

Yerevan Rules Out US Lease On Corridor for Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Azatutyun.am) — The Armenian government on Monday, July 14, ruled out the possibility of the United States taking over a land corridor that would connect Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave through Armenia.

The US ambassador to Turkey, Thomas Barrack, indicated late last week that Washington has proposed a 100-year lease on such a transport link in a bid to

and says, ‘Okay, we’ll take it over. Give us the 32 kilometers of road on a hundred-year lease, and you can all share it,’” he said. “But these tribal points of view do not fade.”

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s press secretary, Nazeli Baghdasaryan, dismissed the idea in comments to the official Armenpress news agency.

“We have repeatedly said that Armenia

es.

“Therefore, the option mentioned by the US ambassador is not possible,” she said.

Barrack’s comments are consistent with reports that the US proposed recently that Armenian border and customs checks for the transit of people and cargo to and from Nakhichevan be outsourced to an American company. The US State Department did not confirm or deny the reports last week.

Armenia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Mnatsakan Safaryan told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service on July 10 that Yerevan is ready, in principle, to discuss such an arrangement.

“This process must be carried out under the sovereignty, jurisdiction, and territorial integrity of Armenia,” said Safaryan. “If it complies with these principles, then yes, it can be carried out.”

Baghdasaryan appeared to contradict Safaryan’s statement, however, saying that Armenia is “not discussing outsourcing control over its own sovereign territory to any third party.”

“No part of the territory of the Republic of Armenia can be outside the territorial integrity, sovereignty, or jurisdiction of the Republic of Armenia,” added Pashinyan’s spokeswoman.

Armenian opposition leaders and other critics of Pashinyan have expressed serious concern about the reported US proposal. They say that such an arrangement

see BORDER, page 2



Armenia’s border with Iran in Syunik province, April 12, 2025

facilitate a peace deal between the two South Caucasus nations.

“They [Armenia and Azerbaijan] are arguing over 32 kilometers of road, but this is no joke,” Barrack told reporters in New York. “It’s been going on for a decade – 32 kilometers of road.”

“So what happens is America comes in

is discussing the issue of unblocking regional infrastructures exclusively in the context of Armenia’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and jurisdiction,” she said. “We cannot discuss any other logic.”

Baghdasaryan also argued that Armenian law allows only the lease of agricultural land for farming or grazing purposes.

Detained Russian–Armenian Billionaire Karapetyan to Found New ‘Political Force’

By Yousef Bardouka

Samvel Karapetyan, a Russian–Armenian billionaire detained on charges of making calls for the overthrow of the government, has announced plans to create a “fundamentally new political force” through which he could cooperate with “like-minded people.”

Karapetyan made the announcement through a Facebook post from detention on Monday morning, July 14.



Samvel Karapetyan

In the post, he thanked the ‘tens of thousands’ of his supporters who protested and called for his release from detention.

He went on to briefly outline his plans to create a “fundamentally new political force,” while apparently shunning the work of Armenia’s opposition parties.

see KARAPETYAN, page 2

Armenian Priests Reaffirm Support for Church Head

YEREVAN (Azatutyun.am) — Parish priests from across Armenia on Friday, July 11, joined senior clergymen in reaffirming support for Catholicos Karekin II and condemning Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s efforts to depose the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

In a joint statement adopted during an annual conference in Echmiadzin, they also deplored the “political persecution” of two archbishops and Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan arrested last month.

“The inappropriate behavior and obscene language displayed by the Armenian authorities towards the Holy Church, their continuous threats and blatant attempts to split the clergy offend the noble feelings of our believers around the world and also directly violate Armenia’s Constitution and Law on Freedom of Conscience and

see SUPPORT, page 3

Kurdish, Armenian Mass Grave Site in Siirt Opened to Development

The government-appointed administration of the Siirt Municipality has reopened an area known by its Kurdish name, Newala Qesaba, or “Creek of Butchers,” a site of mass graves, for development.

The site covering about 50 hectares contains the remains of Armenians buried in 1915 and Kurdish militants buried during the 1980s.

The Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB/UCTEA) Siirt branch secretary, Fırat Şimşek, strongly criticized the decision. He said the revised zoning plans threaten to erase the collective memory associated with the area.

Following the 2024 local elections, the newly elected municipal council, where the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Equality and Democracy (DEM) Party had the majority, had reversed a prior decision made under trustee rule, canceling plans to open the area for construction on Jun 7, 2024.

see DEVELOPMENT, page 6



ARMENIA

Armenian Food Bank Calls on Diaspora for Support

Page 5



NEW YORK

Tekeyan NY Hosts Dinner Honoring Constantinople Patriarch Sahak II

Page 11



LONDON

Klingen Ensemble Presents ‘Sounds Of Armenia In London

Page 15





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Damage from
Illegal Mining Fully
Compensated to State

ARMAVIR, Armenia (PanARMENIAN.Net) — During the preliminary investigation of a criminal case launched by the Armavir regional investigative department of the Investigative Committee of Armenia, factual data was obtained indicating that a company operating in Armenia illegally extracted and sold sand-gravel mix on leased land plots.

The unauthorized activity, considered illegal entrepreneurship, caused damage estimated at 40 million Armenian drams to the state. The Investigative Committee reported that the full amount of the damage has been recovered during the investigation.

UN: Armenia’s
Population Grows,
Aging a Concern

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenia’s permanent population reached approximately 3.075 million as of January 1, 2025 — an increase of about 84,000 compared to 2024, according to the Statistical Committee of Armenia. The urban population is 1.8 times greater than the rural population. On World Population Day, Florence Bauer, Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), presented a summary report on global and Armenian demographic trends.

UNFPA forecasts that, if current conditions persist, Armenia’s population could decline to about 2.373 million by 2050, accompanied by a notable increase in the elderly share of the population.

Between 2018 and 2023, Armenia saw a slight rise in the average number of children born per woman, with the fertility rate reaching 1.9. However, according to the Statistical Committee, more than 60% of households have no children. About 16% have two children, 15% have one child, and only about 7% have three or more. UNFPA estimates that most Armenian couples would ideally like to have three children.

The report concludes: “Therefore, it is essential to eliminate economic (funds, housing, jobs), social, health, institutional, and other barriers that prevent especially young people from having as many children as they wish.”

Vegetable and
Fish Prices Surge in
Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Vegetable prices jumped by 29% in May, and fish and seafood rose by 20%, making them the leading contributors to food price inflation in Armenia. According to the Statistical Committee of Armenia, food and non-alcoholic beverage prices increased by 7.4% in May 2025 compared to May 2024.

Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians End Sit-In
Protest Without Achieving Results

by Arshaluys Barseghyan

Following a fruitless meeting with the authorities and a small number of protesters, Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians halted their sit-in protest on Monday, July 14, which was launched with a main demand for “the solution to the urgent problems” of the refugees.

Earlier on Monday, the representatives of the protest, initiated by the Artsakh Residents’ Rights Protection Council, were received by Arman Adilkhanyan, Chief of Staff to Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Khachatryan, and Davit Khachatryan, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs.

“The meeting lasted a long time, but no agreement was reached, especially on the issue of continuing rental support. For them, people staying outside is not a valid reason,” CivilNet quoted Nagorno-Karabakh’s last Human Rights Defender Gegham Stepanyan as saying.

Earlier, admitting that the government has amended the state housing programme, Stepanyan noted many complaints still stand, especially among small families who would be unable to buy an apartment with the allocated amount.

It takes time to obtain Armenian citizenship, which is required in order to be eligible for the state housing program. In addition, finding property that is available for purchase can also take time.

“At the moment, 1,900 certificates have been issued, we are talking about 25,000 beneficiary families, [...] of which 300–400 have been realized. It takes time for people to find the place where they will live their whole lives, where will people live during that entire period?”, Stepanyan said on Saturday.

Monday’s meeting came as the refugees protested in front of the government

building to hand over a petition to Deputy Prime Minister Khachatryan.

The action followed a sit-in protest at Yerevan’s Freedom Square, launched after a rally on Saturday where they demanded protection of their rights.

The rally was attended by over 2,000 people, a significantly small number compared to their first major rally at the end of March which saw roughly 10,000 protesters.

Following their sit-in protest launched on Saturday, the demonstrators later moved near the government building, explaining that their protest was directed at the authorities.

“The council’s position is that we are currently ending the street struggle phase,” council member Apres Margaryan said following the Monday meeting. He noted that it was impossible to reach a result with a small number of protesters.

Margaryan additionally criticized former MPs and officials of Nagorno-Karabakh for not standing with the protesters. He additionally noted that a small number of Armenian opposition figures attended the rally.

At the same time, Margaryan noted that the council would continue its activities, leaving the territory of the Nagorno-Karabakh representation, where they were stationed following their sit-in protests earlier this year.

In April, protesters agreed to remove their protest tent from Yerevan’s Freedom Square after the government postponed cuts to assistance provided to refugees to cover rental costs.

The decision to make cuts to the aid program was adopted by the government in November 2024. The changes cut the number of people eligible to receive support, mainly excluding working-age people.

Detained Billionaire Karapetyan to Found
New ‘Political Force’

KARAPETYAN, from page 1

“I have great respect for the political forces and figures who have fought a real struggle against the policy of [Prime Minister] Nikol Pashinyan’s anti-national government. But we have our vision to build a good future for Armenia. And we will go our own way, with our new team, not excluding domestic cooperation with like-minded people.”

“Even in different circles of today’s administration, there are real professionals who don’t share the values of the small group [Civil Contract/ Pashinyan’s government], but still don’t see the way out of the situation,” he said, adding that the “formation of our political team has begun.”

“We will do it in our own way,” he concluded his post in an allusion to the remark he had made before his arrest.

Karapetyan was charged in mid-June after making statements in support of the Armenian Church amidst its ongoing conflict with the government.

“If the politicians fail, then we will participate in our own way in all of this,” Karapetyan had said in an interview with *News.am* before his arrest.

On July 8, the authorities raided the Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA), the country’s sole electricity distributor run by Karapetyan’s Tashir Group. While no arrests were made during the raid, Narek

Karapetyan, the detained tycoon’s nephew and chair of ENA, said that investigators seized 37 documents from the company.

The raid followed the adoption of legislative amendments on 4 July that would virtually allow the state to nationalize the company.

Pashinyan had previously claimed the move was not related to Karapetyan’s pro-church statements, and was instead rooted in public discontent with the company’s services and frequent power outages in Armenia, which Pashinyan alleged were intentionally used “to generate internal public discontent.”

However, critics of the recent legislative amendments warn that the nationalization of ENA could have consequences on the country’s investment climate and foreign economic relations.

The ENA raid is part of a broader conflict between the ruling Civil Contract party and the Armenian Church, which in late June resulted in the arrest of at least 15 people on charges of seeking to violently overthrow the government with a coup d’état.

The authorities allege that the plot was spearheaded by the now-detained Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, an opposition figure who leads the anti-government Holy Struggle movement.

(This article first appeared in [OC Media](#) on July 14.)

At the same time, the government launched a new program targeting vulnerable groups. It envisages that the families whose income per person would be lower than ֏55,000 (\$140) will be provided with ֏40,000 (\$105) for the first family member, and an additional ֏10,000 (\$26) for each subsequent family member.

The assistance program launched in October 2023, immediately after the exodus of virtually the entire Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. The population fled after Azerbaijan’s final offensive into the region, which occurred after it was placed under a nine-month blockade.

(A journalist since 2016, Arshaluys Barseghyan specializes in fact-checking and open-source investigations, with a focus on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, politics, and social and gender issues. She is also a strong advocate for media literacy and closely follows Armenia’s media landscape. This article first appeared in OC Media on July 14.)

Dilijan Plans
Ropeway Project
For Tourism
Boost

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenia’s government has approved a loan agreement with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for a tourism and regional infrastructure project.

According to Radar Armenia, the project includes the construction of a ropeway connecting the center of Dilijan to the Takhta district.

The initiative aims to support 7 of Armenia’s 20 designated tourism destinations: Areni, Dilijan, Dvin, Gyumri, Jermuk, Goris, and Yeghegis. The total value of the program is €120.5 million, with €24.1 million to be co-financed by the Armenian government.

The goal is to enhance Armenia’s tourism potential through targeted infrastructure and soft investments in several provinces. Specifically, the program will promote tourism in seven distinct clusters focused on wine, wellness, adventure, culture, education, and ecotourism across Ararat, Vayots Dzor, Shirak, Tavush, and Syunik regions. It prioritizes connectivity to these clusters and upgrades to key tourism sites. The program aligns with the World Bank’s strategy to attract private capital into defined tourism clusters.

Yerevan Rules Out US
Lease On Corridor for
Azerbaijan

BORDER, from page 1

would undermine Armenian sovereignty over the transport links for Nakhichevan passing through Syunik, the only Armenian province bordering Iran.

Iran is strongly opposed to the extraterritorial corridor sought by Azerbaijan as well as Turkey. In a clear reference to the US and other Western powers, Tehran has also repeatedly spoken out against the presence of “extra-regional” forces in the South Caucasus.



ARMENIA

Armenian Flower Farmers Hit Hard by Russian Import Curbs

By Narine Ghalechian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun.am) — A group of angry greenhouse owners in the southern Armavir province demonstrated on Friday, July 11, to demand that the Armenian government take urgent action over Russia’s serious restrictions on the import of cut flowers from Armenia.

They said that due to the restrictions imposed late last month flowers grown by them are no longer shipped to Russia, their principal market.

The Russian agricultural watchdog Rosselkhoznadzor first threatened to ban the rapidly growing Armenian flower imports on June 3. It said laboratory tests conducted by it have found an alarming increase in harmful “quarantined organisms.” Armenia’s Food Safety Inspectorate scrambled to address the Russian concerns but clearly failed to satisfy Rosselkhoznadzor.

“Despite the agreements reached on strengthening phytosanitary control by the Armenian side, the import of infected flowers of unknown origin into Russia was prevented in 20 cases in 2025,” the Russian government agency said in a June 25 statement.

This testifies to the “inability of the Ar-



Workers at a flower greenhouse of the Spayka company, February 7, 2025

menian side to ensure phytosanitary safety and traceability of flower products sent to

Russia,” it said, adding that some of those flowers are grown in third countries and do not conform to the Eurasian Economic Union’s sanitary norms. The statement went on to announce that starting from June 27 only those Armenian exporters that can prove the origin of their flowers will be allowed to sell them in the vast Russian market.

The measure appears to have largely halted Armenian flower exports to Russia that reportedly reached \$32 million last year. It has hit particularly hard the kind of small-scale farmers that staged Friday’s protest in Armavir.

“Exporters would come to the market, buy our flowers and take them away,” one of them told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service. “But not this year. There is no such thing this year.”

“I don’t know what I’m going to do with my 60,000 flowers that are about to blossom,” said another farmer. “Now that the time has come to export our flowers the roads are blocked [by Russia].”

The protesters warned that they will block a highway to Yerevan unless the government clarifies by Monday, July 14, what it is doing about the Russian ban and when it could be lifted.

The Food Safety Inspectorate spokeswoman, Anush Harutiunyan, said in this regard that her agency has been working closely with the Russians and that they have already allowed seven Armenian firms to resume their flower exports.

“Also, Rosselkhoznadzor specialists will soon visit Armenia, familiarize themselves with our greenhouses and see that our produce is not that bad,” she told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service.

Rosselkhoznadzor did not confirm the upcoming visit in another statement on Armenia released on July 11. The Russian watchdog announced instead that “at the request of the Armenian side” its deputy chief, Yulia Shvabauskene, and the head of the Armenian inspectorate, Tigran Petrosyan, will negotiate via video link on July 14.

Russia is also the main market for other agricultural products as well as alcoholic beverages exported by Armenia. In the last few years, Moscow has occasionally and briefly banned some of those exports on similar sanitary grounds construed by Armenian commentators as Russian retaliation against the Armenian government’s continuing drift to the West.

Russian-Armenian tensions were reignited late last month by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s ongoing campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church that led to the arrests of two archbishops and Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov criticized the “unjustified attacks” on the church on June 30. His Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan responded by accusing Moscow of meddling in Armenia’s internal affairs.

Last week, the Armenian Foreign Ministry summoned Russia’s ambassador in Yerevan, Sergei Kopyrkin, to again protest against “hostile” statements by Russian lawmakers and media. The Armenian ambassador in Moscow, Gurgen Arsenyan, was in turn summoned to a meeting with Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin on Monday, July 7.



