

Vatican Signs New Collaboration Agreements With Azerbaijan

By Edgar Beltran

THE VATICAN (*The Pillar*) — The Vatican this week signed several new collaborative agreements with Azerbaijan’s government, the latest in a series of controversial arrangements with a government accused of ethnically cleansing Christian minorities within its territory.

Azerbaijan signed agreements with the Bambino Gesù Children’s Hospital and the Vatican Apostolic Library and Apostolic Archives, alarming critics who accuse the Azeri regime of human rights abuses against the Armenian minority and of practicing “caviar diplomacy” by using its cultural and economic power to shape Vatican policy in the South Caucasus region.

A September 9 agreement between the Azeri Ministry of Health and the Bambino Gesù Hospital will enhance collaboration in specialized pediatric training, genetic diagnostics, and clinical management of complex cases. Azeri media reported that the initiative was also supported by the Secretariat of State.



The Bambino Gesù Hospital

A day later, a representative of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation - led by Azerbaijan’s first lady and widely considered the “caviar diplomacy” arm of the Azeri regime - signed an agreement with the Apostolic Library and the Apostolic Archives, by which Azerbaijan will work on the digitalization of documents related to Azeri history in the Vatican archives, as well as on cooperation in research, workshops, exhibitions, and bibliographic initiatives.

The agreements are the latest development in a long-standing relationship between the Holy See and the controversial Azeri regime.

In April, the Azeri regime held a conference at the Pontifical Gregorian University, prompting widespread backlash.

The April 10 conference was entitled “Christianity in Azerbaijan: History and Modernity.”

Armenian activists and Church leaders called the event part of a broader campaign to erase Armenian Christian heritage from disputed territories.

Promotional materials for the conference included distinctly Azeri reads on West Asian history, including a display of

see VATICAN, page 5



Ruben Rubinyan (right) and Serdar Kılıç (left), the Armenian and Turkish special envoys for normalization of relations, shake hands at the state border. Official photo.

Armenian and Turkish Special Envoys Hold Talks in Yerevan

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

YEREVAN (OC-Media) — On Friday, September 12, Turkey’s Special Envoy for normalization with Armenia, Serdar Kılıç, arrived in Armenia via the land border, which remains closed, to hold talks for the first time in Yerevan.

Kılıç’s Armenian counterpart, Ruben Rubinyan, welcomed him at the border, with the two shaking hands before walking onto Armenian territory.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry reported that the envoys “agreed to expedite” the process of opening the border crossings, the agreement on which they reached in July 2022.

Then Armenia and Turkey have reached an agreement to allow third-country citizens and

diplomats to cross the border between the two countries, the Armenia–Turkey land border remains closed, with Turkey conditioning progress on its opening with the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process.

“They also decided that efforts should be made to strengthen cooperation in the field of culture and

see ENVOYS, page 2



The protester hold posters displaying images of Armenian prisoners in Azerbaijan, red hands along with 1915, and messages such as “No to Denial.” Photo: RFE/RL.

Genocide Scholar Tessa Hofmann Honored in Germany

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier signed an order this summer naming Dr. Tessa Hofmann, sociology scholar, genocide researcher, and human rights proponent, as recipient of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. In his letter informing Hofmann two weeks later of the honor, George Klussmann, the Berlin Mayor’s chief of



Prof. Tessa Hofmann

protocol, wrote, “With your exceptional personal achievements you have made an outstanding contribution to the common good of the Federal Republic of Germany. For this engagement, I render my thanks.”

Although the specific grounds for conferring the award are yet to be officially stated, the fact that it was the Department for Culture and Social Solidarity of the Berlin Senate that issued the declaration is indicative. Hofmann is well-known for her civil society activities, particularly in her leading role in promoting recognition of the genocide against the Armenians and other Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire, recognition that came in the form of a resolution passed by the Bundestag (Parliament) in 2016. Among those organizing support for this honor are in fact many individuals and organizations, of Germans, and especially Kurds, Alevites, Armenians, Greeks and Syrian Orthodox Aramaeans.

see HOFMANN, page 5

Pashinyan Under Fire Over ‘Pro-Turkish’ Change in Armenian Passport Stamps

By Ruzanna Stepanian

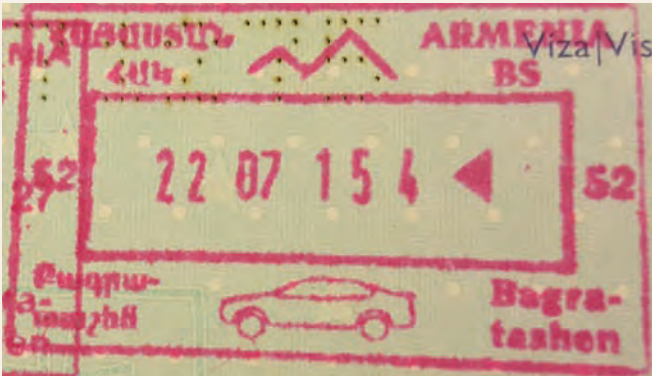
In what opposition leaders see as yet another concession to Turkey, Armenia’s government has decided to remove an image of Mount Ararat from the entry and exit passport stamps issued by Armenian immigration officers.

The emblematic mountain located in modern-day

Turkey but still regarded by Armenians as a key national symbol has been depicted in the stamps put on travelers’ passports ever since the country’s independence. This will no longer be the case starting from this November.

The government did not explain the change approved during a cabinet meeting on

see STAMP, page 3



The official passport stamp in Armenia

ARMENIA

Mystery of Armenia’s ‘Dragon Stones’ Discovered



VATICAN

Armenian Church Head Meets Pope Leo



WASHINGTON, DC

Assembly Internship Program Highlights Importance of Connecting with People Shaping Policy





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Prospects of Armenia’s European Integration Discussed in France

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Vahan Kostanyan, during a visit to France, met with Minister Delegate for European Affairs Benjamin Haddad, on September 16.

