade followed by military aggression and mass displacement, was not only controversial but deeply alarming. It was in the wake of this international event that I became fully immersed in a global civic campaign focused on a profoundly human appeal: the release of the at least 23 Armenian hostages held in Baku.

Within the global Armenian community and beyond, there are varying views on the effectiveness of activism and advocacy related to the hostages. Some even question whether advocacy and international pressure can truly bring change, especially when the Armenian government itself remains noticeably passive on this issue.

While I understand this skepticism, I firmly believe that silence ensures impunity. Change rarely happens overnight, but history shows that sustained pressure, moral clarity and international solidarity do make a difference. Activism and advocacy may not yield immediate results, but they are often the only forces that keeps injustice from being forgotten.

I WAS PARTICULARLY STRUCK BY HOW WELL-INFORMED SOME PARTICIPANTS WERE, NOT ONLY ABOUT THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE OF 1915 BUT ALSO ABOUT THE ONGOING GENOCIDE IN ARTSAKH.

As a German citizen and chairman of the Central Council of Armenians in Germany, I took my concerns directly to national political leaders. I reached out to the Chancellor, the President, the Federal Foreign Office, and numerous members of the Bundestag. The responses I received were varied, some supportive while others were more cautious but what became unmistakably clear was that in order to truly build international pressure, we must go beyond institutional channels and national boundaries. We need to mobilize people of conscience across the world who see this not as an isolated ethnic conflict, but as a profound human rights crisis. That realization led me to the Oslo Freedom Forum.

The Oslo Freedom Forum (OFF) is an annual international gathering organized by the Human Rights Foundation. It brings together some of the world's most courageous human rights defenders, journalists, artists, and political dissidents to share their stories and strategies in the fight against authoritarianism. OFF focuses particularly on societies where freedom is under attack, offering a unique platform for those who have suffered repression to inspire collective action and global solidarity.

An activist from our #FreeArmenianHostages civic movement told me about the Oslo Freedom Forum, which led me to discover this important platform. Intrigued, I applied to participate, driven by the hope that I could use this influential stage to amplify the story of the Armenian hostages on a global level.

When I submitted my application months earlier, I was uncertain whether I would be accepted or how best to raise the issue once there. Upon receiving confirmation of my participation, with the clear intention to spotlight the fate of the hostages, I connected with another activist from France representing the Libertas collective. Together, we strategized around three core objectives: to inform the broader audience, to ensure the plight of the Armenian hostages gained visibility beyond our immediate community and to build bridges for future cooperation with allies worldwide.

Together with friends from Norway, we planned a small protest at the site of the Forum, and prepared flyers with QR codes linked to our movement. In my suitcase, I had packed a megaphone, the flyers and a banner showing our hostages. One day before the OFF started, I met Michal from Libertas and Sven, our Norwegian friend who had registered the protest. Though it was our first time meeting in person, we quickly finalized our plans and already spoke about preparations for next year.

On the morning of May 26, I arrived early to register at the forum. For a moment, my thoughts turned to the Battle of Sardarabad, which took place on the same date in 1918 and led to Armenia's first independence. That historical memory gave me strength.

From the very beginning, I was struck by how exceptionally well-organized the Oslo Freedom Forum was. Around 1,400 participants from across the globe had gathered for this powerful event. Even before the official opening and the first keynote speakers, I had already begun speaking with attendees about the Armenian hostages in Baku.

The speeches and testimonies of the first day were not only moving, they were profoundly inspiring. I was especially touched by the story of Kim Yumi, a North Korean defector who, along with her family, risked everything in pursuit of freedom. Equally impactful were the voices of Maria Sarungi Tsehai, a prominent Tanzanian human rights activist, and Canadian journalist and author Judi Rever, who courageously spoke about Paul Kagame and the hidden truths surrounding the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. Their stories, and those of many others, reminded me that the struggle against tyranny is universal, transcending borders and individual conflicts. In essence, it is the story of Haig and Bel: the legendary Armenian forefather who rose against the tyrant and fought for freedom.

Throughout the three days of the forum, alongside the various workshops, debates and keynote talks, we had meaningful conversations with many people who were genuinely open and eager to learn more about the Armenian hostages in Baku and the rights of the Artsakh Armenians. Many not only showed interest, but also asked how they could support the cause.

I was particularly struck by how well-informed some participants were, not only about the Armenian Genocide of 1915 but also about the ongoing genocide in Artsakh.

One powerful example was Tekle, a Tigrayan scholar, who not only used the term *Artsakh* with familiarity but also offered a thoughtful analysis of the recurring patterns in genocidal strategies perpetrated by different regimes. These interactions highlighted the value of the forum as a space for dialogue and connection. My first takeaway was the importance of simply being present on global stages like OFF, even when our own cause is not yet at the center of attention.