A flower greenhouse in Armavir province, July 11, 2025

Armenian Priests Reaffirm Support for Church Head

SUPPORT. from page 1
Religious Organizations and numerous international norms,” read the statement issued by more than 200 priests.

“Hate speech, propaganda of discrimination, and calls for various forms of violence are dangerous and destructive and can never bring good to our national and patriotic life,” it said.

The low-ranking clerics went on to express their “filial support” for Karekin, who presided over their gathering. They described him as a “good and courageous shepherd” who must continue to lead the church and its faithful to “peaceful and safe havens with divine wisdom, calmness and an ever-vigilant spirit.”

The heads of the Armenian Church’s worldwide dioceses and other bishops issued a similar statement a week ago.

Pashinyan has been pressuring the top clergy and Karekin in particular to resign, saying that they have had secret sex affairs in breach of their vows of celibacy. His detractors say that he is simply trying to please Azerbaijan and/or neutralize a key source of opposition to his unilateral concessions to Armenia’s arch-foe.

Unlike the bishops and other senior clerics, Armenian parish priests have traditionally been allowed to marry and have children. Pashinyan tried to reach out to them last week, calling them his “brothers” and urging them to help him topple Karekin. Many of them scoffed at his appeal.

Pashinyan threatened on June 26 to forcibly remove Garegin from the church’s Echmiadzin headquarters if the Catholicos continues to ignore his demands. Security forces raided the Mother See the next morning in a bid to arrest Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan. But they failed to do that after meeting with fierce resistance from hundreds of angry priests

with calling for a violent regime change.

Pashinian indicated on Monday, July 7, that Armenia’s National Security Service and other law-enforcement agencies must be able to raid the Mother See again. The statement fueled speculation that he may order them to arrest Garegin.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) expressed serious concern at Pashinyan’s



Parish priests of the Armenian Apostolic Church attend a conference in Echmiadzin, July 11, 2025

and laymen.

Ajapahyan surrendered to investigators several hours after the unprecedented raid condemned by the Armenian opposition and many public figures. He was charged

campaign on Tuesday, July 8. It called on the Armenian government to “refrain from actions or statements” undermining “the principles of religious freedom, due process, and the peaceful exercise of faith.”

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

'I Can't Name It': Kari Lake Forgets That People in Armenia Speak Armenian

By David Edwards

WASHINGTON (MSN Raw Story) — Kari Lake, special advisor to the United States Agency for Global Media, struggled to remember that the people of Armenia speak Armenian.

During a June 25 hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) asked Lake about the status of Voice of America's Armenian network.

"Do you happen to know, Ms. Lake? I come from the land of William Saroyan, and I assume you know what language the people of Armenia speak?"

"I've actually heard it," Lake replied. "It's a beautiful language. I can't name it. Can you please tell me?"

"Yeah, it's Armenian," Costa explained. "The story of Armenian language is, and the Voice of Armenia, was so that the people of Armenia would understand — who were under the oppression of the Soviet Union — what America stood for and what our values stood for."

Trump: Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict Approaching Resolution

WASHINGTON (PanARMENIAN.Net) — US President Donald Trump stated on July 14 that the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict seems to be approaching a successful resolution. Speaking at the White House during a meeting with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, Trump listed several global conflicts and remarked, "And we solved another one — Armenia and Azerbaijan. It looks like that's going to come to a conclusion, a successful conclusion."

Trump's comments come amid ongoing diplomatic momentum between Yerevan and Baku, including recent meetings in Abu Dhabi that signal progress toward a potential peace agreement. Previously, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio expressed hope that a formal peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia could be signed soon.

UNESCO Approves Armenia's New Heritage Nominations

PARIS (PanARMENIAN.Net) — At the 47th session of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee in Paris, two Armenian nominations were approved for inclusion in UNESCO's Tentative List: Urartian Heritage of Yerevan and the Garni Archaeological Complex and the Symphony of Stones. These nominations developed under the coordination and commission of Armenia's Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports with the Research Center for Historical and Cultural Heritage, the Service for the Protection of Historical Environment and Museum-Reserves, as well as academic experts.

Swiss Peace Initiative for Nagorno Karabakh Holds Congressional Briefing, Meetings in DC

WASHINGTON — "Does the US believe that a favorable and lasting peace in the South Caucasus — a region of growing geopolitical and economic significance — can be built on the basis of ethno-religious cleansing?" Dr. John Eibner, the president of Christian Solidarity International, posed the question to a packed room in the Rayburn House Office Building on Tuesday, July 8.

"If the answer is no, then the US should provide support for Switzerland's peace initiative."

In Washington, D.C., a delegation from the Swiss Peace Initiative for Nagorno Karabakh held a congressional briefing at the US Capitol. Two members of the Swiss parliament, Erich Vontobel and Lukas Reimann, as well as Dr. Eibner and Vartan Oskanian, the former foreign minister of Armenia, spoke about the Initiative and the opportunity it presents for the United States to help establish lasting peace in the South Caucasus, after 37 years of war.

A recording of the event is available to watch online.

In 2023, Azerbaijan blockaded Nagorno Karabakh (also known as Artsakh) for nine months before launching a military invasion of the region, leading to the forced exodus of its entire population — nearly 120,000 Armenian Christians. 30,000 more were forcibly displaced in the 2020 Karabakh War.

In March of this year, the Swiss parliament passed a motion to hold an international peace forum between Azerbaijan and the representatives of the displaced Armenians, to negotiate a framework for their safe return.

Erich Vontobel, who introduced the motion in the Swiss parliament last year, spoke of meeting refugees from Nagorno Karabakh in Armenia. "They said to me, please do something so that we can return," he said. "One woman showed me a video of

her house, now occupied by another family. That sight broke my heart. That's when I knew I must act."

Citing Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Vontobel pointed out "there is a real risk of renewed conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia." On a visit to southern Armenia, locals shared their fear with Vontobel that, after the fall of Nagorno Karabakh, Azerbaijan will attack their region next. "If we close our eyes" to what happened in Karabakh, he said, Azerbaijan will "see that they can do such things and there are no consequences."

Lukas Reimann, another member of the Swiss parliament, said that Azerbaijan's "state-sponsored starvation and military violence reminiscent of the Armenian Genocide" had "caused great distress in Switzerland." He pointed out that the Swiss Peace Initiative had received support from members of all 10 parties in the Swiss parliament — an unusually broad swath of support.

"We cannot accept and will not accept that these families cannot return to their home," he said. "We will help them to get back there."

Former foreign minister Vartan Oskanian, who currently chairs the Committee for the Defense of the Fundamental Rights of the People of Nagorno Karabakh, a body established by the Artsakh National Assembly in exile, pointed out that Nagorno Karabakh was "inhabited by Armenians for centuries, and in the past 30 years, Nagorno Karabakh Armenians had full self-rule and a democratic life on that territory."

Nevertheless, Oskanian said that Karabakh Armenians "have come to terms with the new realities on the ground" and are not seeking "to go back to the status quo ante. They simply want to go back home."

While Oskanian recognized that "the United States views Azerbaijan as a partner on many levels," he said that "these geopo-

litical considerations do not justify silence on the expulsion of 150,000 people from their homes. This sends the wrong message, and sets a very dangerous precedent."

With US support, Oskanian said, the Swiss Peace Initiative could make return a reality.

"The Swiss Peace Initiative does not call for sanctions or intervention," Vontobel said. "It calls for a table, a place for dialogue, where even the displaced have a seat."

Vontobel noted that in the 2024 election campaign, "President Trump promised to end the ethnic cleansing of Christians" in Nagorno Karabakh. "He speaks to my heart. Our interests and values align. The Swiss Peace Initiative offers the U.S. a chance to support peace without taking on direct risk."

"We in Switzerland can do it," Vontobel concluded. "What we need now is broad international support — above all from the US. I therefore ask you to publicly endorse the Swiss Peace Initiative."

The congressional briefing is part of a three-day visit by the delegation to policymakers in Washington, D.C. The briefing was co-organized with the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) and moderated by Mark Milosch, Congressional Staff Director for Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ). More information about the Swiss Peace Initiative is available at www.swisspeacekarabakh.com.

[Members of the Swiss Peace Initiative for Nagorno Karabakh also met during their trip with Vice President Vance's national security team, the office of the Speaker of the US House, and key Senate offices, to discuss international efforts to realize the right of return for the ethnically-cleansed Armenians of Artsakh, according to Oskanian's Facebook post of July 11. In addition, they were received by the Swiss ambassador to Washington.]

Syria, Azerbaijan Renew Ties Amid Secret Talks with Israel

BEIRUT (TheCradle.co) — Azerbaijan and Syria took steps toward restoring bilateral relations on July 13, with both countries' leaders pledging enhanced cooperation, particularly in the energy sector, amid talks between Syrian and Israeli officials in the Azeri capital.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev welcomed Syrian interim leader Ahmad al-Sharaa to Baku in a meeting that marked the first official engagement between the two governments since former president Bashar al-Assad's ouster in December 2024.

Sharaa, a former ISIS commander whose forces toppled Assad's government, thanked Aliyev for Azerbaijan's "brotherly support" and said that the previous Syrian administration had damaged Damascus's relationships with several countries, including Azerbaijan.

"The visit of the Syrian president to Azerbaijan will significantly contribute to the development of bilateral relations," Aliyev stated, according to the Azerbaijani presidency.

Central to the talks was a shared commitment to address Syria's ongoing energy crisis. The Azerbaijani government announced plans to begin exporting natural gas to Syria via Türkiye in the near future.

"This project will contribute to ensuring the energy security of Syria," the Azerbaijani presidency said in a statement, noting that the two countries would also explore Azerbaijani involvement in rebuilding Syria's devastated energy infrastructure.



Ahmad al-Sharaa, left, visiting Ilham Aliyev

Syria's major oil fields are occupied by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the US military in the northeast of the country, forcing Damascus to pay to purchase its own oil from the SDF leadership.

Syria's current leadership maintains strong ties with Türkiye, a key regional player and close ally of Baku. Azerbaijan has recently emerged as an intermediary between Türkiye and Israel, whose military occupation and bombing of Syria remain a point of contention.

According to diplomatic sources in Damascus speaking with AFP, Syria's interim president Sharaa visited Baku at the same time as a rare meeting between Syrian and Israeli officials took place in the Azerbaijani

capital. Though Sharaa did not attend the meeting, the encounter reportedly focused on Israel's military occupation of Syria.

Israel's public broadcaster Kan confirmed the talks occurred, describing them as part of an effort to manage regional tensions.

Despite these developments, reports from Israeli media suggest any potential understanding would not include an Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights, territory Israel has occupied since 1967.

At the same time, informal security arrangements between Tel Aviv and Damascus may already be in place, with Israel reportedly having used Syrian airspace to launch an unprovoked war against Iran in June.



INTERNATIONAL

West, Russia, Hail Latest Armenian-Azeri Summit

By Astghik Bedevian

ABU DHABI (Azatutyun.am) — The United States, the European Union and Russia have welcomed fresh face-to-face talks held by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in Abu Dhabi on Thursday, July 10.

Russia and the EU also renewed their calls for the quick signing of an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty finalized in March.

“We encourage both sides to proceed with the signing and ratification of the draft peace agreement as soon as possible,” Anitta Hipper, the EU foreign policy spokeswoman, told the Armenpress news agency on Friday, July 11. “The EU stands ready to provide additional support and expertise, should the sides request it.”

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov made similar comments during the Aliyev-Pashinyan meeting that lasted for about five hours.

“We, of course, welcome the fact of such a direct dialogue, and have repeatedly said at various levels that we would welcome the signing of a peace agreement as soon as possible,” Peskov told journalists.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio expressed hope earlier this week that an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace deal will be reached “pretty soon.” The US State Department spokeswoman, Tammy Bruce, would not say on Thursday, July 10, whether Rubio’s optimism was connected with the upcoming Abu Dhabi talks.



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev meet in Abu Dhabi, July 10, 2025

“I think the Trump Administration and Secretary Rubio’s approach speaks for itself, and his remarks at the cabinet meeting is that this is an administration working for peace,” Bruce told a news briefing in Washington. “They will do what and go wherever they need to go. It has not waned. It is because it is the core of the commitment to making America great again is improving, of course, the condition of the

world around us.”

In their virtually identical readouts of the Abu Dhabi summit, Baku and Yerevan did not say whether the two sides moved closer to signing the peace treaty. The Azerbaijani side has for months made that conditional on a change of Armenia’s constitution.

In separate comments to RFE/RL’s Armenian Service, the Armenian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, AniBadalyan,

described the summit as “successful” and said it “can serve as a serious basis for the further implementation of the peace process.” But she did not elaborate.

According to Azerbaijani state media, Aliyev and Pashinyan discussed, among other things, the possibility of “initialing” the draft peace treaty. Badalyan seemed to imply that they reached no concrete understandings to that effect.

Bringing Hope Home: Armenian Food Bank Calls on Diaspora for Support

YEREVAN —In the heart of Armenia, where poverty and displacement continue to affect thousands of families, an organization is working tirelessly to bring relief and dignity to those in need.

Founded by Canadian-Armenian humanitarian Michael Avetikian and his wife Yelena, the Armenian Food Bank has been a registered non-profit organization in Armenia since 2020. Since its inception, the foundation has provided food, clothing, and hygiene items to vulnerable families, refugees, veterans, and elderly citizens living alone across the country.

Now, the Armenian Food Bank is calling on the diaspora — especially the vibrant Armenian communities throughout the United States — to join a vital campaign to collect non-perishable food and clean, gently used clothing. With growing demand

and limited resources, every contribution makes a difference.

“We see the pain and poverty every day. With just a little help, we can change a life — even save it,” says Avetikian. “Together with our diaspora, we can make a real impact.”

The organization is also seeking logistical support or sponsorships to help ship collected donations from the United States to Armenia, where urgent distribution is already planned.

How to help? Donate non-perishable food and clean clothing; connect the Food Bank with sponsors or shipping partners; share this mission through your media platforms and networks. To support or learn more, visit www.armenianfoodbank.org or contact Michael Avetikian, founder and ambassador, at armfoodbank@gmail.com.



Supporting families in need and refugees with school supplies



Michael Avetikian delivering aid around the border for poor families with children across Armenia



Humanitarian support for struggling families with children during Christmas time throughout Armenia



INTERNATIONAL

Armenian Bank Joins Race for HSBC Malta

By Neville Borg

BIRKIRKARA, Malta (TimesofMalta) — Ardshinbank, a leading Armenian bank owned by an Armenian businessman with past business links to Russia, has submitted a bid for HSBC Malta, Times of Malta has learnt.

It is believed to be one of two Eastern European banks currently vying for HSBC's Maltese operations. The identity of the other bank is not yet known.

Last November, Ardshinbank took over from HSBC in Armenia, as the global giants exited Armenia after three decades in the Armenian market.

Ardshinbank is one of Armenia's leading banks, holding a fifth of the country's market share. A 2024 investor briefing lists the bank as having over 400,000 customers across its 71 branches in Armenia. It registered a profit of \$338m (roughly €289m) in 2024.

While the bank has been awarded a

elons, as well as by the Maltese financial regulator and the European Central Bank.

Ardshinbank's bid is unlikely to face any obstacles from HSBC's end, given that its takeover of HSBC Armenia was only recently approved and completed. However, how regulators will respond to the bid is not yet clear.

One of the initial frontrunners in the race, OTP, backed down from the deal and declined to formally submit a bid after reputational concerns were flagged, with sources telling Times of Malta that Ardshinbank is highly likely to face similar concerns.

Who Owns Ardshinbank?

Ardshinbank is owned by businessman Karen Safaryan, who founded the bank in 2003.

Safaryan owns almost all the bank's shares through a holding company, Arins Group, of which he is the sole shareholder.

Armenian sources who spoke to Times of Malta described Safaryan as a well-

"dozens" of businesses across Russia and Armenia by the early 2000s.

In 2016, Ardshinbank merged with Arximbank, the Armenian subsidiary of Russian banking giant Gazprombank, after the subsidiary was bought by a holding company, named Region, which is also owned by Safaryan.