The officials “commended the high level of political dialogue between Armenia and France, discussed upcoming programs, as well as emphasized the importance of establishing a strategic partnership,” the Armenian foreign ministry said in a press release.

Kostanyan briefed the French official on the steps undertaken by the Government of Armenia following the adoption of the law “On the launch of the process of Armenia’s accession to the European Union”, aimed at deepening the partnership with the European Union, providing a detailed overview of the reform agenda, the ministry said.

The organization process of the European Political Community Summit to be held in Armenia in 2026 was touched upon.

Kostanyan briefed Haddad on the historic agreements reached in Washington on August 8 in the normalization process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as Armenia’s vision for the institutionalization of peace, the ministry said. Views were also exchanged on current issues on the international and regional agenda, it added.

Armenia Confirms Participation in CIS PMs Meeting in Minsk

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenia on September 16 confirmed its participation in the upcoming meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), scheduled to take place in Minsk on September 29. However, the format of its participation remains undecided, according to First Deputy Secretary General of the CIS Igor Petrishenko, who spoke to journalists in Minsk.

The summit will include discussions on 14 agenda items, reports Sputnik Armenia.

“Armenia has also confirmed its participation. The matter is currently under review. This is a decision the Armenian side must make in order to ensure more effective participation. Therefore, they will make the final call,” Petrishenko said in response to a question about whether Armenia would join in the current format.

On a related note, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko visited Nagorno-Karabakh from May 15 to 17, 2024. He said that prior to the 2020 war, referring to it as “your liberation war” in a conversation with Ilham Aliyev, he and Aliyev had concluded that victory was possible. Lukashenko added that the current period is a difficult one, requiring efforts to revive the region.

Armenian Transit Corridor Gets Initial Financial Infusion

Armenian officials say the transit corridor brokered by US President Donald Trump has entered “the practical implementation phase.”

The corridor, dubbed the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), will receive an initial infusion of \$145 million to create necessary infrastructure. TRIPP is projected to traverse 42 kilometers of Armenian territory to connect Azerbaijan proper to its Nakhchivan exclave, marking the final piece of what is projected to become the central trade route in the emerging Middle Corridor trade network. The corridor is the centerpiece of a peace deal signed by Armenia and Azerbaijan and overseen by Trump in Washington on August 8.

“Working with Congress, we plan to provide \$145 million in assistance for Armenia, which marks the first major step toward making TRIPP a reality,” Brendan Hanrahan, Senior Bureau Official of the State Department’s Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, stated in a social media post. Hanrahan, along with US Ambassador Kristina Kvien, led the US delegation during September 11 talks with Armenian officials in Yerevan. The discussions covered a wide range of issues, including an

Armenian trade initiative called the Crossroads for Peace.

The meeting participants gave no indication whether they made progress on working out key corridor details, including establishing a construction timetable and a procedural framework. According to initial indications, an American private company was to manage the route. But officials in Yerevan have stated that they will retain sovereignty over TRIPP’s functions. It was also uncertain whether the \$145 million pledged has already been earmarked by Congress and when the funding would start flowing.

Armenian officials clearly articulated an expectation that the \$145 million amount is just the first tranche of others to come, something that US officials did not specifically mention in their own public comments. In a social media post, for example, Armenian Economics Minister Gevorg Papoyan said “the United States will soon provide Armenia with \$145 million ... with further support to follow,” the Armenpress news agency reported.

Hanrahan was also upbeat about his discussions with top Azerbaijani officials on September 10, touting “great momentum here in Baku as we begin implementing

President Trump’s historic peace summit.”

In a September 8 appearance at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (МГИМО), Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov downplayed the significance of the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace deal signed at the White House, questioning the Trump administration’s ability to follow through on its diplomatic commitments.

“There is a type of foreign policy when you do something flashy to score points in mass media,” Lavrov said. “But if there’s no follow up, then it’s just a flash in the pan.”

Meanwhile, Armenia’s president, President Vahagn Khachaturyan, striking a defiant tone in a comprehensive interview with Russia’s RTVI outlet, said the Kremlin needed to get used to the idea of Armenia’s geopolitical free agency.

“[Armenia’s] relationship with Russia is completely different now, it is a partnership” rather than before when “Russia’s attitude towards Armenia was that of an older brother to a younger brother,” Khachaturyan said.

(Eurasianet.org originally ran this story on September 12.)

Armenian and Turkish Special Envoys Hold Talks

ENVOYS, from page 1
academia, particularly by creating scholarship opportunities for higher education students and the joint renovation of the historical Ani/Silk Road bridge,” read the Armenian readout.

They also agreed “to carry out the necessary work for other interested companies to start flights to various destinations starting in the summer of 2026,” which will work towards increasing the number

fulfilment of Turkish preconditions.”

Armenian and Turkish envoys have been meeting since January 2022, with most discussions taking place in third-party capitals, such as Moscow and Vienna. Previously, in July 2024, Rubinyan and Kılıç held their fifth meeting on the Margara–Alican crossing on the border of the two countries. In April, they met within the framework of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum.



The Armenian and Turkish delegations on normalization hold talks in Yerevan. Official photo.

of flights between the two countries.

Following the meeting, Kılıç expressed gratitude for Rubinyan’s “warm welcome,” adding that he was “glad” to meet him again.

At the same time, members of the opposition Armenian Revolutionary Federation held a small protest near the government building. However, according to RFE/RL, Kılıç and Rubinyan held their talks at the Armenian Foreign Ministry. The aim of the protesters was “to express to the negotiators on the Armenian and Turkish sides our disagreement with the

In 1993 Turkey unilaterally closed its border with Armenia during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Armenian and Turkish Statements ahead of the Meeting

Armenian authorities first reported a meeting between special representatives for the Armenia–Turkey normalization process in Yerevan on September 7, without giving specifics of the date and venue.