We had scheduled our protest for 5 p.m. on the second day of the forum, timing it for when all participants would be leaving the venue. Earlier that day, one of the Forum organizers approached us to express awareness of our planned protest and signaled his solidarity with our cause. As the time approached, it was raining cats and dogs - but remarkably, the downpour stopped just as our protest began. We were a group of about 15 people, including members of the Armenian community in Norway and supportive Norwegian friends. Through our activist network, we amplified the message across social media, reaching many others.

This year's forum was titled "Imagine," and it inspired me to do just that. I imagined a powerful keynote speaker next year featuring the testimony of an Artsakh Armenian. I also envisioned a broader Armenian presence, not just two participants from two countries, but twenty voices from twenty different countries. The forum has the potential to become a crucial platform to support the global effort to hold Ilham Aliyev, the genocidal dictator of Azerbaijan, accountable before the International Criminal Court in The Hague. And while we were there this year to bring attention to the plight of Armenian hostages in Baku, one of the most meaningful takeaways for me was the opportunity to express our solidarity with other courageous individuals who are also fighting for freedom on different places of the world.

As an Armenian by choice, I experienced the Oslo Freedom Forum as a place where the very spirit of freedom that Haig Nahabed once embodied and that became the genesis of the Armenian people is alive and shared by all who gather there. And in a world that today seems to be shifting toward tyranny and authoritarianism, this spirit stands firm, offering hope and solidarity. I remain convinced that freedom will prevail and that our struggle to bring our hostages home is not only just but destined to succeed. #FreeArmenianHostages

(Jonathan Spangenberg was born in Germany but grew up in Anjar, Lebanon from 1984 to 2004, where his parents were responsible for the boarding school at the Armenian Evangelical School of Anjar. He studied history and since 2022, has been the chairman of the board of the Central Council of Armenians in Germany.)



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Pashinyan and Partner Use Vulgar Slanders to Smear The Armenian Church

In recent months, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has exhibited frequent episodes of erratic behavior that raise serious questions about his mental stability. During parliamentary appearances, he screams at those who question him, wildly flailing his arms, and even threatens to jail his political opponents. Such conduct is both bizarre and wholly inappropriate for the head of Armenia's government.

Whatever Pashinyan's mental state was before the Artsakh war, it has clearly deteriorated since the catastrophic defeat Armenia suffered in 2020 under his leadership. Typically, political leaders responsible for disastrous outcomes, generals who suffer major battlefield losses and corporate heads whose mismanagement drives their companies into bankruptcy swiftly resign or are replaced by a more competent person who can take over and do damage control. Regrettably, Pashinyan's refusal to resign only deepens Armenia's precarious situation.

Pashinyan displayed another example of his irrational behavior during last week's cabinet session, when he launched an unprovoked tirade against the Armenian Apostolic Church and its clergy. "I officially say our churches are storage rooms. S-t-o-r-a-g-e-r-o-o-m-s. Inside the church, there are piles of garbage, bags of cement, shoes, old clothes, old bed, leftover materials, and rusty rebar." This statement constitutes a false and unwarranted attack on the Armenian Church, especially considering that he did not identify a single church in such a condition. The Prime Minister may have seen construction materials that are stored during church renovations.

Pashinyan's unnecessary outburst ignited a bitter exchange between himself joined by Anna Hakobyan (his partner, since they are not married), and several clergymen.

In a series of inappropriate Facebook posts, Pashinyan asserted that "all clergymen who have violated their oath of celibacy must leave spiritual service." This is none of the prime minister's business. His statement clearly oversteps his authority and infringes upon the constitutional separation of church and state.

Pashinyan then wrote on his Facebook page: "The Republic of Armenia must have a decisive vote in the election of the Catholicos of All Armenians. Candidates for Catholicos must pass a background check." This too represents an unwarranted intrusion into the church's internal affairs, violating the Constitution.

The dispute worsened when Pashinyan used a shockingly vulgar remark to respond to a bishop who had called his earlier statement "disgraceful." Incredibly, the prime minister posted on his Facebook page: "Srpazan [Eminence], go back to banging your uncle's wife, what business do you have with me?" Such language is unbecoming of Armenia's leader and more appropriate for a street thug.

Seventeen non-governmental organizations issued a joint statement condemning Pashinyan for exploiting women as sexual objects to attack his op-

ponents. In my opinion, what Pashinyan wrote is libelous, providing ample grounds for legal action by the bishop. I have filed a complaint with Facebook against Pashinyan for violating its Community Standards by posting this defamatory statement.