Safaryan is known to be close to Armenia's current deputy prime minister Mher Grigoryan, who spent several years chairing Ardshinbank's board, before entering politics. Armenian sources describe Grigoryan as a technocrat, a career banker who transitioned to politics as a compromise candidate following the country's 2017 elections.

Safaryan is also believed to have personal ties to former Armenia PM Karen Karapetyan.

Business Links

Safaryan's political connections, together with certain negative media reports about his past business dealings, are believed to have raised reputational concerns among insiders involved in the HSBC Malta sale, according to sources close to the deal.

One independent regional media outlet described Safaryan as a "murky Russian aerospace mogul", while another lists him as a hidden beneficiary of Aviaprom, an aviation company that has since been blacklisted after defaulting on government contracts.

Meanwhile, some business reports at the time of the merger with Gazprombank suggested that the deal might help evade Western sanctions.

At the time, Gazprombank faced an early batch of EU sanctions following Russia's annexation of Crimea, effectively limiting the bank's access to EU markets.

Several years later, Gazprombank would be hit with harsher US sanctions, having its assets frozen and prohibiting dealings with the Western world altogether in 2024.

However, others have pointed to different reasons behind the merger, most notably

a change to Armenian banking requirements at the time which prohibited banks from having less than 30 billion Armenian dram (€67m) in capital, effectively forcing several smaller banks to shut down or find new owners.

Safaryan 'No Longer Active in Russia'

While these reports may have raised red flags in some banking circles, there is no evidence of Safaryan himself being directly implicated in wrongdoing.

Safaryan's biography says he has divested all Russian business interests over the past years and, since 2019, his "business activities have been concentrated solely in Armenia, in the financial sector".

Nevertheless, a 2020 risk profile drawn up as part of loan deal between Ardshinbank and a private investor notes that "Mr Safaryan has other business interests in Armenia, notably in the insurance and real estate sectors, as well as in Russia," although he is believed to have continued shedding his Russian businesses over the following years.

Contacted by Times of Malta, Ardshinbank declined to comment on the bank's interest in purchasing HSBC Malta, citing its policy not to comment on market speculation.

However, the bank has previously publicly addressed allegations of impropriety across Safaryan's business ventures in a statement issued last year, following allegations made by Armen Chibukchyan, an Armenian blogger and former journalist.

In its statement, the bank objected to instances in which "several companies are inaccurately portrayed as under Mr Safaryan's control, despite any links being over 30 years old, or where companies are erroneously claimed to be owned by Mr. Safaryan when they have never been associated with him".

The bank had also refuted the suggestion that Safaryan carried undue political influence, saying he "has never engaged in politics, neither in Russia nor in Armenia."

A bank spokesperson told Times of Malta that "the claims made are defamatory and categorically false, as demonstrated by the fact that the Yerevan General Court ruled in favor of Mr. Karen Safaryan in a defamation and insult case against the blogger earlier this year, with damages awarded."

(Neville Borg runs Times of Malta's fact-checking service, an EU-funded project operated in collaboration with the University of Malta.)



Ardshinbank owner Karen Safaryan (second from right) and current Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan (far left) in 2017

stable rating by several rating agencies, sources told Times of Malta that the bid has raised reputational concerns, particularly around the figure of its owner and his past business ties to Russia.

HSBC Malta's eventual buyer will need to be green-lighted by HSBC's upper ech-

connected figure who likes to keep a low profile.

After beginning his career as an engineer, the 62-year-old businessman developed several business ventures after relocating to Russia in the mid-1990s. His official biography describes him as having

Kurdish, Armenian Mass Grave Site in Siirt Opened to Development

DEVELOPMENT, from page 1

However, after the municipality was again placed under trustee control in January, that decision was overturned. In a council meeting held in April, zoning plans were amended to allow the construction of buildings up to eight stories high.

'A Site of Memory'

On Jun 26, TMMOB's provincial coordination boards released a statement emphasizing that the area should be preserved, not developed.

Şimşek described the site as a powerful symbol in local memory, saying, "There are songs, poems, and books written about Kasaplar Deresi. It is a place that has left deep marks in the collective memory of the people. You cannot build social peace without confronting the past."

Noting that a 400-bed state hospital is already under construction in the area, Şimşek said, "Geotechnical reports clear-

ly state that the land contains cavities and fractured clay-limestone layers. Despite this, the Health Ministry chose to intervene in the ground rather than relocate the hospital.

"That intervention has cost around 400 million Turkish lira and involved the installation of 1,169 bored piles. The right decision would have been to move the hospital elsewhere."

Şimşek further stated that TMMOB has filed a formal objection to the zoning revisions with the Siirt Municipality and has also applied to a court in Diyarbakır to halt the implementation of the project.

"Our objections were rejected, but the legal process continues," he said. "A trustee has been appointed to the Siirt Municipality, and the current council cannot make any decisions. This effectively nullifies the will of the people."

What Happened in Newala Qesaba?

Newala Qesaba, historically associated with mass killings and enforced disappearances, first drew attention in 1989 when a mass grave was discovered in the area. The site is believed to contain the remains of hundreds of people, including Armenians and Chaldeans killed during the events of 1915, as well as Kurds who were forcibly disappeared or extrajudicially executed during the 1980s and 1990s.

On Apr 22, 1989, excavations using heavy machinery uncovered the remains of eight individuals within a few hours. Despite calls for a scientific investigation involving independent experts, the excavation was halted the same day by order of the Siirt Governor's Office. No further steps have been taken since, and the identities and causes of death of the eight individuals remain unknown.

Over time, the area was gradually opened to construction. What was once a

mass grave site became a dumping ground, then a dual carriageway was built. A wedding hall followed, approved through zoning changes. Eventually, a Police Academy was established in a section believed to contain additional mass graves.

Now, plans are underway to build luxury residences and multi-story buildings in the area, where hundreds of Kurds and Armenians are believed to be buried without proper funerals. A signboard displaying project details has been placed at the entrance to the site. The project, undertaken by a company named War Yapı, includes dozens of villas, eight-story apartment buildings, and a swimming pool. A sales office has also been set up, with the surrounding area enclosed by metal barriers. (EMK/VK)

(This article first appeared in Bianet.org on July 15.)



Community News

Washington Congressional Intern Tarpinian-Jachym Killed in Shooting

By Diallynn Dwyer

WASHINGTON (Boston.com) — A rising senior at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, who was in Washington, D.C. for a congressional internship, was killed in a shooting in the nation's capital on Tuesday, July 1, authorities announced.

Eric Tarpinian-Jachym, 21, of Granby, Massachusetts died Tuesday, the Metropolitan Police Department said.

Police responded around 10:28 p.m. on Monday to the sound of gunshots on the 1200 block of 7th Street, the department said. At the scene, the officers found Tarpinian-Jachym, an adult woman, and a 16-year-old boy suffering from gunshot wounds. Tarpinian-Jachym was unconscious, police said, and all three were taken to area hospitals.



Eric Tarpinian-Jachym (photo LinkedIn)

Tarpinian-Jachym died Tuesday from his injuries, according to police.

Police said the preliminary investigation indicates Tarpinian-Jachym was not the intended target of the shooting.

"Multiple suspects exited a vehicle at the intersection of 7th and M Street, Northwest and began firing at a group," police said.

The vehicle in question has been recovered by investigators, police said.

Tarpinian-Jachym, who was majoring in finance with a minor in political science, was interning for Rep. Ron Estes of Kansas, the congressman's office said in a statement. He joined the D.C. office of the Republican congressman in June.

"I will remember his kind heart and how he always greeted anyone who entered our office with a cheerful smile," Estes said in a statement. "We are grateful to Eric for his service to Kansas' 4th District and the country. Please join Susan and me in praying for his family and respecting their privacy during this heartbreaking time."

Massachusetts Congressman Richard Neal, whose district includes Granby, said in a statement he was "heartbroken" to learn of Tarpinian-Jachym's death.

see SHOOTING, page 8



Simone Rizkallah

Sacred Heart Armenian Catholic Church Hosts 2025 Eparchial Conference

GARRISON, N.Y. — From June 27 to July 1, the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg in the United States and Canada gathered in faith, joy, and unity for its annual Eparchial Conference. This year's gathering began with the much-anticipated Annual Youth Retreat, held at the peaceful and scenic Graymoor Spiritual Life Center in Garrison, New York, and concluded with a powerful and spirit-filled conference hosted by Sacred Heart Armenian Catholic Church in Little Falls, New Jersey.

A Spiritual Start: The Youth Retreat

The retreat, running from June 27–29, welcomed youth from across the Eparchy—including Boston, Toronto, Montreal, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles — offering three days of reflection, learning, and joyful fellowship. Participants were blessed by the presence and wisdom of two extraordinary keynote speakers.

Dr. Cara Aghajanian, whose impactful talk focused on "Discipline in One's Life," drew on her medical and spiritual experience to challenge youth to strengthen their character and habits through faith.

Simone Rizkallah, a dedicated Catholic educator and speaker, delivered two engaging presentations: "Moral Compass: Applying Catholic Teaching to Today's Most Pressing Issues" and "What It Means to Be a Christian: Witness to Hope." Her sessions ignited meaningful discussions among the young faithful.

see CONFERENCE, page 8



Group picture at the retreat

Assemblymember Greg Wallis and Senator Dave Cortese Join California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation announces Assemblymember Greg Wallis (R-Bermda Dunes) and Senator Dave Cortese (D-Silicon Valley) have become its 55th and 56th members, respectively.

Wallis declared: "I am proud to join the California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation. I have been a longtime supporter of Armenian American issues in my district, and I look forward to amplifying Armenian-American voices at the state-wide level."

Cortese in turn said, "I'm proud to stand with the Armenian American community in Santa Clara County and across California. As an ally and



California Assemblymember Greg Wallis



California Senator Dave Cortese

member of the California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation, I remain committed to preserving and sharing Armenia's history, protecting Armenia's sovereignty, and ensuring that Armenian-American voices are heard at every level of government. We must also ensure that future generations understand the history of the Armenian Genocide and that they too carry forward these lessons and stories."

The California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation serves as a forum for members from the California Senate and Assembly to identify key issues affecting Armenian Americans and develop and empower the Armenian American community throughout California. The Foundation encourages advocacy and participation in cultural, educational, and community efforts in California. Through advocacy, the Foundation strives to ensure that California Armenian American's voices are heard and given a platform.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Sacred Heart Catholic Church Hosts 2025 Eparchial Conference

CONFERENCE, from page 7

Daily Holy Masses, Eucharistic Adoration, and Confession were celebrated and offered, deepening the retreat's spiritual essence. Alongside prayer and formation, joyful activities like the Water Balloon Fest and a heart-warming Campfire Night brought laughter and friendship to life.

The Conference Begins

On Sunday, June 29, the Eparchial Conference officially commenced with

Fr. Ignatius Abassian (Los Angeles).

The sacred liturgy was a moment of profound grace, where families, youth, and clergy joined in vibrant Armenian Catholic worship, reflecting the beauty and unity of the Universal Church.

Fellowship and Formation Continue

On June 30, the youth spent the day enjoying the sunshine and waves at the Jersey Shore — a joyful and relaxing moment in the heart of summer. It was a time of



Bishop of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg Mikael Mouradian

a majestic opening Mass at Sacred Heart Armenian Catholic Church in Little Falls, presided over by Most Reverend Mikael Mouradian, Bishop of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg.

Celebrating with him were Fr. Ghazar Bedrossian (Boston), Fr. Andon Noradougian and Fr. Richard Shackil (New Jersey), Fr. Asadur Minasian (Philadelphia), Fr. Haig Chahinian (Toronto), and

community building, laughter, and shared memories that will last a lifetime.

The following day, July 1, the conference resumed with a captivating historical and spiritual presentation by Dr. Aghajanian, who spoke movingly about her cousin, the Servant of God Cardinal Gregory Peter XV Agagianian — one of the most distinguished Armenian Catholic figures of the 20th century. Her testimony stirred



Mass at Sacred Heart Armenian Catholic Church in Little Falls



At night at the campfire



Dinner dance at Macaluso's Restaurant with the youth and their families

hearts and reminded all present of the legacy of holiness that belongs to our Armenian Catholic heritage.

Looking Ahead and Giving Thanks

During the closing ceremony, Bishop Mikael Mouradian joyfully announced that next year's 2026 Eparchial Youth Retreat and Conference will be hosted by Armenian Catholic Youth Group (ACYG)-Boston and Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in New England, from June 26 to

July 1, 2026.

The conference came to a beautiful close with a joyful dinner dance at Macaluso's Restaurant, where music, laughter, and heartfelt gratitude filled the air. The youth of ACYG-Eparchy, full of spirit and love, shared closing words of thanks with deep warmth and kindness, expressing their joy for the fellowship they experienced and their excitement to host next year's gathering.



Dr. Cara Aghajanian

Washington Congressional Intern Tarpinian-Jachym Killed in Shooting

SHOOTING, from page 7

Tarpinian-Jachym, a graduate of Pope Francis Preparatory School, was pursuing his "passion for public service" with his internship, the Democrat said.

"As a lecturer at UMass, I know firsthand the caliber of students who walk through those doors," Neal said. "Eric embodied what it means to be part of a community committed to learning, growth, and civic engagement."

"Any parent will tell you there is no greater pain than the pain of losing a child," he added. "As a father, my thoughts and prayers are with Eric's family and loved ones during this difficult time."

A statement from a UMass Amherst spokesperson said the school had learned of "a student's death in Washington, D.C. and is in communication with the student's family" but did not reference Tarpinian-Jachym by name.

"We extend our deepest condolences to all who knew him and will be communicating with the campus shortly to offer support," the statement read.

The Metropolitan Police Department had already offered a reward of up to \$25,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of individuals responsible for homicides in D.C. But, the department announced Tuesday, July 8, the reward for information related to the shooting of Tarpinian-Jachym has been increased by \$15,000 with funds from the FBI's Washington field office.

The Metropolitan Police Department is asking anyone with information about the shooting to contact investigators at (202) 727-9099 or text your tip to the Department's TEXT TIP LINE at 50411.

(Dialynn Dwyer is a reporter and editor at Boston.com, covering breaking and local news across Boston and New England.)



COMMUNITY NEWS

MAGA Mom Locked Up by ICE Vows to Never Stop Loving Trump in Detention Center Call

By Leigh Kimmins

(Daily Beast) — A devout MAGA mom holed up in a detention center in the Mojave Desert says her support for President Donald Trump is unwavering, despite his ICE goons locking her up.

Arpineh Masihi was born in Iran but has been in the United States since she was 3 years old. She became a target for Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers over crimes committed 17 years ago and was arrested in June as part of the president's immigration crackdown.

The 39-year-old, a mother of four children born in the US, was eating breakfast with her family at their home in Diamond Bar, Los Angeles County, California, when ICE agents called her. Just 30 minutes later, she was cuffed in front of her young kids and brought to a holding cell in downtown Los Angeles.

From there, she was shipped to Adelanto immigrant detention center in California's Mojave Desert. Despite "very challenging" conditions in the prison-like facility, Masihi



Arpineh Masihi with husband Arthur Sahakyan

still has faith in the Trump administration. "He's doing the right thing because lots of these people don't deserve to be here," Masihi told the BBC in a phone call from the detention center.

"I will support him until the day I die. He's making America great again."

Masihi is a Christian Armenian-Iranian, something she and her husband, Arthur Sa-

hakyan, believe makes her not deportable to her home nation, which is majority Shia Islam.

"We are Christians. She can't go back, there's no way," Sahakyan told the BBC, suggesting his wife's life would be at risk.

Sahakyan said their "home is broken" by his wife's arrest, but he refused to blame Trump for their predicament.

"I don't blame Trump, I blame Biden," Sahakyan said. "It's his doing for open borders, but I believe in the system and all the good people will be released and the ones that are bad will be sent back."

In 2008, Masihi was sentenced to two years in prison after she was convicted of burglary and grand theft. Her green card was taken away by an immigration judge, making her current predicament all the more challenging.

Since then, Masihi has started a business

and had four children, aged 14, 11, 10 and 4. She and her family live in the affluent Los Angeles County suburb of Diamond Bar.

After Masihi's arrest on June 30, Sahakyan refused to take the Trump flags down from the family's yard and, speaking to the media, attempted to justify ICE's work.