Earlier this week, Rubinyan stated at parliament that his meeting with Kılıç would focus on the entire normalization

agenda. He added that he saw no reason why Turkey should hesitate to open the border and establish diplomatic relations with Armenia.

“At least there is no issue of hesitation from the Armenian side. We are ready to have open borders and diplomatic relations even tomorrow,” Rubinyan said.

He highlighted that Armenia continues the normalization process with Turkey “without preconditions.”

Unlike Armenia, Turkey conditioned the process on the developments between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Ahead of the meeting, Kılıç pointed out the reasons which obstruct them from opening the border.

Referring to Rubinyan’s remarks expressing Armenia’s readiness to open the border, Kılıç claimed that “some technical work needs to be carried out before certain projects can be implemented; otherwise, we have no issue regarding intent.”

Kılıç’s statement came on Thursday, during a press briefing in Turkey’s Igdir province bordering Armenia, where he went to meet with the province’s governor, Ercan Turan, ahead of his meeting with Rubinyan.

During the same briefing, Kılıç stated the “Zangezur route,” in an apparent reference to the Trump Route, was “particularly significant” and “important not only for relations between Turkey and Armenia but also for opening up to all of Central Asia and the Turkic republics.”

The Washington summit on between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the US on August 8 saw the initialing of the peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as an agreement to establish a route between Azerbaijan and its exclave of Nakhichevan through Armenia called Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP).



ARMENIA

Mystery of Armenia's 'Dragon Stones' Discovered: An Ancestral Water Cult in the Highlands

By Guillermo Carvajal

YEREVAN (LBV Magazine) — A team of Armenian and European researchers has carried out the first comprehensive statistical analysis of the vishaps, enigmatic prehistoric stelae known as “dragon stones” that rise in the highlands of Armenia. The results, published in the journal *Npj Heritage Science*, reveal that their construction was an intentional and colossal effort, and that they were deeply linked to an ancient water cult.

The vishaps (Armenian term for “dragon”) are prehistoric stone monuments carved with images of animals. They are found in the high mountain pastures of present-day Armenia and adjacent regions, at altitudes ranging from 1,000 to 3,000 meters above sea level. Carved from local stone, mainly andesite and basalt, these stelae are classified into three main types: *Piscis*: Fish-shaped, *Vellus*: Shaped like a stretched or hanging bovine hide and *Hybrid*: A combination of the iconographies of the two previous types.

With heights ranging from 1.1 to 5.5 meters, most lie today toppled or placed horizontally, but the fact that all of them are carved and polished on all sides except for the “tail” strongly indicates that they were originally erected vertically.

A Century-old Archaeological Puzzle

Scientific interest in the vishaps arose in the early 20th century. The scholar Ash-Kharbek Kalantar pioneered their study in an archaeological context and linked them with other megalithic phenomena. He was the one who launched a crucial hypothesis: that the vishaps marked critical points in prehistoric irrigation systems.

However, the systematic study of these monuments was limited for decades. It was not until 2012 that a collaborative project between the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, the Free University of Berlin, and Ca' Foscari University of Venice resumed the research with modern methods. The objective: to unravel the function and socioeconomic background of the vishap phenomenon through landscape surveys and stratigraphic excavations.

A key site in this research has been Tirinkatar (also known as Karmir Sar), on the

slopes of Mount Aragats, where an exceptional concentration of 12 of these stelae was discovered.

One of the greatest challenges has been determining when these stones were erected. The history of their dating has gone through several stages. For a time, they were considered an “archaic” phenomenon. A crucial finding was the Garni 1 stele, which bears a secondary Urartian cuneiform inscription of King Argishti I (8th century BC), which placed the vishaps, at least in their reuse, in the second millennium BC.

But the definitive breakthrough came with the excavations at Tirinkatar. Radiocarbon dating of 46 organic samples recovered in stratified contexts allowed, in two specific cases, the erection of two vishaps to be dated around 4200–4000 BC, that is, in the Chalcolithic or Copper Age.

This suggests that the vishaps are a product of this period, later reused and reinterpreted in various ways in later times. The Tirinkatar site has thus been shaped as a sacred cultural landscape with an extraordinary concentration of these monuments since at least the late fifth millennium BC.

The Analysis: Size, Altitude, and a Tremendous Effort

The new study focuses on the statistical analysis of two physical characteristics of 115 vishaps documented in Armenia: their size and the altitude at which they are found.

The researchers started from a logical premise: the amount of work required to create a — from quarrying the stone, carving and polishing it, to transporting it — is proportional to its size. Larger stones equate to much greater human effort. At the same time, altitude drastically conditions the time available for work. Above 2,000 meters, the snow-free activity window is considerably reduced, making any construction project much more difficult.

The larger vishaps would require greater processing time, especially in regions where the length of the snow-free period decreases with increasing altitude. Therefore, one would expect that at higher altitudes, smaller vishaps would be found, the authors explain. In other words, smaller vishaps would be expected at higher elevations, where the time to work them was

shorter.

However, the results contradicted this expectation. The analysis showed no correlation between the size of the vishaps and altitude. There is no trend indicating a decrease in the number of large vishaps as elevation increases. In fact, some of the largest and heaviest examples (such as Karakap 3, weighing 4.3 tons) are found above 2,800 meters.

This suggests that the builders intentionally dedicated their limited periods of



Piscis-type dragon stone in Armenia. Credit: “Vishap” Project, A. Bobobkhyan

activity in the higher areas to the construction and transport of large monuments that required much manpower, the study notes, despite the added logistical difficulties, such as providing food and fuel for the workers.

Another crucial finding was the altitude distribution of the vishaps. Far from being evenly spread, they show two very marked peaks or modes: one around 1,900 meters and another, even more prominent, around 2,700 meters above sea level.

This bimodal distribution suggests a deliberate and structured placement pattern, linked to specific cultural motivations and not to chance or simple resource availability. These two altitudes represent two very different environmental realities in terms of snow levels and periods of human activity

The Water Cult in the Summits

All these clues — the association with water, the fish shapes, the location at extreme altitudes despite the cost — point to the same conclusion: the vishaps were cult monuments dedicated to water.