Not to be outdone, Anna Hakobyan, Pashinyan's partner, escalated the conflict further. On her Facebook page, she proclaimed inappropriately: "The country's main pedophiles are demonized by the word 'storeroom.' Of course, that's how it should be. Aren't storerooms the dark corners of the lives of black-vested maniacs? After all, it is in storerooms that perversions take place..." She also lambasted the World Council of Churches conference on Artsakh held last week in Switzerland, which was attended by Catholicos Karekin II and other dignitaries, by asking: "What are you doing in Switzerland?" She then ridiculed the efforts to assist Artsakh Armenians: "Whom are you sending securely to their native cradle, whom do you immediately free from captivity? Do you know what spirituality is? That's news for you. The country's chief spiritual mafia leader [referring to Catholicos Karekin II] is clearly indignant that a conversation has been opened about storerooms. Otherwise, why would they attack the elected leader of the state?" It appears that Anna was incensed by Catholicos's attempts to reverse Pashinyan's surrender of Artsakh.

Hakobyan then posted a vulgar and libelous statement on Facebook about an Armenian journalist who had criticized her. She wrote: "According to reliable information, [journalist] Boris Murazi is providing sexual services to [former President] Serzh Sargsyan and some of his favorite bishops. I have been told about this for several years. I did not believe it. Now it is obvious. I think the relevant agencies already have video recordings in the drawers." This vicious attack crosses all red lines of morality and decency. Murazi should file a lawsuit for libel. I have already reported her falsehoods to Facebook.

Had Pashinyan and Hakobyan expressed their disagreements with the Catholicos in a civilized language, it would have been somewhat understandable. However, using such vulgar language is utterly deplorable. Over the years, I have engaged in numerous disagreements with various high-ranking clergymen and former and current political leaders of Armenia, but I have never resorted to using abusive language. One can disagree without being disagreeable.

Pashinyan ascended to power in 2018 by falsely assuring the Armenian public that he would lead a movement for "love and tolerance." Yet, seven years later, it is evident that he has done the exact opposite. He has abused his authority to spread hatred and intolerance. Azerbaijan's media gleefully reported the Prime Minister's attacks on the Armenian Church, aligning him with Pres. Ilham Aliyev and Allahshukur Pashazade, the Grand Mufti of Azerbaijan, in their denunciation of the Church. Ultimately, Pashinyan and his partner appear to use these vulgar statements to divert the public's attention from the regime's array of damaging, anti-Armenian policies. After ceding Armenian control of Artsakh and parts of the Republic of Armenia to Azerbaijan and attacking the sacred symbols of Armenia's statehood, this couple is now intent on undermining the 1,700-year-old religious institution that is central to Armenian identity.

To get rid of this national scourge before he destroys Armenia, I suggest that Karekin II and Aram I Vehapars order all Armenian churches -- in Armenia and the Diaspora -- to toll their bells, urging hundreds of thousands of Armenians to gather in front of the Prime Minister's building and remain until Pashinyan resigns.

The Hidden Crisis in Armenian Schools

Bullying Leaves Lasting Scars

By Shoghik Mikayelyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

"I saw it happen — older boys mocking and calling a younger boy names like it was a game. But it wasn't. It was cruel," 14-year-old student, Gegharkunik Province.

In a world where emotional intelligence is increasingly valued, schools are still grappling with a silent epidemic — bullying. Despite global awareness and extensive international research, the phenomenon remains under-addressed in Armenia.

Bullying remains a widespread issue across the globe, affecting more than 30 percent of students and leaving lasting impacts on mental health, academic performance, and school attendance (UNESCO, 2023). According to UNICEF, approximately 150 million adolescents aged 13 to 15 have experienced peer-to-peer violence in or around school (UNICEF, 2023). Regional data reveals stark differences, with the highest prevalence in the Eastern Mediterranean region (45.1 percent), followed closely by Africa (43.5 percent), and the lowest in Europe (8.4 percent) (PLOS ONE, 2023). In the United States, 19.2 percent of students aged 12–18 reported being bullied during the 2021–2022 school year (NCES, 2023). Bullying is more common among middle school students (26.3 percent) than high school students (15.7 percent), and female students report higher rates of bullying (21.8 percent) compared to males (16.7 percent) (StopBullying.gov, 2023).

Additionally, about 22 percent of bullied students experienced cyberbullying, including harassment via the internet or text messages (NCES, 2023).

These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted prevention strategies and supportive interventions across all educational settings. Though Armenia has only recently begun discussing this issue publicly, the statistics are deeply alarming. A 2018 survey by World Vision revealed that 38 percent of Armenian children witnessed physical violence in their communities, and 35 percent saw bullying in schools.