He said detaining people like his wife "will resolve a lot of issues because we'll know exactly who's in here, for what reasons. Even though I miss her dearly."

As for his feelings toward the president, he said, "Trump is not trying to do anything bad. We understand what he's doing. He wants the best for the country."

The couple, meanwhile, are awaiting updates on their legal case.

(Leigh Kimmins is a writer at the Daily Beast, and former news editor / senior reporter at the *Daily Star* in London. He also worked at Mail Online and studied international journalism at John Moores University in Liverpool.)

OBITUARY

Longtime Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Center Activity Director Siran Salibian Passes Away

WATERTOWN — Siran Salibian, the decades-long Activity Director of the Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, passed away peacefully on June 28, 2025 in Irvine, California, with her beloved children, Garo and Rita, by her side. She was 90 years old.

Siran was born on November 17, 1934 in Damascus, Syria, to Armenag and Vera Mahdessian. She grew up with two brothers, Avedis and Ghevont, and an older sister, Elmast.

A compassionate and dedicated life-long caretaker, Siran began her career as a young nurse in the pediatric polio unit at



the American University Hospital of Beirut (AUHB), tenderly caring for infants suffering from the dreaded infectious disease.

In April 1958, she married Neshan Salibian. Together, they built a peaceful and simple life grounded in unconditional love and mutual respect. In their humble home in Bourj Hammoud, they enjoyed summer nights on the balcony, reflecting on their day and taking in the sights and sounds of the neighborhood below. On Sundays, they would explore the countryside or treat their children with an outing to Jounieh for ice cream...the ones with bubble gum at the bottom of the cone. They would return home for a traditional hearty dinner around their kitchen table.

Their love story was cut short by his untimely death after 16 years of marriage. A resilient woman, Siran found strength in

her grief to carry on for her children. She continued to sacrifice precious time with them to provide round-the-clock care for her helpless young patients at AUHB. A back injury forced her to take a desk job as a phone operator at the hospital.

When the Lebanese Civil War broke out in 1975, Siran was stranded at work for a year. Her children, who were staying with family in Antelias at the time, would call the hospital each day, hoping their mother would be the voice that answered.

Determined to provide a safer and more secure life away from the uncertainties of war and its far-reaching consequences, Siran resolved to immigrate to the United States in September 1976. For a widow with two children, this journey was risky and arduous, but Siran's tenacity was unmatched. With the help of dear friends Harry and Hrip Parsekian, the family of three eventually settled into their new life in Watertown, Massachusetts. Siran would work multiple jobs, often overnight shifts, to make ends meet. They ultimately moved from their one-bedroom apartment on Arlington Street into a charming two-story home on Milner Street in Waltham.

The hallmark of Siran Salibian's legacy, however, will forever be her role as the longtime Activity Director of the Armenian Nursing & Rehabilitation Center — a community she tirelessly served for 40 years. This was not just a job; it was her calling. Siran was a hero to the hundreds of residents blessed to be in her care. She danced with them, hosted ice cream parties for them on the patio, baked Easter cookies with them, rolled sarma with them, prayed with them and advocated for them. Every year around April 24, she would transport residents, several of whom were Genocide survivors, to the Massachusetts State House so that they could participate in the commemoration. She lovingly called her residents "mama" and "hayrig." When asked to reflect, she would say, "My family, my work and the residents are my blessing. I would do it all over again."

It's safe to say there will never be another "Deegeen Siran."

Siran is survived by her children: Garo Salibian and his wife Salpi of Irvine, California; Rita Yerezian and her husband Kevork of Marlborough, Massachusetts. She was blessed with four grandchildren—Leeza Arakelian, Garren Salibian, Shant Yerezian and Arek Salibian—and three great-grandchildren—Alik Arakelian and sisters Liana and Mia Salibian.

Funeral services took place on Thursday, July 10, at St. James Armenian Church,

in Watertown, Massachusetts. Siran's final resting place is at Mount Feake Cemetery in Waltham, Massachusetts.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Siran's memory may be made to the Armenian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA), 435 Pond Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130, St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472 or St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church, 38 Elton Ave., Watertown, MA 02472.

Telephone (617) 924-7400

Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Inc.

Continuous Service By The Bedrosian Family Since 1945

558 MOUNT AUBURN STREET
WATERTOWN, MA 02472

MARION BEDROSIAN
PAUL BEDROSIAN
LARRY BEDROSIAN

James "Jack" Giragosian, CPC

Mark J. Giragosian

Giragosian
FUNERAL HOME

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

DENNIS M. DEVENNEY & SONS Cemetery Monuments

Specializing in
Armenian Designs and Lettering

701 Moody St. Waltham, MA 02543
(781) 891-9876 www.NEMonuments.com



COMMUNITY NEWS

Festive Celebration of a Historic Religious Event

By Florence Avakian

It was not just for a century, but for 110 glorious years. The New York St. Illuminator’s Cathedral, established 110 years ago, and its devoted pastor, Fr. Mesrob Lakissian celebrated his 20-year faithful service along with an enthusiastic group of parishioners and friends at a sold-out banquet that took place on Sunday, June 22.

But the day of joy and happiness had a surprising happening that almost prevented the long-planned celebration. The day before during a long-continuing heat wave, the banquet hall, Terrace On The Park, suffered a total power blackout. What to do?

Without hesitation, the faithful under the direction of Yeretsgeen Ojeen Lakissian and Chairlady of the 110th Anniversary Gala Committee Louise Kanian gathered a group of ten who toiled together to solve the problem. They quickly found a new location – not easy to do on a Sunday in New York at the last minute with all the necessary amenities including flowers, drinks, two cakes, etc.

The group then started telephoning the more than 250 banquet attendees to reveal the new location. And an hour before the 3:00 pm banquet, an individual went to the original Terrace On The Park venue, in case someone had not been informed.

A Symbolic Church Service
The historic day had begun with the Soorp Badarak celebrated by Eastern Prelate Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, during which he ordained altar servers – Mark Dilsizian, Hakob Keymetlyan, and Armen Morian – to the rank of acolytes, and then, together with Aram Parnagian, who was already an acolyte, to the rank of subdeacons. Archdeacon Shant Kazanjian was awarded the Eastern Prelacy’s St. Stephen Proto Deacon Certificate of Appreciation.

And with great celebration, and for his dedicated and exemplary services, Cili-



Board members

Moussayan from the Armenian Sisters’ Academy, and of course Archpriest Fr. Mesrob, Yeretsgeen Ojeen, their daughter Taleen, and Fr. Mesrob’s sister, Tamar.

Following the blessing of the table by Archbishop Anoushavan, in Armenian and English, and his congratulations for the 110 anniversary of St. Illuminator’s Cathedral and the 20th anniversary of Archpriest Fr. Mesrob, the Cathedral’s choir director Anahit Zakarian sang the American and Armenian national anthems.

Chairman of the St. Illuminator’s Cathedral Board of Trustees Armen Morian, Esq. enthusiastically welcomed all attendees who had come from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Philadelphia, Chicago, Las Vegas, San Diego, and Montreal, and invited Khoren Srpazan



The table of clergy

ship with the Cathedral, “a headquarters of light and faith for its people, for students, for young people, for philanthropists, for clergy, and the faithful.” Sarajian was God-father for the ordination of Der Mesrob.

Following a long period of applause, Der Mesrob Avak Kahana, the second longest serving priest of St. Illuminator’s Cathedral, the home of culture, faith, stewardship, struggle, renovation, and survival, spoke from his heart, thanking his family and all who have served the Church in

Again, addressing the large crowd, the beloved prelate said: “You have a duty to invite scholars to see the archives of our church. Our identity galvanized our Mother Church,” he declared to a standing ovation.

Two chocolate cakes emerged, one dedicated to the Church’s 110th anniversary and one for Der Mesrob Avak Kahana, who expertly cut pieces for the attendees following their sumptuous dinner.

To the absolute delight of all, the over-



Fr. Mesrob Lakissian

cian Catholicos Aram I, bestowed the title of Archpriest on Fr. Lakissian on the 20th anniversary of his ordination. Archbishop Anoushavan read the Gontag from Aram Vehapar on the bestowal of the Archpriest title on Fr. Lakissian, and conveyed prayers and congratulations for the 110th anniversary of St. Illuminator’s Cathedral.

Celebratory Banquet
As the elegant and spacious banquet hall at the new location, Da Mikele Illagio, in Elmhurst, Queens, filled to capacity with more than 250 enthusiastic Armenian faithful, the festive atmosphere was already felt by all. It was a family atmosphere.

The clergy present included Archbishop Anoushavan, Archbishop Khoren Doghrmajian, Archpriest Fr. Nerses Manoogian, Archpriest Fr. Nareg and Yeretsgeen Annie Terterian, Rev. Fr. Vahan and Yeretsgeen Maggie Kouyoumdjian, Sister Emma

to read the Encyclical of Catholicos Aram I on the 110th anniversary of St. Illuminator’s Cathedral, and the 20th anniversary of Der Mesrob Avak Kahana. Morian then invited Archpriest Fr. Nareg to read Aram Vehapar’s Pontifical letter of blessing conferring the title of Avak Kahanna on Der Mesrob.

After giving his keynote speech about the history of the Cathedral and its remarkable story of service, trial, and triumph, and its renewal under Der Mesrob’s leadership, Morian asked all present who had served the Church in different capacities to stand and be recognized, including a moment of silent reflection and remembrance for the deceased members.

Several prominent church officials offered inspiring remarks, including Hagop “Jack” Janbazian, and Richard Sarajian, Esq., who mentioned his family’s relation-



Armen Morian

some capacity.
Archbishop Anoushavan, who always addresses the audience without notes and in a very personal manner, spoke with great emotion about “all who were part of this most original Mother Cathedral. We are some of its fruits,” he stated as he walked to the back of the hall to acknowledge 101-year-old Cathedral parishioner Mary Dugan, who received a long ovation.

joyed celebratory gathering danced the night away to the glorious sounds of the famed Club 27 Ensemble, which included vocalist Shant Massoyan, Ara Dinkjian on keyboard, Jim Kzirian on dumbek, Raffi Massoyan on oud, and Steve Vosbikian on clarinet.

For all, it had been an unforgettable day of celebration, recognition, and family togetherness.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Tekeyan New York Hosts Dinner Honoring Constantinople Patriarch Sahak II

PARAMUS, N. J. — The Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Greater New York Chapter and the TCA Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group hosted a special dinner on June 25 to honor Archbishop Sahak II Mashalian, Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, who is visiting the United States. Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, Very Rev. Fr. Harutyun Damadyan of Istanbul, and Fr. Armash Baghdasarian, pastor of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church of Wynnewood, PA, also were present.

Chapter Chair Hilda Hartounian, who is also a member of the TCA central board, spoke briefly about the activities of TCA and its mission. She declared in particular that it was an honor for an association which was founded with the vision of preserving the Western Armenian language to welcome the patriarch and listen to his message.

Toasts were given and songs were sung during the dinner. The Primate, in the name of those present, welcomed the patriarch and declared that he had already spent two days in New York, and through various meetings and visits, the patriarch was becoming acquainted with Armenian community life in New York and in particular in the Eastern Diocese. He expressed his thanks that the patriarch had accepted the current invitation and traveled to New Jersey to share a table with the Tekeyan members.

At the end of the evening, the patriarch declared that he was moved to see organizations in the diaspora which were dedicated to the preservation of Armenian identity, with members truly committed to this cause. While it may be true that in the conditions prevailing in the diaspora, it is fairly difficult to preserve the mother tongue and culture, he said that all the instances reminding us that our values have not been



Members of the Tekeyan Cultural Association Greater New York Chapter, including leaders of the TCA Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group, host Archbishop Sahak II Mashalian, Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, and his entourage along with Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America on June 25

lost are encouraging.

He gave as an example the TCA Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group which operates as part of the Tekeyan Cultural Association (among those present at the dinner were chairman of the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group of New York Harout Chatmajian and his wife Ani, as well as longtime leader and TCA Central Board Secretary Hagop Vartivarian), and said that an association which can present Armenian theater in the diaspora is endowed with great abilities and so it and its members must always see the positive.

On this occasion, he blessed those present and advised them that they continue their historic journey under the leadership of Bishop Parsamyan. He also gave as a souvenir a framed picture of the Istanbul Patriarchate and a copy of the Armenian book Istanbul, Old and New.



Patriarch Sahak II Mashalian presents a framed picture of the Armenian Patriarchate to Tekeyan Cultural Association Greater New York Chair and Tekeyan Central Board member Hilda Hartounian, with Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America to her right



Tekeyan Cultural Association, Inc.

Dr. Nubar Berberian 2025 Annual Awards

Dr. Nubar Berberian, intellectual, journalist, activist and editor of many ADL daily newspapers for more than 50 years passed away at the age of 94 in November 23, 2016. In his Will, Dr. Berberian directed his Trust Fund managers to appropriate awards every year to college students of Armenian descent worldwide who major in either International Law or Political Science.

ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Eligible recipients are college students of Armenian descent who major in either International Law or Political Science.
- 2) Applicant must be enrolled in a full-time graduate program in a fully accredited college or university in the world.
- 3) Applicant must provide all of the information requested on the application form.
- 4) Applicant must submit a copy of his or her most recent college transcript.
- 5) Applicant is to include a small head and shoulders self-portrait.
- 6) Application could be received by requesting from Tcadirector@Aol.com.
- 7) Applicants should submit applications electronically (via email) to: Tcadirector@Aol.com.
- 8) The deadline of receiving the applications is **September 30, 2025**.
- 9) The administrators and managers of the fund will vote the qualified winners in **October, 2025** based on the merits of each applicant.
- 10) The winners will receive their awards in **November, 2025**.
- 11) Winning applicants are not eligible to apply again.
- 12) This announcement is published in Armenian, English, French and Spanish.

Watertown, MA, July 14, 2025

AGBU
ARMENIAN GENERAL BENEVOLENT UNION
LOS ANGELES SPECIAL EVENTS COMMITTEE



THE AGBU SPECIAL EVENTS COMMITTEE
& TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION
LOS ANGELES CHAPTER
INVITE YOU TO

AN EVENING WITH

**DR.
VARTAN
TACHDJIAN**



JOIN US ON THURSDAY JULY 31st AT 7PM

BOYADJIAN HALL

AGBU VACHE & TAMAR MANOUKIAN CULTURAL CENTER
2495 E MOUNTAIN ST., PASADENA, CA 91104

Reception to follow - Admission is free



COMMUNITY NEWS

Lisa Haidostian Thrives During Walgreens' Turnaround

By Billy Yost

CHICAGO (Modern Counsel) — Walgreens is in the middle of a massive turnaround. The pharmacy chain plans to close up to 1,200 stores and announced earlier this year that it has agreed to be taken private after almost one hundred years as a public company. But analysts are hopeful this big move could help mark the beginning of a recovery for one of the best-known names in pharmacy.

A turnaround isn't easy. But it has been a learning experience unlike any other for Lisa Haidostian, senior director and managing counsel for commercial and securities litigation at Walgreens. Haidostian came in-house in 2021 after nearly a decade at Chicago-founded firm McDermott Will & Emery.

"There's no doubt that a turnaround environment can be challenging, but I've tried to find opportunities," Haidostian explains. "There are chances to stretch yourself and further your development in ways that might not have been available otherwise."

Haidostian says she focuses on the aspects of her job that she *can* control. She loves her work, genuinely enjoys being around her coworkers, and she has faith in the direction her company is headed. She believes she has the dream job for her, focusing on litigation strategy and big picture issues.

The attorney has also had the opportunity to expand her own practice. A year into her in-house role, Haidostian was asked to manage compliance for Walgreens' US healthcare segment, a wholly new experience for her. She eventually returned to her litigation practice, but says the detour was a good chance to develop different legal muscles.

"I was excited about the opportunity," the attorney explains. "I learned some important lessons about working proactively with a compliance team to anticipate issues and try to head them off before they become actual problems. We work with our compliance group early and often to anticipate or mitigate potential problems before they bubble up."

And while returning to high-stakes litigation was the right move for Haidostian, the attorney says going in-house gave her the opportunity to focus on a bigger picture for her entire life, not just her career.

Haidostian went in-house, in part, to have a better handle on work-life balance. The attorney and her commercial litigator husband have two children, currently four and six. After nine years at a law firm, Haidostian was ready for a different approach.