The natural motivation for placing the vishaps at higher altitudes may be related to the cult of water as a life-sustaining force in the valleys located below, the authors conclude. The motivation was cultic. Positioning these monuments near the

summits, the main snow reservoirs, had a profound symbolic and practical meaning. The water melting from these summits is what sustains life in the valleys, especially during the hot and dry summer months.

Kalantar's hypothesis about their connection to prehistoric irrigation systems makes full sense here. The vishaps would not only be near water, but would mark and sacralize the very origin of that vital resource.

The double concentration of stelae at 1,900 and 2,700 meters could be related to patterns of seasonal migration or ritual pilgrimages to these sources of life in the heights. Areas such as Mount Aragats and the Geghama Mountains, rich in water and archaeological monuments, contrast with others such as Mount Ararat, with porous soils and scarce water sources, where cultural remains are much rarer.

The study culminates with a reflection: Human history shows that cults are often associated with significant efforts by their societies.

The analysis of Armenia's dragon stones goes beyond archaeology to delve into the psychology and organization of the first complex societies. It reveals that, more than 6,000 years ago, the communities of the Armenian highlands were willing to invest an enormous amount of energy and resources in an apparently non-utilitarian project.

But it was not arbitrary: it was an investment in their worldview, in the sacralization of the element that guaranteed their survival — water. The location, size, and shape of the vishaps are not accidental; they are the petrified proof of a deeply rooted belief that mobilized an entire community toward the summits, defying the logic of minimal effort, to erect eternal witnesses of their faith in the sources of life.

Pashinyan Under Fire Over 'Pro-Turkish' Change in Armenian Passport Stamps

STAMP, from page 1

Thursday and revealed at the weekend. Speaking during a security forum in Yerevan on Monday, September 15, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan implied that he does not want to “annoy” Turkey anymore.

“I want to give a very simple example: you built your house within your cadastral line but you painted a picture on your house, especially on the outer walls, that symbolizes your perception that your neighbor does not deserve to have what he has,” Pashinyan said, clearly alluding to the decision that sparked an uproar from his political opponents and other critics.

Senior representatives of Armenia's leading opposition groups insisted that the Armenian passport stamps do not amount to a territorial claim against Turkey and that Pashinyan simply keeps cozying up to Ankara with unilateral concessions. Seyran Ohanian, the parliamentary leader of the Hayastan alliance, said the controversial

change may have also been demanded by the Turks.

Pashinyan's cabinet made the decision the day before a Turkish envoy, Serdar Kilic, visited Armenia for further talks with Armenian officials on the normalization of bilateral relations. Ankara continues to make it conditional on an Armenian-Azerbaijani settlement acceptable to Azerbaijan.

Hayk Mamijanyan of the opposition Patriotic Unem bloc suggested that Ankara did not actually demand Ararat's removal from the Armenian passport stamps.

“One can endlessly be amazed at how zealously Pashinyan is ready to please Turkey or Azerbaijan,” Mamijanyan told reporters.

Artur Hovannisyan, a senior lawmaker from Pashinyan's Civil Contract, rejected the opposition criticism.

“The stamp of the Republic of Armenia placed on passports must reflect the state symbols of the Republic of Armenia and

be free from emotional, sentimental symbols,” he said.

In fact, Ararat, which is adjacent to the Armenian border and very visible from Yerevan, is depicted in Armenia's state coat of arms. The mountain is shown rising above a sea that presumably symbolizes the biblical Deluge.

Pashinyan criticized the coat of arms in 2023, saying that it underlines a “dichotomy between historical Armenia and real Armenia.” Hovannisyan claimed that the Armenian authorities are not considering erasing Ararat from it.

The only legal way of doing that is to amend the Armenian constitution or adopt a new one through a referendum. A government task force formed by Pashinyan is already drafting a new constitution demanded by Azerbaijan. The Armenian opposition has vowed to scuttle its adoption at a planned referendum that could be combined with parliamentary elections due in June 2026.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

Arsen Harutyunyan Wins Bronze at World Wrestling Championships

ZAGREB (Armenpress) — Armenian freestyle wrestler Arsen Harutyunyan (57 kg) won a bronze medal at the 2025 World Wrestling Championships held in Croatia's capital, on September 15.

In the bronze medal match, the four-time European champion defeated Mexico's Roman Bravo Young with a score of 7:4.

Harutyunyan had previously claimed bronze medals at the 2021, 2022, and 2023 World Championships.

Azerbaijani Court References 1988–1992 Events in Artsakh Trial

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — On September 15, Azerbaijan's military court in Baku held another session in the ongoing politically motivated trial of former Artsakh political and military leaders, including Arayik Harutyunyan, Arkadi Ghukasyan, Bako Sahakyan, Davit Ishkhanyan, Davit Babayan, Levon Mnatsakanyan and others.

The hearing was presided over by Judge Zeynal Aghayev. According to Azertag, interpreters and defense attorneys were provided for all defendants in their native language.

The session focused in part on the events of 1988–1992 in Nagorno-Karabakh, which Azerbaijan is using to justify its prosecution of the former leaders.

The next hearing is scheduled for September 18.

Centre Pompidou to Host Retrospective Of Harutyun Khachatryan's Films

PARIS (Panorama.am) — The Centre Pompidou in Paris has announced a two-month retrospective dedicated to Armenian filmmaker Harutyun Khachatryan, running from October 9 to November 30, 2025.

The program, organized within La Cinémathèque du documentaire par la Bpi, will feature ten of Khachatryan's films, including "Kond," "White Town," "Return to the Promised Land" and "The Last Station."

Each film will be screened three times, offering audiences 30 showings in total, the Armenian Union of Film Professionals reported.

The retrospective will open with Khachatryan in attendance. Events will also include three post-screening discussions and a masterclass with the director.