Local organizations like Nor Luyce have taken initiatives. Their 2020 research in Gyumri showed that 69 percent of students identified bullying as a serious problem. Teachers echoed these concerns, with 62 percent confirming bullying in their communities, though only 39 percent said students had turned to them for help. Meanwhile, 82 percent observed psychological symptoms in affected students — ranging from depression and social withdrawal to declining academic performance (Mikayelyan, 2023).

In 2023, Nor Luyce expanded its research across Armenia. Of 500 surveyed students, 47 percent reported being bullied in their own classroom. Most common was social bullying (89 percent), followed by physical bullying (10 percent). In a pilot anti-bullying program, 87 percent of 175 adolescents reported past experiences of bullying, with girls more often facing relational aggression and boys more likely to encounter physical aggression (Mikayelyan, 2023).

Teachers, too, observed troubling patterns: 38 percent reported a sharp drop in academic engagement, and 43 percent said students had confided in them, hoping for help. These findings reveal not only the prevalence of bul-

lying—but the emotional isolation and fear that often accompany it (Mikayelyan, 2023).

That fear is captured painfully in the words of a 15-year-old schoolgirl from Armenia's Tavush region:

"I saw bullying with my own eyes. A group of older boys — maybe 15 to 17 — were ganging up on younger ones. I wanted to step in, but fear held me back. I was scared to get closer. When I got home, I couldn't stop thinking about it. I regretted not helping. But even if I had, what could I have done? They were older, stronger, and there were many of them. Still, that moment haunts me. I can't forget it. It terrifies me."

Her story is not unique. It echoes the voices of hundreds of Armenian children who are silently suffering or standing by, unsure of how to act.

To classify a situation as bullying, experts define two key elements: a power imbalance, where the aggressor or aggressors intentionally use physical strength, popularity, or social leverage to harm someone; and repetition, meaning the behavior occurs more than once or has the potential to (Olweus, 1993).

Most bullying happens when the target is alone—no friends nearby, no teachers in sight. It's in those quiet, unsupervised moments that children often experience the greatest fear.

The solution requires more than just awareness. It demands action—systemic, community-based, and grounded in education and empathy. Schools must become safe havens, not silent battlegrounds.

Until then, as long as students continue to feel helpless in the face of cruelty, we must keep asking: Are we doing enough to protect our children?



Khazadian's Atlas of Historical Cartography of Armenia Reprint Presented at Moscow's St. Regis Nikolskaya Hotel

By Gohar Botoyan

MOSCOW — The reprint of Zadig Khazadian's *Atlas of Historical Cartography of Armenia* was presented in Moscow on May 20 at the famous St. Regis Moscow Nikolskaya Hotel in the center of the Russian capital on the initiative of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Armenia and the



Philanthropist and president of the Rutsog Invest holding company Ruben Grigoryan

Rutsog Invest holding company. Members of both the Russian and Russian-Armenian communities were present.

The speakers at the event included philanthropist and president of the Rutsog Invest holding company Ruben Grigoryan,



President of the Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Union of Armenia Ruben Mirzakhanyan

President of the Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Union of Armenia Ruben Mirzakhanyan, who is a doctor of Historical Sciences, professor and Honored Worker of Culture of the Republic of Armenia, Academician of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia and doctor of Historical Sciences Professor Ruben Safrastyan, Russian historian, ethnographer, and professor of the Russian Academy of Sciences Alexey Zagreb, General Director of the Scientific Park of the Lomonosov Moscow State University Oleg Movsesyan, and chief architect of a number of significant Moscow projects, including the St. Regis Moscow Nikolskaya Hotel and the Sheremetyevo commercial and office complex, and head of the Rutsog Invest design and construction company Zaza Verulashvili.

The speakers congratulated those responsible for the reprinting of the Khazadian atlas. They expressed their gratitude to the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Armenia and to the well-known businessman and philanthropist Ruben Tsolaki Grigoryan, president of the Rutsog Invest holding company, who was the wellspring of the reprinting of the atlas.

Grigoryan in turn solemnly presented the representatives of the Russian museums present at the event with the maps he published. These maps can be viewed online at the following link: <https://www.armmuseum.ru/?ysclid=mawrz1o832865017358>

For more information on the contents of the book and about Khazadian, see this April 23 article in the *Mirror-Spectator* covering its prior Yerevan presentation (<https://mirrorspectator.com/2025/04/23/khazadians-atlas-of-historical-cartography-of-armenia-reprint-presented-at-yerevans-tekeyan-center/>)

The above article is a translation and adaption of the Armenian language one in the newspaper *Azg*.



The atlas reprint on display



Guests at the Moscow event examine an atlas on display