"I still have a very demanding job, but most nights I'm not staying up past midnight preparing for a deposition," the attorney says, laughing. "My husband and I are trying to model a balanced life for our kids: two parents committed to their careers, but also fully invested in their family."

Today, the attorney says she's proud of the life she and her



Lisa Haidostian

husband have created for their children in the heart of Chicago. When Haidostian is home with her family, she's present. The inherent demands of supporting a major company and indulging her husband's interest in discussing even the more mundane aspects of litigation mean she rarely escapes the law completely. But the couple manages to balance their work talk with enjoying their lives with their children.

Additionally, Haidostian has stayed connected to the pro bono work she engaged in previously. The senior director started working with the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) while at McDermott, eventually joining the organization's board. When she came to Walgreens, she made it clear that it was important for her to continue working on asylum and other immigration-related cases.

"Walgreens has been very supportive of me continuing that work," Haidostian says. "Our NIJC clients have usually been through incredible hardships and are just trying to create the best lives for themselves and their families. I'm grateful to be able to help them."

Haidostian encourages other in-house lawyers to find ways to keep doing pro bono work. She positioned her request internally as a way to build more engaged relationships with outside counsel as well as being the right thing to do.

"Most companies want to do the right thing," Haidostian says. "They want to give back, and it creates good development opportunities for their in-house lawyers. It's a win-win for everybody."

FASF Raises \$17K For Tsaghkadzor Camp for 170 Children of Fallen Soldiers

LOS ALTOS, Calif. — The Friends of the Armenian Soldiers and Families (FASF), in cooperation with Zinapah and Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Armenia, is proud to announce the successful completion of its spring fundraising campaign to support the children of Armenia's fallen and retired soldiers.

Thanks to the generosity of FASF's community of friends and supporters, the campaign raised the full target amount of \$17,000, which will cover the costs of a three-day healing and recreational camp in Tsaghkadzor this October for 170 children whose fathers lost their lives or were discharged due to injuries sustained in service.

Launched in April and concluding at the end of June, the campaign was rooted in one simple goal: to remind these children that they are not alone — that their fathers' sacrifices are remembered, and that their



futures are worth investing in. The overwhelming response from donors reflects a deep and ongoing commitment to honoring Armenia's defenders by uplifting their families.

While FASF led the fundraising effort, the camp itself will be organized and implemented by Zinapah and AGBU Armenia, whose experience in organizing impactful programming for children and youth ensures that the event will be meaningful, safe, and unforgettable.

"This success was made possible by every single donor who gave from the heart," said a representative from FASF.

For more information about this initiative or to support future campaigns, visit www.fasf.org. FASF is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (EIN #86-2191892), and donations are tax-deductible in accordance with applicable laws.

AWWA Launches 2025 Armenian Elder Care Grant Program with \$150,000

JAMAICA PLAIN, Mass. — Armenian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA) launched its 2025 Armenian Elder Care Grant Funding Program this year. It is awarding funding to organizations enhancing the lives of Armenian elders both internationally and within the United States. This initiative champions healthcare, mental health, and social inclusion, ensuring dignity and quality of life for Armenian seniors worldwide. As part of this program, AWWA is announcing the first three grant recipients focused on serving Armenian seniors living outside the United States. A second grant opportunity for nonprofits based in the Boston area will open for application submissions in the coming months.

Following a rigorous review, AWWA has selected three outstanding awardees for the initial six-month funding for projects that started July 1, 2025.

Alzheimer's Care Armenia (ACA) was founded in 2017 by gerontologist Dr. Jane Mahakian with the purpose of raising awareness and developing sustainable programs and services for people with Alzheimer's disease and their families in Armenia. ACA is a national leader in dementia care and brain health for Armenian elders. Their impactful programs—including Memory Cafés, Brain Health Armenia, and the National Dementia Plan—provide education, early intervention, and caregiver support. AWWA's grant will help expand these services across Armenia, bringing relief and resources to elders affected by Alzheimer's and their families (alzheimers.care.armenia.org).

Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) was founded on the principle of need in 1988. Through its Championing Dignity project, FAR is delivering comprehensive medical, psychological, and social services to elders

over 65 in Armenia. AWWA's support will enable FAR to expand this vital work at the Vanadzor Old Age Home, caring for the neglected, isolated and vulnerable elderly in Armenia. This collaboration will also help establish national standards of care, and improve access to care for vulnerable seniors—promoting aging with dignity in underserved regions (Farusa.org).

Hanganak NGO provides holistic, community-based care for elders, with a strong focus on rural populations. Their project strengthens physical and mental health services and fosters social inclusion. AWWA's grant will help deepen this outreach and improve their elder care infrastructure to reach a greater number of beneficiaries in remote communities (<https://hanganak.org/en/home-page/>).

"This grant program reflects AWWA's unwavering belief that every elder deserves to age with dignity, connection, and care,"

said Wendy Segrest, Executive Director of AWWA. "By funding these initiatives with these remarkable organizations, we support more professionals and more effective delivery systems to improve the care for Armenian seniors—care that honors their lives, sustains their health, and strengthens communities across generations."

About Armenian Women's Welfare Association

Since 1915, Armenian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA) has been a non-profit organization, committed to enhancing the quality of life of older adults in our community close at home and abroad. AWWA is the founder of the Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Center (ANRC) in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, and a proud supporter of international programs to improve the care and lives of Armenian Elders living outside the USA.



Arts & Culture

Klingen Instrumental Ensemble Presents 'Sounds of Armenia In London'

LONDON — On the evening of June 14, London's St Paul's Church resonated with the rich and vibrant sounds of Armenian classical music, as the Klingen Instrumental Ensemble, soloists, and choir presented a celebration of Armenian musical heritage. Conducted by Maestro Sipan Olah, the concert brought together an impressive lineup of Armenian and international musicians, offering a unique interpretation of works by twelve significant Armenian composers.

Ani Baghdassaryan welcomed attendees to St Paul's Church. The concert began with Aram Khachaturian's *Dance of the Pink Maidens* from the *Gayane Suite*, arranged by Sipan Olah for piano (four hands), string quartet, oboe, and flute which the Klingen String Quartet (Polina Sharafyan, Xiongyufan Miao, Elizabeth Tobald, Erlend Vestby),



Hayarpi Yeghikyan



Polina Sharafyan

along with Nika Pinter (flute), Hagop Mouradian (oboe), and pianists Maria Palazian and Sipan Olah, performed.

Artemi Ayvazyan's *River Araks* was performed by mezzo-soprano Helen Rotchel and pianist Maria Palazian.

Guitarist Arie Dakesian presented his arrangement of Arno Babajanian's *Melody and Humoresque*, adding a personal touch to the two-part composition.

Khachaturian's *Uzundara*, featuring Caucasian folk rhythms, was brought to life by oboist Mouradian and pianist Palazian.

Artur Bobikyan performed two of his own works, *Stand or Be Silent* and "Prelude No. 3," on piano, adding a contemporary element to the evening.

Gomidas's *Shushiki*, arranged by Dakesian for flute and guitar, evoked the spirit of Armenian village dances.

A highlight was Babajanian's *Vocalise*, performed by soprano Isabella Karaoghlanian, Palazian, and the Klingen String Quartet, directed by Olah.

see CONCERT, page 15



Christian Immler (Seneca) and Douglas Ray Williams (Nero) (photo Kathy Wittman)

BEMF Pulled Off Quite a Feat

By Michael Goetjen

BOSTON (The Boston Musical Intelligencer) — The centerpiece opera production of BEMF 2025 — Reinhard Keiser's "Octavia" (1705) — dazzled us at the Emerson Cutler Majestic Theater on Wednesday, June 11, in its second performance of the week. This year's operatic offering highlights a lesser-known contemporary of — but important musical influence on — Handel and Telemann. Keiser (1674-1739) held the post of main composer and later music director and business manager of the Oper am Gänsemarkt in Hamburg. His involvement in this operatic venture continued on and off from about 1697 to 1717; he was a poor business manager and often skipped town when things went south financially only to return later and resume his post. Yet, as an opera composer he was quite successful and worked with a young Handel who played violin and harpsichord in the orchestra as well as composed operas for the same theater from 1703-08. Keiser's operas had a major impact on Handel's operatic style prior to his trips to Italy and the younger composer would continue to borrow from Keiser's scores throughout his career.

BEMF's choice to program "Octavia" — a tale of love and infidelity in Nero's Rome — shows that Keiser is not merely an inferior predecessor to Handel but also rather a compelling musical dramatist in his own right. The BEMF orchestra, dance company, and cast pulled off an exceptional feat on Wednesday night: to produce a Baroque opera by a somewhat obscure composer with an attention to historical accuracy of presentation while also creating a compelling and engaging drama.

The costumes (Anna Kjellsdotter) and sets (Alexander McCargar) replicated the 18th century's view of ancient Rome, making clever use of moving set pieces that evoke the kind of stage machinery in vogue at the time. The beautiful and ornate costumes combined 18th-century dress with Roman togas and laurel wreaths. The troupe of 5 dancers (directed by Marie-Nathalie Lacoursière and choreographed by Hubert Hazebroucq) added a touch of spectacle in the four dance sections, at times portraying dancing fish and later ghosts attacking grave robbers. They deftly wove together 18th-century dance techniques with a modern sense of narrative to add further depth to the story.

see BEMF, page 15



Christian Immler (Seneca), Douglas Ray Williams (Nero), and Emőke Baráth (Octavia) (photo Kathy Wittman)

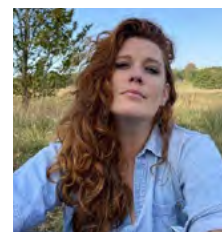
Kate Franklin Starts As Tufts Associate Professor of Armenian Art, History & Architecture

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

MEDFORD, Mass. — Dr. Kate Franklin will start as Associate Professor of Armenian Art, History and Architecture in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Tufts University this September, according to a post in May on her Instagram account.

Franklin declared in her post: "I am so happy to announce that as of September I will be Associate Professor of Armenian Art History and Architecture in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Tufts University. I am deeply honored to take up this post which was made possible by the American Armenian community, and to continue the legacy of the brilliant women who came before me."



Franklin holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Chicago (2014), an M.Phil. degree in archaeology from the University of Cambridge (2006), and a bachelor's degree in archaeological studies from Yale University (2005).

Until recently, she was a senior lecturer at the School of Historical Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. She has published *Everyday Cosmopolitanism: Living the Silk Road in Medieval Armenia* in 2021 (University of California Press), and *Landscapes and Environments of the Middle Ages*, together with Michael Bintley, in 2024 (Routledge).

She writes on her Birkbeck staff profile webpage: "I am an archaeologist of medieval Armenia and the Caucasus and an indiscriminate enthusiast of speculative fiction, cuisine, and vintage textiles. I have been working on collaborative projects in the Republic of Armenia for a decade, exploring the ways that local politics and Silk Road culture were tangled together in landscape and space-time."

Franklin adds, "...I am curious about the experiences of medieval travel, intimacies of medieval embodiment, and the profound and mundane practices of medieval and early modern hospitality. I am field co-director of a project that combines thinking about routes and infrastructure, contemplating 'domestic' space, and appreciating the canyon landscapes of Vayots Dzor, Armenia. ... My work at the moment is concerned with world-making as a locus of politics, with material culture as a mediator of spatio-temporal distances, and with the interpenetration of literary and 'real' landscapes in archaeological work."

Franklin's immediate predecessor at Tufts is Dr. Christina Maranci, who at present is the chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and Mashtots Professor of Armenian Studies at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University.



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Naz Dervanian’s *Khoresh Gheymeh* (Meat and Split Pea Stew)

This recipe *khoresh gheymeh* (meat and split pea stew) by Naz Deravian was published in the *New York Times* on February 25, 2025. In the canon of iconic Iranian stews, *khoresh gheymeh* holds a top spot alongside classics like *ghormeh sabzi*. A seemingly humble dish of gently spiced meat and split peas, *khoresh gheymeh* can be served as a cozy home-cooked meal or a celebratory dish; in big batches as a means of giving alms to those in need; or during religious ceremonies. “Gheymeh” refers to the size of the meat, which should be cut into small pieces. Traditionally, lamb is used, but you can also use beef. The stew is enriched with starchy Iranian yellow split peas called *lappeh* (see Tip). In this version, the split peas are par cooked separately so their texture and cooking time can be controlled. The split peas finish cooking in the stew, becoming tender but holding their shape. *Limoo Ammani*, or dried limes, lend the stew its distinctly rich and earthy tang, but if you can’t find any, use lime or lemon juice. *Khoresh gheymeh* is famously topped with either fried matchstick potatoes (see Tip) or fried eggplant; this version uses potatoes. Spoon the stew over rice and serve, if you like, with Shirazi salad.

Yield: 4 servings

INGREDIENTS:

For the stew:

- 1/2 cup/100 grams slow-cooking Iranian *lappeh*, *chana dal* or yellow split peas, picked through and rinsed
- 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon olive oil or vegetable oil
- 1 large yellow onion, very finely chopped
- Kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal) and black pepper
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 pound lamb or beef stew meat (see Tip), cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 3 tablespoons good-quality tomato paste
- 1(3-inch) cinnamon stick
- Large pinch saffron threads
- Sugar, if needed
- 4 *limoo Ammani* (dried limes; see Tip), rinsed and dried, or 3 to 4 tablespoons lime or lemon juice
- Lime juice or lemon juice, as needed
- Basmati rice or *polo ba tahdig*, for serving

For the Fried Potatoes (or use store-bought crunchy potato sticks; See Tip):

- 1 Large Yukon Gold potato (8 ounces), peeled, cut into matchsticks and soaked in cold water
- 2 cups vegetable oil
- 1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric (optional, for color)
- Kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal)

PREPARATION:

Start the stew: Place the *lappeh* or *chana dal* in a bowl and cover with 3 cups cold water.

While the *lappeh* soaks, in a kettle or a saucepan, bring 8 cups of water to a boil and keep at a lively simmer. In a large (5-quart) Dutch oven or similar pot, heat 1/4 cup of oil over medium. Add the onion, give a quick stir to coat, and cook without stirring until the onion starts to turn golden at the edges and decreases in volume, 6 to 8 minutes. Begin to stir frequently and keep cooking until mostly golden throughout, 4 to 6 minutes more.

Season the onion with a little salt, add the turmeric and stir until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the meat, give a quick stir to coat in the onion mixture, spread evenly over the bottom of the pot and don’t touch for 1 minute. Then cook, stirring

frequently, until the meat is no longer pink, 2 to 3 minutes. Season with 2 teaspoons salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper.

Adjust heat to medium-low and add the tomato paste. Cook, stirring frequently, until the tomato paste releases its color into the oil, 2 to 3 minutes. (This step is very important for the final hue of the stew.) Add the cinnamon stick, give a quick stir and pour in enough boiling water to cover the meat. (You’ll use 2 1/2 to 3 cups water; reserve the rest for later.) Bring to a boil, stir, cover, adjust heat to low and gently simmer, stirring once in a while, for 1 hour, until the meat is tender.

While the meat simmers, prepare the saffron water: Using a mortar and pestle (or a spice grinder), grind the saffron to a fine powder (you will have a scant 1/4 teaspoon). If needed, add a small pinch of sugar to the threads to help with grinding. Add 2 tablespoons of the boiled water, gently stir, cover and let steep until ready to use. (If using a spice grinder, transfer the powdered saffron to a small glass to steep.)

Soak the *limoo Ammani*: Firmly hold one *limoo Ammani* at a time on a board and, with a fork or the tip of a paring knife, carefully puncture it a couple of times. Place in a small bowl, cover with boiled water and place another small bowl on top to submerge the limes. Let soak for 15 minutes to remove their bitterness. Drain and set aside until ready to use.

Par cook the *lappeh*: In a medium saucepan, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil over medium. Drain the *lappeh*, transfer to the saucepan and cook, stirring constantly, for 3 minutes (avoid overcooking, which would toughen the peas). Cover with 4 cups of the boiled water and add 1 teaspoon salt. Bring to a boil over high, adjust to a simmer, partially cover and cook, stirring occasionally and skimming off any foam, until the peas are al dente, 10 to 15 minutes. Drain, rinse with cold water and set aside.