According to the union, this marks the first time in the history of Armenian cinema that a director has been honored with a retrospective at the Center Pompidou, coinciding with Khachatryan's 70th birthday milestone.

Armenian Church Head Meets Pope Leo, Again Slams Azerbaijan

By Susan Badalian

ROME (Azatutyun) — Catholicos Karekin II again accused Azerbaijan of destroying Armenian churches in Nagorno-Karabakh and called for the release of Armenian

the Armenian people." Karekin brought up with Leo "the imperative of preserving the Armenian spiritual and cultural heritage facing destruction in Artsakh and releasing prisoners of war and hostages," according to the statement.

The Pillar, an American news website focusing on the Catholic Church, quoted another Armenian archbishop, Vicken Aykazian, as saying at the time that financial ties to Baku have influenced Vatican policy on Armenia. (See story on page 1.)

"There's a lot of people and a lot of media articles asking why the Vatican is forgetting their friends in Armenia, and it's because there are cardinals and Vatican officials in touch with Azerbaijan and getting money from them," said Aykazian.

Karekin similarly accused Azerbaijan of committing ethnic cleansing in Karabakh and illegally occupying Armenian border areas during a conference hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Switzerland in May. Azerbaijan's top Shia Muslim cleric closely linked to the government in Baku protested against "the provocative, revanchist propaganda of the Armenian Church" in a letter to the WCC.

As Karekin attended

the WCC forum in Bern, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan began attacking the church's top clergy in daily social media posts that sparked an uproar from opposition leaders and prominent public figures. He accused Karekin and other senior clergymen of having had secret sex affairs in breach of their vows of celibacy. Pashinyan went on to demand Karekin's resignation.

He insisted late last month that he has not abandoned plans to "free" the Echmiadzin seat of the Catholicos with the help of his supporters. Pashinyan's detractors say his campaign is aimed at pleasing Azerbaijan and/or neutralizing a key source of opposition to his unilateral concessions to Armenia's arch-foe.



Pope Leo XIV meets Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II at his residence in Castel Gandolfo near Rome, September 16, 2025.

prisoners held by Baku when he met with Pope Leo XIV on Tuesday, September 16.

Leo received the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church at the papal summer residence outside Rome for talks which Karekin's office said highlighted "brotherly ties" between the two churches.

"The Catholicos of All Armenians expressed confidence that relations between the two Churches will continue to develop in the same fraternal spirit and warmth, resulting in new and good joint achievements," read a statement released by it.

It said that the two religious leaders discussed "disasters and worrying developments taking place in the world" and "challenges and trials facing Armenia and

"The Pope emphasized that peace must be established on the basis of justice," Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, the Armenian Church's representative to the Vatican, told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

Neither Leo nor his late predecessor Pope Francis has publicly criticized Azerbaijan over its actions in Karabakh and Armenia. Critics in and outside Armenia have rebuked the Vatican for accepting in recent years Azerbaijani government funding for some of its restoration projects.

The Holy See has also been criticized for allowing the Azerbaijani government to hold at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in April this year a conference clearly designed to deny the Armenian origin of Karabakh's medieval churches.

Armenian-Lebanese Prisoner Languishing in Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Vicken Euljekjian, who has been held in an Azerbaijani prison since 2020, began a hunger strike nearly a month ago. His family still has no information about his current health condition.

According to Pastinfo, his Argentina-based lawyer Luciana Minassian stated that it remains unclear whether Euljekjian has ended his strike.

"Phone calls are allowed monthly, and we've already had the September call. However, we've received no information from Baku about Vicken. We believe he will continue the hunger strike regardless of the consequences — he simply cannot endure the prison anymore," said Minassian.

She added that the Armenian National Committee of Lebanon has appealed to Lebanon's Permanent Mission to the United Nations to raise the issue of Euljekjian's continued, unjust detention in Baku. In Buenos Aires, appeals were also sent to Argentina's Vice President Victoria Villarruel and Human Rights Defender Claudia Rucci, urging them to speak out on behalf of

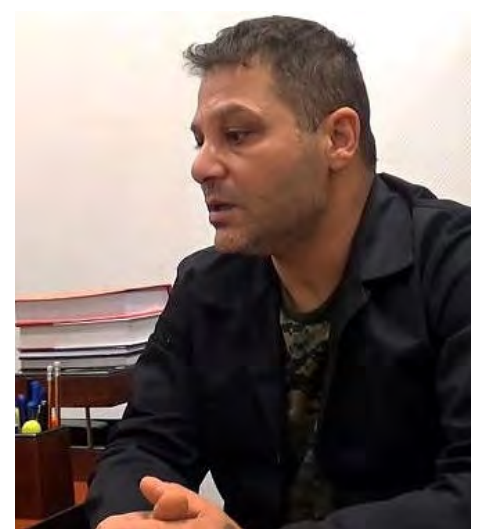
Armenian prisoners, including Euljekjian.

"So far, we haven't received any response from the Vice President or Rucci, but we may hear back from the Human Rights Observatory during the week. In the meantime, we continue pursuing legal action — there's still much to do," she said.

Euljekjian, 46, holds dual Armenian and Lebanese citizenships. He was abducted on November 10, 2020, just one day after the ceasefire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. He is one of six civilians still held by Azerbaijan.

This is at least his third hunger strike in captivity. In 2023, Euljekjian refused food for 24 days in protest of a ban on speaking Arabic with his wife, who does not understand Armenian. In May this year, he launched another hunger strike after being completely denied contact with her. Eventually, he was allowed a monthly call, reportedly facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

During his five years of captivity, Euljekjian has reportedly suffered both physical and psychological abuse. According to a report by the Center for Truth and Justice,



Vicken Euljekjian

he was beaten unconscious upon capture and subjected to mock executions. Burn marks are visible on his tattooed cross, suggesting intentional harm. He has also reportedly been denied proper nutrition and medical care, worsening digestive problems and leading to significant weight loss and chronic pain.