When the meat has simmered for 1 hour, add the par cooked *lappeh*, drained *limoo Ammani* and 1 tablespoon of the saffron water to the stew, adjust heat to medium and bring back to a rapid simmer. Cover, adjust heat to low and simmer for 30 to 40 minutes, occasionally using the back of a wooden spoon to gently squeeze the *limoo Ammani* against the side of the pot, until the stew comes to life: The *lappeh* are tender but maintain their shape, the oils have risen to the surface and the flavors have come together. As the stew simmers, taste for salt and adjust as needed.

Remove the cinnamon stick, stir in the remaining saffron water and add lime juice to taste, 1 tablespoon at a time. Cook for 10 to 15 minutes more, until the consistency of the stew is not too thick and not too runny. (You should be able to spoon the ā over rice.) Adjust as needed: Add just-boiled water to thin out a little, or simmer uncovered to thicken. (The stew will also thicken as it sits.)

While the stew simmers, prepare the fried potatoes (if using store-bought potato sticks, skip this step) so you can serve them hot when the stew is ready (or keep warm in a 250-degree oven). Drain the potatoes and thoroughly pat dry with a clean kitchen or paper towel. Place a wire rack over a sheet pan (or line sheet pan with paper towels). In a large (12-inch), high-sided pan, heat the oil over medium-high until hot, about 2 minutes. Add the potatoes and give a quick stir with a slotted spoon. Fry without stirring (so they don’t break) for 4 minutes. Sprinkle the turmeric (if using) into the pot and continue to cook, stirring frequently, until the potatoes are golden and beginning to crisp, 3 to 5 minutes more. Transfer to the sheet pan and sprinkle with a little salt. Transfer the stew to a serving dish, scatter the fried potatoes on top and serve with rice.

TIPS:

Lappeh, Iranian yellow split peas, can be found at Iranian and Middle Eastern markets, and online. Make sure to use the “slow cooking” kind. You can also use Indian *chana dal* or yellow split peas.

Lamb (such as boneless lamb shoulder or leg) and beef (chuck or eye of round) are good choices for the stewing meat.

Limoo Ammani, often called *Omani*, can be found at Middle Eastern markets and online. The dried limes are served with the stew but typically not eaten. Unless you’re a diehard fan, in which case you can include small pieces, avoiding the seeds which are very bitter, with your bites of stew.

Instead of frying your own potatoes, you can purchase crunchy potato sticks (also called shoestring potatoes) online and in Middle Eastern markets in the snack section to use as a topping.

NAZ DRAVIAN is a writer and actor born in Iran. She grew up in Italy and Canada and now lives in Los Angeles with her husband and two children. She is the award-winning voice behind the food blog Bottom of the Pot, which won the 2015 International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) Award for best narrative culinary blog. She has also been twice nominated is several categories for the SaverFood Blog Awards. For her website and recipes, go to: <https://bottomofthepot.com/home/>

In her debut cookbook in 2019, *Bottom of the Pot*, Naz, an award-winning writer and passionate home cook based in L.A., opens up to us a world of fragrant rose petals and tart dried limes, music and poetry, and the bittersweet twin pulls of assimilation and nostalgia. In over 100 recipes, Naz introduces us to Persian food made from a global perspective, at home in an American kitchen. Her work has also been featured in the *New York Times*, and Condé Nast Traveler, among others. Occasionally, she steps away from her cutting board and rice pot and works as an actress. In 2019 she was nominated for a James Beard Award and Bottom of the Pot was the recipient of The IACP Julia Child First Book Award. Bottom of the Pot was a Taste Canada Gold Award winner, as well as the 2018 Food52 Piglet Award winner. Naz was featured in Padma Lakshmi’s Hulu show, “Taste the Nation.”

For this recipe, go to: <https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1026340-khoresh-gheymeh-meat-and-split-pea-stew>. For recipes in the *New York Times Cooking* section: <https://cooking.nytimes.com/author/naz-deravian>. For recipes in Epicurious: <https://www.epicurious.com/contributors/naz-deravian>.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/bottomofthepot>, Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/bottomofthepot/?hl=en>, Blog: <https://bottomofthepot.com/blog/>

For “Throw a Persian-Themed Dinner Party “ in *Sunset Magazine*, go to: <https://www.sunset.com/food-wine/kitchen-assistant/persian-recipes#bringing-iran-to-la>
Copyright 2021 Naz Deravian. All Rights Reserved.



ARTS & CULTURE

Klingen Ensemble Presents ‘Sounds of Armenia In London’

CONCERT, from page 13

Yerevan 2800, composed by Araik Gevorgyan and arranged by Palazian, honoured the city’s anniversary with a performance by Palazian and the quartet directed by Olah.

My Yerevan by Vagharshak Kotoyan deepened the patriotic theme, performed by soprano Hayarpi Yeghikyan and the ensemble.

Eduard Baghdasaryan’s “Nocturne” was presented by violinist Sharafyan and pianist Bobikyan, showcasing its lyrical quality.

As a tenor, Olah sang Konstantin Petrosian’s *Hayastan–Armenia* anthem.

The famous *Waltz* from Khachaturian’s “Masquerade Suite,” arranged by Olah, was presented by the Klingen Ensemble.

At the end of the concert the Klingen Choir performed Edgar Hovhannissyan’s *Arpa-Sevan*, Lusikyan’s *Nor Hayastan*, and Babajianian’s *Tchknagh Yeraz*. The culmination of the concert was Shakaryan’s jazz-inflected *Armenian Folk Songs* medley, which had been newly arranged by Olah in which all the instrumental and vocal participants of the concert gathered together for one major final performance. There was a standing ovation at the end of the concert.

Ealing Councillor Seema Kumar praised Olah for his immense contribution to disseminating Armenian music and culture in London, presenting him with a special award and certificate from Mayor of Ealing Yvonne Johnson. Attendees included councillors from various London boroughs, representatives from Armenian schools, “Znaniye” schools and foundation, cultural organization chairmen and members, and music enthusiasts from across the United Kingdom.



Helen Rotchel



Nika Pinter and Arie Dakessian



Sipan Olah conducts the musicians



Maria Palazian and Sipan Olah



Sipan Olah receives certificate from Ealing Councillor Seema Kumar



Hagop Mouradian

BEMF Pulled Off Quite a Feat

BEMF. from page 13

The show brought Boston area favorites such as Amanda Forsythe, Aaron Sheehan, Richard Pittsinger, and Jason McStoots to the stage together with out-of-town guests including Hungarian soprano Emőke Baráth in the title role. Baráth in particular deserves accolades; an announcement prior to the show told us that she was feeling unwell and would be marking most of her choreography. Despite this, she persevered, singing each aria and scene with strength of voice and emotional fervor that brought the regal Octavia to life. In particular, her extended accompanied recitative in Act 2, as Octavia prepares to take her own life, displayed both sincere emotion and vocal prowess, despite her standing still center-stage for the entirety. We didn’t mind the missing stage movements.

Baritone Douglas Ray Williams portrayed the capricious and inconstant emperor Nero, Octavia’s husband. He undergoes a significant character development through the opera, beginning by forsaking his wife for the Armenian queen Ormœna (Forsythe) who is herself married. He then attempts to do away with his wife by forcing her to commit suicide. Octavia is saved from this fate by Piso (Sheehan); she later appears to Nero pretending to be her own ghost. At this point, the famously

insane emperor descends into madness but is brought out of it by his general Fabius’s (Pittsinger) announcement of his defeat of Piso’s rebellion (the historical Pisonian conspiracy) and the subsequent revelation that Octavia lives. Husband and wife reconcile and Nero pardons Piso, achieving the *lieto fine* (happy ending) expected of such operas. Williams drew us into Nero’s journey with his evocative acting and deft use of vocal shadings. When acting the imperious ruler, he drew on the full resources of his dark lower register but when driven to madness by guilt and fear of his wife’s “ghost” he displayed an impressive lightness in his upper register. In this way, Williams demonstrated the versatility of the medium-low male voice not often heard in bel canto or contemporary operatic singing.

Led by co-music directors Stephen Stubbs and Paul O’Dette in the continuo section and concertmaster Robert Mealy in the strings, the BEMF orchestra shone throughout the evening. Keiser’s score calls for some unusual and innovative (for the time) orchestrations such as frequent use of two horns (Todd Williams and Nathanael Udell) and in one aria no less than 4 bassoons (Dominic Teresi, Allen Hamrick, Marilyn Boenau, and Sally Merriman). The orchestra sat on the floor in front of the stage and arranged themselves as Keiser’s orches-

tra would likely have been at the Gänsemarkt theater, even using a few faux candles as stand lights. The upper strings along with woodwinds sat in two long rows facing each other in the center with the continuo section in a group at one end and the orchestral cellos at the other. Mealy sat dead center facing toward the stage, allowing him to be seen clearly by the whole orchestra and the singers. Such a set up might seem odd to us today, but it was standard practice at the time.

The continuo section deserves special mention as well. Featuring O’Dette and Stubbs on theorbo and guitar along with David Morris (viola da gamba), Maxine Eilander (Baroque harp), Nathaniel Chase (double bass), and Jörg Jacobi (harpsichord), the continuo displayed great cohesion in their playing throughout and their instrumentation choices changed to suit the emotion of the singers in each section. For instance, the harp and gamba might accompany a particularly heartfelt moment while the harpsichord and plucked strings along with double bass might emphasize a more strident tone. This attention to instrumentation of continuo is both historically accurate and enhances the drama of the otherwise somewhat dry recitatives.

The Cutler Majestic proved quite hospitable to this production as it is slightly smaller than some other theaters nearby. The warm acoustic allowed not only for the various sections of the orchestra to be heard with great clarity but also for the singers to

project over the orchestra without strain. The only balance issue came with the two baritones (Williams and Christian Immler as the philosopher Seneca) whose lower registers the orchestra sometimes overshadowed. But, we never struggled to hear the wonderfully light coloratura of Forsythe’s Ormœna or Sherezade Panthaki’s Clelia, for instance. Such a revealing sonic environment might have exposed intonation or timing issues, but none were apparent as the strings played cohesively and the winds (especially Debra Nagy’s oboe) maintained warm and resonant timbres throughout.

Overall, BEMF pulled off quite a feat with “Octavia,” bringing together the finest in HIP instrumentalists, singers, dancers, costume and stage design to delight us with a three hour opera that felt much shorter. The orchestra rose to the challenge of Keiser’s innovative instrumentation. The singers gave emotionally nuanced portrayals of characters that might otherwise tend to the one dimensional without sacrificing technical precision in the often-challenging coloratura. And all 11 roles were strongly cast.

“Octavia” repeated on Friday evening, June 13, at 7 and Sunday afternoon June 15 at 3:30.

(Michael Goetjen, a musicologist, harpsichordist, and organist whose research focuses on 18th-century opera and the music of Mozart, teaches at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and BoCo (Boston Conservatory).)



ARTS & CULTURE

Karmella Tsepkenko's Creative and Family Ties to Armenia

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/ODESA — Karmella Tsepkenko (b. 1955, Odesa) is a renowned Ukrainian composer, laureate of the Taras Shevchenko National Prize of Ukraine (2024), recipient of the B. N. Lyatoshynsky Prize (2001), educator, professor (since 2009), with a PhD in pedagogy, secretary of the Board of the National Union of Composers of Ukraine, and an Honored Artist of Ukraine. From 1962 to 1973, she studied at the Odesa Special Secondary Music School. She continued her musical education at the Odesa Conservatory (1973–1979), where she studied composition and piano. From 1986 to 1989, she pursued postgraduate studies at the Moscow Pedagogical Institute. She also attended composition masterclasses in Germany three times.

Since 1980, she has been teaching composition at the Odesa V. Nezhdanova State Music Academy. In her teaching, she employs her original method, “Scenario-Based Development of Musical Material.” She has led masterclasses at institutions in Germany, Moldova, Russia, Switzerland, and the USA. Tsepkenko is a participant in numerous international festivals and forums and a laureate of international composition competitions.

In 1995, she initiated and became the artistic director of the annual festival Two Days and Two Nights of New Music in Odesa — an event featuring contemporary music by Ukrainian and foreign composers, primarily of an experimental nature. She is also the founder and chair of the board of the international public organization Association New Music, which serves as the Ukrainian section of the International Society for Contemporary Music. She has established a school of contemporary composition in southern Ukraine and has trained many students — composers who have become laureates of national and international awards.

During the Russo-Ukrainian war, Karmella Tsepkenko devised the slogan “Ukrainian women composers with their own weapon” as part of her creative wartime strategy and launched a project featuring works by composers and poets written during the war.

Dear Karmella, since 2022, whenever I speak with Ukrainians, I always begin with wishes for a swift peace — in Ukraine and throughout the world. Odesa, where you live, was recently bombed again by the Russian army. Nevertheless, you continue to hold the Two Days and Two Nights of New Music festival.

Dear Artsvi, just today (June 16, 2025), on one of the countless days of this terrible war, one of the most destructive attacks on Odesa and Kyiv took place. Entire blocks in the city center have been destroyed or damaged. The Russians are employing a scorched-earth tactic with absolute cynicism and cruelty. While Western and American politicians direct their efforts toward achieving a just and lasting peace in Ukraine, the aggressor continues to spread destruction and death. The Russian army has begun using very powerful drones carrying 150–200 kilograms of explosives, which are launched in swarms. We do not have enough capacity to shoot them all down. That is why there is such severe destruction and so many civilian casualties.

As for our annual international festival Two Days and Two Nights of New Music, it has been representing contemporary Ukrainian art in Odesa for decades, at a level comparable to the best global standards. During wartime, the festival has become a powerful artistic weapon in the fight against the Russian invaders. Its programs unite works by Ukrainian and foreign composers written during the war, reflecting — whether directly or allegorically — the heroism of the Ukrainian people, their armed forces, and the unprecedented support of Ukraine by Western countries.

The festival emerged in the early years of Ukraine's independence and is almost the same age as the young Ukrainian state. Throughout its history, the festival's efforts have been aimed at developing contemporary academic music: more than 2,700 performances of approximately 2,500 different works by 1,264 Ukrainian and foreign composers have taken place. Thousands of Ukrainian and foreign composers and performers have participated in the festival over the years.

Since its founding, only in 2022 — due to the start of the full-scale war — was it impossible to hold the 28th festival, which then took place in 2023. Despite the ongoing war, the 29th festival was successfully held in 2024, and the 30th edition is planned for August 2025 as a major cultural event, aimed at demonstrating to the world



Karmella Tsepkenko

that Ukrainian culture is indomitable and continues to exist and develop even under the extraordinary conditions of war.

In May of this year, during the Yerevan contemporary music festival Crossroads 2025, we heard your compositions. In one of them, I thought I heard notes of alarm linked to the war. Was I right?

In the cantata *Woher, schwarzer Tross, fliehender Schwarm, kommst du geflogen?* (“Where Are You From, Black Rolling Flock of Birds?”) for soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and baritone, set to the poetry of Serhiy Zhadan, there are indeed imitations of bomb explosions, air raid sirens, and machine gun bursts. This cantata was composed in May 2022 in Odesa on commission from association *maezenatentum.at* for the renowned Austrian ensemble REIHE Zykan +, with financial support from Federal Ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport of Austria. The text was translated into German by Claudia Dathe for the German publishing house Suhrkamp Verlag. In developing the piece dramatically, I used game-based compositional techniques and intensified the dramatization by incorporating a sense of competition between the vocal parts. At climactic moments, the texture becomes rich with polylinear, multilayered, meaning-forming structures. Dialogic imagery, opposition and fusion, internal and external conflict — all shape a sequential dramatic arc that resolves entirely in an emotional outburst. Special attention was given to the phenomenon of time: by densifying the event load per time unit and using methods of virtual inversions and bidirectional time flow, I aimed to evoke a sensation of compressed subjective time.

This was your fourth visit to Armenia. Could you tell us about your earlier visits and your connections with Armenian musicians?

My first trip was in 1978, to participate in the All-Union Festival of Creative Universities. It was unforgettable! We spent a week and a half in Yerevan, attending many fascinating concerts, meetings, and trips to Garni, Geghard, Sevan, and Zvartnots. I received my first diploma there for my piano piece *Variations*. I had the honor of meeting giants of Armenian music such as Edvard Mirzoyan and Alexander Arutyunyan.

My second visit was in 1982, when the Odesa branch of the Union of Composers of the USSR visited Armenia for an exchange program between the republican organizations. It was equally memorable. We gave concerts in Dilijan, Yerevan and Sardarapat. We also visited Echmiadzin, where we were allowed to descend into the cellar and see the ancient pagan site upon which the cathedral was built.

The third trip was in 2019, for a field session of the Music Olymp international competition for young musicians in Vanadzor, where I was on the jury. Yerevan amazed me with its scale—forty years had passed since my previous visit. A cooperation agreement was signed between the Kyiv and Odesa academies and the Yerevan Komitas Conservatory, but unfortunately, the wars prevented its realization.

The fourth visit: 2025, at the Crossroads 2025 international festival, invited by the QuarterTone NGO. Aside from my participation in the festival, a seminar was held dedicated to my work, showcasing key compositions. Two works were performed in concert, one of them commissioned by QuarterTone specifically for the festival, and I conducted a masterclass with students of the Yerevan Conservatory. The commissioned piece, *Collisions* for flute, clarinet, piano, violin, viola, and cello, was also inspired by the war. I sought to reflect the clash between peaceful life and war, a multi-dimensional confrontation of opposing values, mindsets, life rhythms, behaviors — even perceptions of time and space. It was performed by the ensemble Assonance, to whom I am very grateful for their inspired and technically superb interpretation. The second piece, *Im Träumen... und hier unten auf der Erde* (“In Dreams... and Here Below on Earth”) for flute, cello, and piano, was also beautifully performed by Assonance within the same project. It contrasts two parts: the first is melancholic, monotonous, and cloud-like; the second is active and restless, striving for perfection.

Every visit to Armenia leaves a deep impression. Each time brings new experiences — and something indescribable that stirs deep in the soul — something that connects you with past generations.

Many Armenian musicians came to Odesa through the Cultural Connections program funded by the Open Society Institute. The Armenian side was coordinated by you, Artsvi, and the Odesa side by myself and my husband, musicologist Alexander Perepelitsa. These were diverse projects involving composers, performers, dancers, and theater artists. Armenian musicians have also participated in our Two Days and Two Nights of New Music festival — Edward Ayrapetyan, Vache Sharafyan, Robert Amirkhanyan, Trio Shell, Suren and Gayane Hahnazaryans, Tsovinar Movsisyan, Gevorg Dabaghyan, Mikhail Kokzhaev, among others. Another major initiative was the Traveling Academy of Music, organized by the Odesa branch of the Open Society Institute (“Vidrodzhennia”), in which Armenian performers also took part.

You have not only creative but also family ties to Armenia. I met your husband in 1998, and he mentioned that you are Armenian on your mother's side.

My maternal grandfather, Kevork Kasparovich Demurchian, was born in 1881 in the autonomous community of Khotorjur in the Erzurum vilayet of Western Armenia. Khotorjur, consisting of two village clusters, was mostly populated by Catholic Armenians and was sometimes called “Little Rome.” In the early 1900s, Kevork, the son of a prosperous merchant, went to study at the Kyiv Commercial School in the Russian Empire. After graduating, he returned home, married Elbis Apozian (from a priest's family), and in 1912 moved to Russia again with his wife and daughter to start a business. He settled in Nikolaev, where he bought a mill, several bakeries, and confectioneries. My mother, Mariam Kevorkovna Demurchian, was born in Nikolaev in 1914. Just a few months later, the genocide of 1915 began in Khotorjur.

continued on next page



ARTS & CULTURE

Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island Celebrates 70th Anniversary

By Gary Nahabedian

PROVIDENCE — With voices lifted in harmony and hearts filled with pride, the Armenian community of Rhode Island gathered on June 28 to celebrate a remarkable milestone: the 70th anniversary of the Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island, under the inspired leadership of composer and conductor Konstantin Petrossian. For seven decades, the Chorale has stood as a cultural beacon — preserving and sharing the timeless beauty of Armenian music.

The evening was graced by the presence of many guests, inspiring a mix of song, dance, recognition, and community spirit. A distinguished group of Rhode Island political leaders honored the event with official citations, acknowledging the Chorale’s cultural impact.

Rhode Island State Senator David Tikoian and Congressman Seth Magaziner attended the concert in person and offered their warm congratulations. Their presence underscored the strong and ongoing support for Armenian culture across Rhode Island’s leadership.

Adding a meaningful international dimension, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the United States Lilit Makunts sent a letter of recognition. Her message expressed gratitude for the Chorale’s tireless dedication to cultural preservation and its role in strengthening the connection between the Armenian homeland and its diaspora.

The evening’s performances featured a rich and moving program of Armenian cho-



The Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island

ral music, showcasing the depth and spirit of the Armenian heritage. A highlight was the performances of the group of soloists.

The Nazeli Dance Group brought the joy and rhythm of Armenian folk dance to life with energy, elegance, and authenticity. Fr. Kapriel Nazarian’s participation added spiritual resonance to the occasion, while master of ceremonies Ara Boghigian kept the evening flowing with warmth, insight, and professionalism.

Following the program, guests gathered for a reception featuring refreshments including Armenian delicacies.

This 70th anniversary celebration was not

just a concert — it was a living testament to the enduring power of Armenian music, culture, and community. The Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island has uplifted generations through song, and this milestone reaffirmed its vital place in our cultural life.

Tsepkenko’s Ties to Armenia

from previous page

My grandfather played the flute and mandolin well. Family concerts were common at home. His eldest daughter Siranush (Lyuba) played the piano, his son Kaspar the violin, and my mother danced. From a young age, my mother studied with governesses—languages (German, French), piano, and drawing. She also trained in classical ballet. In 1928, when the Bolshoi Theatre came to Nikolaevo to stage Reinhold Glière’s *Red Poppy*, my mother was selected to perform as one of the Chinese girls. Choreographer Alexander Shiryayev invited her to study in Moscow, but then fate turned. Tragedy struck our family. My grandmother died in childbirth. The four children — Siranush, Mariam, Oghida (Olga) and Kaspar — were left alone. Grandfather was arrested as an “enemy of the people.” The children moved to Kyiv to live with their relative Vartan, a high-ranking party official (later imprisoned for alleged Dashnak affiliations).

My mother, a talented draughtswoman, found work in a design office. During the war, she served as a translator at headquarters, speaking fluent German, and reached Berlin with the troops. Olga finished medical school under occupation and later served on the front as a doctor. Kaspar also fought and returned as a captain, later working in KyivEnergo and organizing an amateur orchestra where he played and conducted. After the war, my mother, Olga, and my grandfather moved to Odesa. My mother married Semen Dmitrievich Tsepkenko — my father.

Were any Armenian traditions preserved in your family — musical, culinary, or otherwise?

Since my grandfather and Vartan lived with us, they spoke Armenian with my mother. Sadly, I never learned Armenian,

likely because Russian dominated all spheres at the time. I deeply regret not immersing myself in the language. Grandfather baked Easter cakes using old recipes (this skill saved him during the repressions—he worked as a baker in the camps). From Armenian cuisine, my mother made *tolma*, *tanabur* (yoghurt soup), *ghavurma*, *gata* and *shakar lokhum*.

You are the author of over 100 works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, vocal, piano, organ, three operas, and more. Do any of them relate to Armenia?

Yes, the *Requiem Symphony*, composed in 1988, which became a form of artistic reflection on both tragic and heroic historic events. It was inspired by two cornerstones of Armenian memory: the Genocide and the Battle of Sardarapat. I mentioned my visit to Sardarapat in 1982, which left a profound impact. Sardarapat became a symbol of victory that later inspired me artistically. Six years after that visit, I began composing the symphony. The memory of the Sardarapat battle crystallized into a musical scenario. The music unfolded naturally, reflecting my inner emotional world. The theme of the Armenian Genocide was not just a historical fact to me — it was personal. My maternal ancestors’ place, Khotorjur, was central to both massacres and resistance (I have a book with a photo of my grandfather in uniform as a defender). Many of his relatives perished during the genocide. One of the few survivors among the 35,000 residents was our relative, the Armenian poet François Bortchalyan, who later returned from France to Armenia and became a monk in Echmiadzin.

Thank you for your heartfelt responses, dear Karmella. I hope you will return once again to your mother’s homeland — this time with new compositions. And may peace soon be restored in Ukraine and throughout the world.

CALENDAR
OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

- MASSACHUSETTS
- 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 3 — Saints Vartanantz Annual Church Picnic, 12 Noon – 5:00 p.m., Music – Food – Dancing featuring the Jason Naroian Ensemble. 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford, MA.**
- 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**
- SEPTEMBER 27 — Armenian Museum of America Music in Color Concert with Musician-in-Residence, violinist Haig Hovsepian and pianist Joey Vasconi, 7- 9 p.m., 65 Main Street Watertown, MA 02472, (617) 926-2562**
- OCTOBER 4 — National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) - “Celebrating 70 Years- Building the Future of Armenian Studies” Gala at the Fairmont Copley Plaza in Boston. Honorees, Pamela Avedisian and Yervant Chekijian. For tickets and sponsorship opportunities please go to <http://naasr.org/gala70>**
- NOVEMBER 21 — AMAA’s Boston Child Care Committee presents an evening supporting the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan, Armenia, FEATURING COMEDIAN KEV ORKIAN. COCKTAILS, DINNER & LIVE AUCTION. Wellesley Country Club, Wellesley Hills. SPONSOR BY AUGUST 1, 2025, TO BE LISTED ON THE INVITATION! (Individual Tickets will commence at a later date). For more info visit: <https://amaa.org/hyemindsboston2025/>**

- CONNECTICUT
- AUGUST 24 — Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection annual church festival at 1910 Stanley Street, New Britain. Live Armenian band, authentic Armenian food, Armenian dancing, bake sale, Armenian vendor. Sunday, noon to 5:00 pm. Come experience the legendary New Britain Armenian hospitality.**
- 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 —



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE
UNITED STATES

EDITOR

Alin K. Gregorian

MANAGING EDITOR

Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

CONTRIBUTORS

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

REGIONAL

CORRESPONDENTS

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

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

VIDEO CORRESPONDENT

Haykaram Nahapetyan

The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is
published weekly, except two weeks in
July and the first week of the year, by:
Baikar Association, Inc.
755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA
02472-1509
Telephone: 617-924-4420
FAX: 617-924-2887
www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com
For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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

ISSN 0004-234X

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

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

Armenia Between Turkish and Azeri Demands

By Suren Sargsyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The past few weeks have been quite eventful with developments concerning Armenia. First was Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s visit to Turkey, followed by his meeting with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and the statement by Armenia’s deputy foreign minister, who said that Armenia could provide a route through its territory to connect Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan — without ruling out the possibility of delegating the security of that route to another actor.

Pashinyan’s visit occurred after Aliyev’s trip to Turkey, where he was personally welcomed by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the airport, illustrating the value of their bilateral strategic relationship. The following meeting between Aliyev and Pashinyan should be viewed in the same context as Pashinyan’s meeting with Erdoğan. This was a coordination of actions between Erdoğan, Aliyev and Pashinyan. It would be naïve to think that the prime minister of Armenia went to Turkey without an agenda. Even if he had no agenda of his own, it is highly unlikely that Erdoğan would have received him without having an entire set of important issues to discuss from his side. Moreover, Aliyev’s prior visit was most likely aimed at coordinating actions between the two Turkic states, while it can be assumed that Pashinyan went to Turkey with a package of proposals, the content of which is still being kept confidential.

Despite the veil of secrecy surrounding this visit, the prime minister, through two statements, roughly outlined the essence of the agenda. According to the prime minister’s official website, “The visit was based on Armenia-Turkey interstate relations, and the ongoing process is an agenda for establishing relations, which stems from the interests of both countries.” Secondly, Pashinyan discussed the Great Turan concept, suggesting its potential benefits for Armenia, possibly to prepare the Armenian public for its implementation. Pashinyan saw no “problem” with the possibility that Turkey’s goal might be the realization of the Great Turan idea.

“Right now everyone’s thinking the same thing — oh no, their goal is Turan! What do they want? They want to pass through Armenia? Let them pass; what’s wrong with that? We’re the ones proposing it. We ask, ‘What do you want?’ They say they want to go east–west, north–south. We say, ‘Go ahead, what’s the problem?’” Pashinyan mentioned this during his meeting with the Armenian diaspora in Turkey. The visit sparked debate in Armenian political circles, with some speculating Turkey would demand the removal

of the Russian military base.

While Turkey has numerous preconditions for normalizing relations, and the Russian base in Armenia is undoubtedly a concern for Ankara, this issue is likely primarily between Turkey and Russia, with Armenia’s influence being limited. In general, as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war as well as the Iran-Israel conflict, the role and significance of both Russia and Iran in the South Caucasus have considerably diminished. This has given Turkey the opportunity to become the sole influential player in the region. Increased pressure on Iran, including US military action, will likely constrain its foreign policy and could compel it to make concessions, potentially temporary. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that the opening of the Zangezur Corridor — about which Azerbaijan has recently started speaking with growing aggression — may be something Pashinyan is attempting to agree to, in order to avoid a potential military escalation, which his administration is incapable of resisting. And the best way to prepare the public for such a move would be to present it as an Armenian initiative, supposedly aligned with Armenia’s national interests.

Predicting outcomes in the rapidly evolving Middle East is challenging due to its shifting dynamics. The region is undergoing significant transformations, with each day presenting new complexities. Accurate assessment is crucial to avoid serious consequences. Experience suggests that the current Armenian authorities are un-

able to accurately assess risks, and this further complicates Armenia’s situation in an already difficult and complex environment like the one we are witnessing today. Hoping Turkey and Azerbaijan won’t exploit this situation to sever Syunik from Armenia, thus connecting Azerbaijan’s Nakhchivan exclave with Turkey, would be naïve. With Armenia excluded from decision-making, aligning Armenian interests with other regional players is crucial to minimizing losses.

As for the meeting between Pashinyan and Aliyev, it is important to note that Turkey and Azerbaijan have identical

preconditions. Both demand a corridor, and both insist that Armenia amend its Constitution — including changes to the preamble and to the national symbols described in it. In other words, Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations are already being treated as components of a single, comprehensive package. Armenia is expected to accept the corresponding preconditions if it wants to establish relations with the two Turkic states. As for the corridor, in Armenian discourse it will be referred to as a “Crossroads of Peace,” while Turkey and Azerbaijan will call it the “Zangezur Corridor,” and other actors will likely use the term “opening of communications.” However, the true nature of the project and the question of Armenia’s sovereignty over it will only become clear once it is known who will be responsible for ensuring its security.

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



OPEN LETTER ON THE PROPOSAL TO RENAME THE ARMENIA-TURKEY BORDER CROSSING AFTER TALAT PASHA

We express our deep concern and disappointment regarding the recent proposal introduced in the Turkish Parliament to rename the border crossing between Turkey and Armenia after Talat Pasha, the principal architect of the Armenian Genocide. As Minister of the Interior of the Ottoman Empire, Talat Pasha played a leading role in orchestrating the planned extermination of over 1.5 million Armenians, alongside the destruction of more than 2,000 churches, the erasure of entire communities, and the forced displacement of millions from their ancestral homeland.

Naming a place of passage and potential reconciliation after a figure so closely associated with the organized mass killing of a people is not only profoundly insensitive—it is an affront to the values of human dignity, historical truth, and moral accountability. Such an act risks legitimizing the crimes of the past, further deepening wounds that have never fully healed.

In contrast, we urge Turkish leaders and the broader public to consider an alternative—one rooted in hope, truth, and shared humanity. Why not name the crossing after a figure of conscience: Hrant Dink? Hrant Dink was a Turkish citizen of Armenian origin who stood against ethnic violence. He was someone who symbolized unity among Armenians, Turks, Kurds, and all peoples of Anatolia. A name that promotes remembrance, reconciliation, and the belief that the horrors of the past must never be repeated.

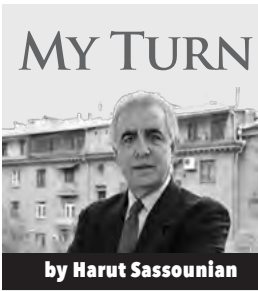
We call upon Turkish academics, civic leaders, and elected officials to remember that progress is not made by obscuring history but by confronting it with courage and integrity. Germany has publicly acknowledged the crimes of the Holocaust; Canada has confronted the truth of its actions against Indigenous peoples. It is time for Turkey to take a similar step—to recognize the genocide against its Armenian, Pontic Greek, Assyrian, and other minorities, which saw the death and expulsion of over 4.5 million people from the lands they had inhabited for millennia.