INTERNATIONAL

Armenian Sacred Music Resonates in Padua's St. Francesco Church

PADUA, Italy (Public Radio of Armenia) — The cultural program “Armenian Sacred Music in European Cathedrals,” organized by the Pan-Armenian NGO Miasin and dedicated to the 156th anniversary of Komitas Vardapet’s birth, held its latest event at the historic St. Francesco Church in Padua.

The evening was part of the celebrations marking the 325th anniversary of the Mekhitarist Congregation. It was attended by members of the Mekhitarist Fathers, local clergy, representatives of the Armenian community, and numerous Italian guests.

Argentine-based musician Gagik Gasparian, accompanied on organ by pianist Zoya Tukhmanova-Karapetyan, performed works by Komitas, Nerses Shnorhali, Grigor Narekatsi, and Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi, as well as selected pieces from European sacred music, receiving warm applause from the audience.

In his welcome address, Miasin founder and president Gevorg Chitchian expressed gratitude to Father Gevorg Vardapet Sargsyan, Abbot of the Mekhitarist Monastery, for co-organizing the event. He also thanked the Italy–Armenia Association for Italo-Armenian Friendship for its decades-long role in strengthening ties between Armenian communities and promoting Armenian-Italian friendship since 1991.

Chitchian extended his appreciation to St. Francesco Church for hosting the con-



The performers in Padua

cert and addressed the international audience, emphasizing that their presence was a sign of deep respect for Armenian culture, spiritual identity, and creative spirit.

Father Massimo De Franceschi of St. Francesco Church welcomed the initiative, noting that such events contribute to the dissemination of spiritual and cultural

values.

Vardan Giacomelli, representing the Italy–Armenia Association, thanked Miasin for its efforts to foster cultural dialogue between the two nations.

At the end of the evening, Miasin presented certificates of appreciation and commemorative gifts to St. Francesco Church

and the Italy–Armenia Association. Abbot Father Gevorg Vardapet Sargsyan concluded the event by awarding a commemorative medal on behalf of the Mekhitarist Congregation to Argentine-Armenian Antonio Sarafian for his dedication to preserving and promoting Armenian culture in the diaspora and for supporting this initiative.

Vatican Signs New Collaboration Agreements With Azerbaijan

VATICAN, from page 1

the medieval Armenian monastery of Davivank, with the claim that it belonged to the “Caucasian Albanian” culture, an Azeri government claim widely disputed by historians.

While the conference talks were not published or streamed, a published summary of one talk claimed that Albanians destroyed Caucasian Albanian monuments in the disputed Karabakh region to “falsely present them as Armenian,” and charged that Armenians are “aggressive settlers” in the region, and that Yerevan, Armenia’s capital, is Azeri.

“This has no basis in reality. They say these are Caucasian Albanian churches, but Caucasian Albanians disappeared in the 8th century,” Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, ecumenical director of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, told The Pillar back in April.

Despite these controversies, the conference received a letter of congratulations from Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches.

Azerbaijan, a Muslim-majority country of about 10 million people, has long disputed control of the region of Nagorno-Karabakh with neighboring Armenia, a Christian-majority country with fewer than 3 million citizens.

Historically, Armenia has deep Christian roots. In 301, the Kingdom of Armenia was the first country to become an officially Christian nation.

Fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh, which is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan but had been governed by ethnic Armenians since the 1990s, has erupted frequently since the end of the Soviet Union.

Many churches, religious sites, and cemeteries were reportedly destroyed or desecrated in the aftermath of the 2023 Azerbaijani offensive.

Church observers have expressed concern about the Vatican’s willingness to engage publicly with the Azeri government, sug-



Bishop Vicken Aykazian

gesting it could be falling prey to “caviar diplomacy,” a term used to describe the Azeri approach of using cultural restorations, economic investments, and other strategies to curry favor with foreign officials.

Aykazian, ecumenical director of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, told The Pillar in April: “The Vatican has been receiving money from Azerbaijan for some time — the main example being the restoration of St. Paul Outside the Walls, which was funded by Azerbaijan.”

In contrast, Azeri officials present their outreach to the Vatican as an effort to strengthen bilateral relations and demonstrate Azerbaijan’s commitment to inter-religious and intercultural dialogue. They characterize the country’s support for Vatican restoration projects as an expression of respect for humanity’s common heritage.

This is not the first time the Vatican’s links to Azerbaijan have drawn attention.

In August 2024, L’Osservatore Romano published an article that repeatedly described traditionally Armenian regions, churches, and monasteries as “Caucasian Albanian,” a term referring to an ancient Christian culture in the region, used by

Azerbaijan to justify its historical claims over Nagorno-Karabakh.

“The article denied the fact that there were any Armenian churches in Karabakh, which is simply a lie. Armenians, including Armenian Catholics, got furious, but things haven’t changed,” Bishop Aykazian told The Pillar.

Months before the 2020 offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan’s First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva was awarded the Order of Pope Pius IX at the Vatican.

Ilqar Mukhtarov, Azerbaijan’s ambassador to the Holy See, received the same distinction on April 3, 2025.

The Heydar Aliyev Foundation lists the Vatican Apostolic Library and the Vatican Museums among its partners and several restoration projects that it is supporting at the Vatican.

The list includes the Roman Catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter, the Catacombs of Commodilla, and the Catacombs of San Sebastiano, the restoration of a statue of Zeus in the Vatican Museums, the restoration and translation of more than 3,000 books and 75 manuscripts in the Vatican Apostolic Library, the restoration of a bas-relief with the encounter between Pope Leo the Great and Attila the Hun in St. Peter’s Basilica, and the restoration of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls.

According to Italian outlet Irpi Media, the donations amounted to 640,000 euros (around \$730,000). But an Azeri official said publicly in 2020 that the figure was “over 1 million euros.” Many of the restoration works came after 2020, suggesting the actual sum could be even higher.