True national strength lies not in denial but in the ability to face history honestly. We remain hopeful that this proposal will be reconsidered in the spirit of mutual respect, dignity, and the shared values of humanity.

The International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights, A Division of the Zoryan Institute



COMMENTARY



Kocharyan Sues Pashinyan For Slander While Karapetyan Sues Over 150 Others

In all countries, individuals accused of crimes face lawsuits. If convicted, they serve their sentences. However, until a court issues a verdict, no one has the right to label these defendants “criminals, terrorists, or lawbreakers.”

Most countries have laws against libel which is the public dissemination of false information that damages someone’s honor, dignity, or business reputation. In Armenia, insults can carry a monetary penalty of up to 3 million drams (about \$7,800), while defamation may cost as much as 6 million drams (about \$15,600).

Yet, most people do not distinguish between an accusation and guilt. Under the rule of law, every person charged with a crime is innocent unless their guilt is proven in court.

In recent weeks, the Armenian government has accused dozens of individuals of crimes ranging from plotting a coup to planning terrorism acts. Long before any trial or verdict, officials and their supporters labeled the accused “criminals,” prompting numerous defamation lawsuits in response.

As I reported last week, Russian-Armenian businessman Samvel Karapetyan, who is detained in a Yerevan jail at Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s behest for defending Catholicos Karekin II, filed lawsuits against two pro-Pashinyan members of parliament. Karapetyan accused Arsen Torosyan and Hayk Konjoyan of falsely claiming that he has links to the Russian security services and “robs the Armenian people.” Karapetyan demands that they retract their accusations and each pay 9 million drams (about \$23,400), plus court costs.

Karapetyan then filed three additional lawsuits: 1. Against Pashinyan’s Press Secretary, Nazeli Baghdasaryan, for Facebook posts on June 17 and 24, alleging Karapetyan meddled in Armenia’s politics at the direction of a foreign country. She also wrote that Karapetyan took “part in a failed coup by a group of scoundrels.” He is demanding a public apology. 2. Against Pashinyan’s Deputy Chief of Staff Taron Chakhoyan for several Facebook posts, depicting Kar-

apetyan as an agent who was sent to Armenia on a mission, and making other “insulting” comments. Karapetyan considers these statements “defamatory, a lie, and baseless,” for which he is demanding a public apology. 3. Against political scientist Harutyun Mkrtchyan for interviews with pro-government journalists and Facebook posts, accusing Karapetyan of getting involved in political activities in Armenia as an agent under foreign orders. Karapetyan calls Mkrtchyan’s accusations “defamatory, false and baseless.”

Meanwhile, Attorney Hovhannes Khudoyan announced last week that his client Karapetyan is filing lawsuits against 150 other individuals for slandering and insulting those arrested in recent days under various charges, thus trampling the defendants’ right to presumption of innocence. The attorney claimed that “the statements made by Members of Parliament, ministers, and mid-level officials, as well as experts and propagandists, are aggressive and full of profanity.”

Finally, former Pres. Robert Kocharyan filed a lawsuit against Speaker of the Parliament Alen Simonyan, asking him to apologize and refute his “false” statements “tarnishing Kocharyan’s dignity and reputation.” Kocharyan filed a second lawsuit, after Simonyan mocked his initial lawsuit.

Kocharyan also sued Prime Minister Pashinyan for falsely alleging that a court found him guilty of bribery. Kocharyan is demanding that Pashinyan pay him six million drams (\$15,600) in compensation.

The problem with all these lawsuits is that most judges in Armenia still fear reprisals, if they rule against Pashinyan’s wishes, as he himself acknowledged in 2018 in a rare moment of candor. This casts a serious doubt on the prospects for impartial justice in these cases.

The defendants have two paths forward. They can wait for a future, independent Armenian court to restore their rights once Pashinyan leaves office. Or, if convicted, they can appeal the verdicts to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Karapetyan’s legal team announced last week that they are already preparing such an appeal to the ECHR, hoping the court in Strasbourg will overturn the unjust Armenian ruling. The only problem is that ECHR proceedings can take years, unless it is handled on an emergency basis.

In the meantime, the Armenian Apostolic Church should consider filing a lawsuit against Pashinyan and his partner, Anna Hakobyan, for violating the constitutional separation of Church and State, and for making unsubstantiated, vulgar accusations against Catholicos Karekin II and other high-ranking clergy. Should the courts in Armenia rule against the clergy, they should appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

The Deportation Theater of the Absurd

By Ardy (Ardashes) Kassakhian

GLENDAL, Calif. — By all appearances, LA County is once again hosting that peculiar brand of political theater that has come to define our nation’s governing bodies. In the city that gave birth to the film industry and reality TV, federal immigration agents are playing the lead role in a tragicomic production titled: “We’re Just Doing Our Jobs.” ICE (Immigrations and Customs Enforcement) raids have returned—not with nuance or necessity — but with the fanfare of a 3 a.m. door knock and all the empathy of classic bureaucratic indifference.

It is said that the moral arc of the universe bends toward justice. Apparently, ICE missed that memo, or perhaps it was confiscated during a “routine operation.” Their recent raids in LA County — cloaked in the language of national security — reveal less about threats to our borders and more about the hollowness of policies untethered from empathy or common sense. I’ve now lived in California long enough to have witnessed various waves of anti-immigrant rhetoric aimed at dividing this state against itself. Every time we’re made to believe that “illegals” are ruining our state. Yet, despite this broken record refrain, California is economically more prosperous than the 49 other states in America.

No rational person believes our nation’s borders should work like a sieve just as no rational person believes that someone who has risked life and limb to come to the United States to follow our laws, live and work with the hope of one day becoming a US citizen, should be persecuted. But that is exactly what is happening as tens of thousands of people are living in abject fear of being rounded up and locked away until such time that

they are deported to who-knows-where.

This is not law enforcement. It’s performance art in jackboots — targeting working families, lawful residents with minor infractions, and those whose only crime was believing America’s promise. Raiding homes in immigrant neighborhoods does not make us safer; it makes us smaller. We may claim to be a nation of laws, but we are also—perhaps more nobly — a nation of ideals. And ideals don’t chase farmworkers in the fields or raid homes in the dead of night, arresting parents and leaving children sobbing and terrified.

To those who shrug and say, “They broke the law,” I suggest they revisit the purpose of law in a republic that also prides itself on due process, proportionality, and, dare I say, decency. True law steers a society towards prosperity and security — it does not batter it into submission.

Likewise, violent protests in response to these raids — smashing windows, lighting cars on fire and destroying

ture for their children, only to be greeted in California with police lines, barbed wire, and violence. Steinbeck showed how fear turns neighbors into pariahs and hardship into a pretext for cruelty. A haunting episode of cruelty unravelling before our eyes in the form of yet another Hollywood reboot.

The famous folk singer Woody Guthrie sang the same warning in 1940, leveling his guitar like a moral compass against the immorality of excess and greed in our Golden State: “California is a Garden of Eden, A paradise to live in or see; But believe it or not, you won’t find it so hot If you ain’t got the do re mi.”

Then, as now, the promise of Eden collided with the price of admission. We have merely swapped “Okies” for Hondurans, Guatemalans, and Mexicans, Hoovervilles for detention centers, and shotgun-wielding gatekeepers for federally badged agents. What endures is the reflex to brand newcomers as economic threats, strains on public coffers, or cultural contagions. Human beings

THE ICE RAIDS IN LA COUNTY ARE NOT JUST MISGUIDED POLICY; THEY ARE A BETRAYAL OF THE VERY VALUES WE CLAIM TO CHERISH.

property, or assaulting officers — do nothing to advance justice and everything to erode credibility. Such actions betray the very ideals protesters claim to defend. How is looting the business that another immigrant built up with the sweat of their own brow advancing the cause of immigration reform or justice? And ironically, both agents and agitators wear masks. No one should hide behind masks — literal or figurative — if what they are doing is just and honorable. Moral clarity cannot be obscured by darkness or disguise.

A few years ago, I revisited a novel penned by one of my favorite writers and a native son of our great state — John Steinbeck — who chronicled the migrant experience during an earlier, dust-choked chapter of the American history. In his seminal work, The Grapes of Wrath, he captured the chaos of Dust Bowl during the 1930s, chronicling the struggle of working folks: families from Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas — Americans all — fleeing drought and despair, seeking a better fu-

— then and now — are reduced to ledger entries rather than embraced as fellow travelers seeking dignity.

The accents change; the scapegoating stays the same. The question before us, unchanged since Steinbeck’s and Guthrie’s day, is not whether migrants will come — they always do — but whether we, in our supposed wisdom, will remember who we once were and choose empathy over expediency.

The ICE raids in LA County are not just misguided policy; they are a betrayal of the very values we claim to cherish. If this is what America looks like in the mirror, perhaps it’s time to ask whether the “home of the brave” still welcomes the brave who seek a home.

(Ardashes “Ardy” Kassakhian is a councilmember @ City of Glendale, CA, former mayor, adjunct instructor of Political Science, and a government and public relations expert and strategic communications and community relations consultant.)



Latvia's Alexander Geronyan Describes a Year with Aznavour

By Melik Tangian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

RIGA/YEREVAN — There is a very active and dynamic Armenian community in Latvia. One telling example of its vigor is how widely the 100th anniversary of Charles Aznavour was celebrated in Riga. The organizer of these events — public figure, journalist, and publisher Alexander Geronyan — tells us about the activities dedicated to the maestro's jubilee: "UNESCO designated 2024 and 2025 as the 'Years of Aznavour' in its calendar. And of course, we could not fail to duly commemorate this important cultural event in Riga."

Geronyan related: "We began with the poetic legacy of the great chansonnier. I reached out to my poet friends and suggested that they translate Aznavour's poems from French into Russian. I provided them with literal translations. After some time, a collection entitled August in Paris was born. Its presentation took place at the bookstore 'Vilki Books.'" Poets Angela Gasparyan, Pyotr Antropov, Yuri Kasyanich, and Natalia Lysiakova read their translations, while musicians Alexander Beknazarov (together with his daughter Nina) and Yuri Tikhomirov performed songs they had composed based on

Aznavour's poetry. Geronyan said that he hopes that August in Paris will soon also appear in Latvian.

He then organized an evening at the Vysotsky Museum of the Baltic International Academy dedicated to the jubilarian. At the dawn of his film career, Aznavour acted alongside the young Marina Vlady in Michel Cravenne's comedy "Everything Works Out in the End." Many years later, Aznavour with his wife Ulla and Marina with her husband Vladimir Vysotsky celebrated New Year's Eve at the Parisian restaurant Raspustin. As it turned out, the two men were familiar with each other's work. When Charles first heard the bard perform Two Guitars, he was absolutely amazed. He later introduced this gypsy hit to French audiences, performing it on stage in French, but with the original Russian chorus: "Ekh raz, yeshchyo raz, yeshchyo mnogo-mnogo raz..."

A grand concert in honor of Aznavour was held in the assembly hall of the Baltic International Academy in September 2024. It lasted almost three hours and featured not only stars of the Armenian community such as Lilit Yedigaryan and Hasmik Bagoyan but also friends of the community, including Latvians, Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians. Denis Poghosyan, with

the help of artificial intelligence, prepared a video clip for the famous song about the Armenian Genocide, Ils Sont Tombés. Gabriella Babayan sang She in English, and Irina Sidorova performed a piano medley of French pop songs. Geronyan was joined in hosting the event by student Yevgenia Harutyunyan and schoolgirl Arina Hambartsumyan. They spoke in Latvian, Russian, Armenian, and French.

The great artist acted in many films, and this could not go unnoticed. At the Kęngaraga Library, a lecture was held about Aznavour's film roles. Geronyan spoke about "Ararat," the important film by Atom Egoyan for both the chansonnier and the Armenian people. In it, Aznavour played director Saroyan, who was making a film about the Armenian Genocide. After the lecture, François Truffaut's "Shoot the Piano Player!" was screened, in which Aznavour — at the start of his film career — played the lead role of Edouard Saroyan.

Songs by the jubilarian and compositions dedicated to him by Latvian authors were regularly featured in the program Melodies of Armenia, held in a restaurant in Riga's Old Town. They were performed by Lilit Yedigaryan, Alexander Beknazarov, and Hasmik Bagoyan. Geronyan proudly declared: "I won't hide the fact that our Mel-

odies of Armenia concerts are always sold out! We're attended by locals and guests from Armenia, the USA, Lithuania, Russia, and France."

At the Nikolai and Mikhail Zadornov Library, the program Bards Sing Aznavour marked the centennial of the great chansonnier. Composers and bards Alexander Beknazarov and Yuri Tikhomirov performed songs composed to Aznavour's poetry. Geronyan, as the host, spoke about the artist's life journey and how his jubilee is being marked in Latvia and Armenia. Geronyan also read poems by Aznavour from



Alexander Geronyan

the collection August in Paris.

Geronyan was warmly welcomed also by the Krišjānis Barons Cultural Society. A meeting was held at the museum-home of Rainis and Aspazija, the renowned couple and classics of Latvian literature. He said that the audience asked many questions, not only about Aznavour, but also about the history and culture of Armenia.

The jubilee of the French-Armenian artist was discussed on Latvian Radio. The occasion was the release of Geronyan's book Aznavour's Eternal Love. Last summer, composer Alexander Beknazarov and Geronyan were at the studio talking about the publication of August in Paris in Riga. Alexander performed two of his songs based on the jubilarian's poetry. This time, the two spoke with the radio host about Aznavour's life and creative path.

The conversation about the book continued sometime later at the popular café of the Polaris bookstore. Geronyan said he spoke about his hero's journey — from a poor childhood to global fame, about his family, his famous friends, and his deep ties with Armenia. They had musical breaks to listen to the great chansonnier himself and songs dedicated to him by Riga's artists. They spoke about why his hits still sound fresh, as if written just yesterday. Geronyan said he shared little-known facts about Aznavour's life and also spoke about his house-museum in Yerevan, headed by Nicolas Aznavour, the chansonnier's younger son.

Geronyan said he is grateful to everyone who helped organize these events and publish the books dedicated to the great artist's centenary, including Mkhitaryan, Honorary Consul of Armenia in Latvia; Stanislav Buka, founder of the Baltic International Academy; and businessmen Aram Harutyunyan, Pavel Sayadov, Vachagan Poghosyan, and Oskar Sarkisyan (the latter prepared the Latvian edition of Aznavour's Eternal Love, which is expected to be released this autumn and will go on sale). He expressed his thanks for the warm feedback and coverage in the Latvian media.

ARMENIA FEST

2025

Embracing Our Past,
Building the Future...

Proceeds from ARMENIA FEST benefit the
**Knights of Vartan
Economic Sustainability Program (ESP)**

The purpose of the ESP is to create jobs and promote
self-employment in the Republic of Armenia.

Royal Oak Farmers Market ★ Sat. Aug. 23rd

5pm - 10pm

316 E. 11 Mile Road (just east of Main Street)

Live Music by

THE ARMENIA FEST ALL-STAR BAND

Performances by
The Hamazkayin
Arax Dance Group



More Food Vendors to try!

Kabob Dinners, Armenian Pastries,
Lamajoon & more!



Beer & Wine Garden
featuring American and Armenian selections

NEW Outdoor Cigar Bar
featuring Armenian Wines & Cognac's



The 2025 GREAT CHOREG BAKE OFF!
All are welcome to enter their best Choreg!

Opening Ceremony with
presentation of Anthems by
Rubik Mailian

- Free Parking at Royal Oak Church 411 E. 11 Mile Rd.
- Open to the Public
- Children's Face Painting, Balloon Art and more...
- Local Vendors
- Armenian Artisans
- Raffles and more...



Large air conditioned
pavilion & tents on site
Limited tables & chairs.
Bring your lawn chairs
for a guaranteed seat!

FREE ADMISSION

Brought to you by the

2025 Armenia Fest Committee

Exhibit Information Call/Text/Email Noreen Masropian at
248.376.0899 / armeniafestvendor@gmail.com

Follow the QR Code
to place an ad in the
ad book or to donate to
support ARMENIA FEST.