One of the largest restoration projects was unveiled in 2024, when the Vatican City State Governorate announced an agreement between the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls and the Heydar Aliyev Foundation.

Observers suggest links between the Vatican and the former Soviet republic were strengthened thanks to Cardinal Claudio

Gugerotti, who is now prefect of the Dicastery for Eastern Churches.

Gugerotti was the apostolic nuncio to Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia from 2001 to 2011.

The 2011 bilateral agreement between the Holy See and Azerbaijan was negotiated by Gugerotti. Azerbaijan then appointed an ambassador to the Holy See.

During Gugerotti’s service as nuncio, Azeri authorities began to have frequent meetings, both in Azerbaijan and the Vatican, with Holy See officials, among them then-Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, and Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, the then-president of the Pontifical Council for Culture.

According to Irpi Media, Ravasi is another central figure connecting Azerbaijan and the Vatican.

Ravasi opened the doors to Azeri-funded restoration projects in the Vatican with a 2012 agreement to restore Roman catacombs, as well as another to translate and restore manuscripts in the Apostolic Library.

Genocide Scholar Tessa Hofmann Honored in Germany

HOFMANN, from Page 1

A leading representative of the latter community, Amill Gorgis, has worked closely with Hofmann leading the Promotional Society for the Ecumenical Monuments for Genocide Victims of the Ottoman Empire (FÖGG). The FÖGG sponsored the erection of monuments in a Berlin cemetery commemorating the Christian groups victimized in the Ottoman genocide. The official ceremony to confer the unique federal honor on Tessa Hofmann will take place in Berlin on October 20.



INTERNATIONAL

‘In the Land of Arto’ — a Thoughtful Exploration Of Armenia’s Past, Present, and Future

By Xandie Alexandra Kuenning

Tamar Stepanyan’s first feature film, a timely and relevant look at Armenia’s tragic history, marks an impressive debut.

The film opens in the summer of 2021, as the French Céline (Camille Cottin) arrives in Armenia’s second-largest city Gyumri in an attempt to locate an official copy of her deceased husband’s birth certificate. When no record can be located — no Arto Saryan exists, only an Arto Santrosian — Céline is forced to question who her husband really was, sending her on a quest to uncover the truth.

From these first scenes, the film plays itself as classic psychological thriller — a woman digging into her husband’s hidden past. Yet, the story soon evolves as Céline confronts her husband’s past, sending her on a journey into Armenian history. All the while her husband’s spirit lingers with her, a silent character in the background, fading in and out.

Throughout the film, the camera lingers on the objects it wants to be noticed, starting with a series of recent graveyards along the train tracks from Yerevan to Gyumri. Soldiers with missing limbs pass in front of the lens, again drawing awareness to the film’s setting, just seven months after Armenia’s defeat in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Once in Gyumri, Céline wanders the many abandoned and semi-collapsed buildings that have been left to waste away since the 1988 Spitak earthquake, which killed between 25,000–50,000 people and left tens of thousands more injured. She hears from the locals the hardships their families have faced, from the subsequent collapsed industry to the fact many of their loved ones remain buried in the rubble to this day, their bodies never properly recovered.

“Many Armenians don’t have graves,” Céline’s taxi-driver in Gyumri, the first companion on her journey, says early on in the film.

Despite the film’s initial premise as a psychological thriller, it is pretty early on in the film that Céline discovers the truth about her husband’s name-change, which instigates the larger focus of the film — a

more ruminative exploration into what the most recent Armenian defeat has meant for the population.

Céline spends the remainder of the film traveling to Nagorno-Karabakh with for-



A still from “In the Land of Arto” with Camille Cottin

mer Armenian soldier Arsine (curiously played by the Iranian actress Zar Amir), all the while learning the history of the conflict, the role her husband played in past events, and what it will mean for her family if she succeeds in gaining Armenian citizenship for her children, the whole reason she needed her husband’s birth certificate in the first place.

In many ways, Céline is just a proxy by which the film illustrates the many tragedies Armenia has faced in just a generation or two. This secondary story is the true masterpiece of the film, providing Western audiences a way to understand, as Céline learns to, what it means to be Armenian.

It is impressive that this is director Tamar Stepanyan’s first feature film, coming at the heels of her highly personal documentary “My Armenian Phantoms.” This documentary aesthetic crops up in places throughout the film as Stepanyan allows her characters to breathe and speak.

It is also noticeable in the blend of fact and fiction, such as when the well-known

Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian rapper Valeri Lyoka Ghazaryan, who goes by the stage name Lyoka, raps to his own song Hascen Im Nuynn A (‘My Address is the Same’) playing on the radio. It is a heartfelt

song, with Ghazaryan singing about what it means to always want your home, yet being forced to remain abroad.

Cinematographer Claire Mathon, of “Portrait of a Lady on Fire” fame, also deserves a mention, as the film would not have had the same impact without her skillful camerawork, allowing Armenia itself the space to become its own character.

“In the Land of Arto” had a timely premiere at the 78 Locarno Film Festival on August 6, just two days before Armenia and Azerbaijani initialled the text of a peace deal in the United States. Many of the topics touched upon the film, particularly in regards to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, remain relevant — yet it remains to be seen if Armenia and Azerbaijan can successfully reconcile with the history behind them.

“In the Land of Arto” (2025), directed by Tamar Stepanyan. It is set to be released on December 31, 2025 in France.

(This review originally appeared on the website www.oc-media.org on September 4.)

Turkish Opposition Party Leader Put under House Arrest for Allegedly Insulting Erdoğan

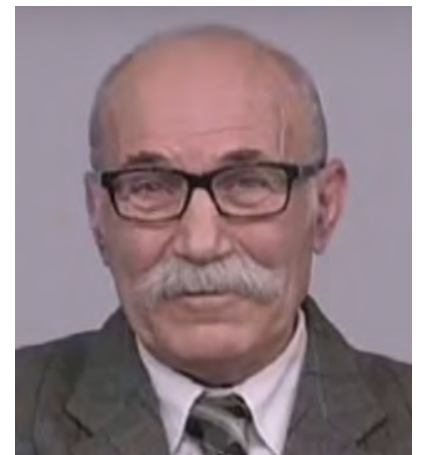
ISTANBUL (Stockholm Center for Freedom) — A Turkish court on Monday, September 15, placed Nurullah Efe Ankut, leader of the People’s Liberation Party (HKP), under house arrest for allegedly insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkish media reported.

Ankut, 79, was detained on September 14 after posting on X that Erdoğan and his inner circle were involved in a \$1.4 billion oil smuggling scheme from Iraq.

Following his testimony to the prosecutor, the case was referred to a criminal magistrate of peace, who ordered house arrest on charges of “publicly insulting the president.”

The HKP, a left-wing populist and anti-imperialist political party, has long been a vocal critic of Erdoğan. Ankut’s arrest marks the latest in a series of prosecutions targeting opposition figures in Turkey.

Turkey frequently invokes a law criminalizing “insulting the president” (Article 299 of the Turkish Penal Code) to silence dissent. Thousands of journalists, academics, politicians and



Nurullah Efe Ankut

activists have faced investigations, prosecution and prison sentences under the broadly defined and widely criticized provision. Human rights organizations have condemned its use as a tool to stifle dissent and restrict freedom of expression.

Ankut has previously faced legal retaliation for his activism. In 2014, following revelations that trucks operated by Turkish intelligence agency MIT had been carrying weapons into Syria, the HKP filed a complaint with the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague accusing Erdoğan and senior officials including then-foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, then-interior Minister Efkan Ala and then-intelligence chief Hakan Fidan of war crimes.

In response Turkish prosecutors charged Ankut with insulting the president and other officials, resulting in a conviction and a suspended one-and-a-half-year sentence.

On July 28 Turkey’s Supreme Court of Appeals’ chief prosecutor announced that Ankut’s party membership and leadership position had been terminated. HKP lawyers appealed the decision, calling it “null and void” since the high court lacks the authority to intervene in the composition of political parties.

Azerbaijan to Increase Military Budget by Almost 4% in 2026

By Aytan Farhadova

Azerbaijan’s Finance Ministry has announced plans to increase the country’s defense and security budgets by \$187 million, to reach a total of \$5.1 billion in 2026.

According to a pro-government media outlet, APA, the budget has been reflected in the ministry’s report, which was published on Tuesday, September 16.

“Next year’s defense and security budget was increased by □318 million (\$187 million) from the current year. Thus, the specific weight of defense and national security expenditures in the budget will be 21%,” APA wrote.

According to pro-government media outlet Report, the total state budget revenues for 2026 are expected to be \$23 billion, with expenditures estimated at \$24 billion.

In 2024, former Finance Minister Samir Sharifov said in parliament that Azerbaijan was increasing its military spending

by President Ilham Aliyev’s decree.

“Twenty percent of next year’s [in 2025] budget expenditures are planned to be spent on defense and security because in the case of the Armenian militarization,” Sharifov said at the time.

That year, the defense and the security budget were increased by \$1 billion.

The increase in military spending in Azerbaijan over the past years took place amidst heightened tensions with Armenia which continued following the end of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 with several Azerbaijani attacks on Armenia and Baku’s takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijani officials, including Aliyev, have regularly accused Armenia of “revanchism” and of harboring territorial claims against Azerbaijan.

However, Armenia and Azerbaijan appear to have made significant strides in the peace process since Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan initialed the peace agreement between Ar-

menia and Azerbaijan alongside US President Donald Trump in Washington D.C on August 8.

In late August, Pashinyan said that his country’s defense may not see an increase in 2026, saying it was “logical” seeing as Armenia and Azerbaijan had “established peace.”

Azerbaijan’s decision to increase its military spending for 2026 notably comes at a low point in Azerbaijan’s ties to Russia, fueled by the deadly crash of an Azerbaijan Airlines (AZAL) flight in December 2024, which Baku has blamed on Russian air defense, as well as the deaths of two ethnic Azerbaijanis during a Russian police raid in Yekaterinburg in June 2025.

In the following months, there have been repeated threats from Russian propagandists and some politicians that the Kremlin could launch an attack on Azerbaijan.

(This article originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on September 16.)



Community News

\$25,000 Donated To Knights of Vartan's Economic Sustainability Program

ANDOVER, Mass. — In January 2024, the Knights of Vartan began the Economic Sustainability Program, to provide refugees settling in the Republic of Armenia the opportunity to rebuild their lives by starting a family business and earning a living there.

Grace (Adamian) Aznoian of Andover, donated \$25,000 to this initiative on behalf of her husband Nicholas and herself. Aznoian is the daughter of Krikor and Araxie Adamian who were members of the Boston chapters of the Knights and Daughters of Vartan. Her donation serves people in the same spirit her parents had done during their lifetime.

Her father escaped the Armenian Genocide and was able to start a coal business and eventually a real estate development business in Arlington. Her husband also grew up the son



Lida Avanesyan, seamstress in Echmiadzin supported through the Economic Sustainability Program



Aslan Musaelyan, a rabbit farmer in Armenia supported through the Economic Sustainability Program

of Genocide survivors and started two commercial real estate development companies and a dry-cleaning business, while also working as the chief financial officer, and eventually chairman, of Nyprom in Clinton.

Seeing the impact of war and the devastating trauma of losing your home, livelihood and possessions, Aznoian understood the positive impact of helping families rebuild their lives starting a business. Providing funding for tools and equipment puts people to work and give hope and reason for refugee families to live in Armenia.

In that spirit, we hope more people will support this program and donate to help restart the lives of people who have lost everything. Learn more about the details of the program by visiting <https://kofv.org/economic-sustainability-program-esp/>



From left, Zhanna O'Clery, UWC Dilijan Head of Advancement; Nadia Shamsi, AIWA-LA Social Media Coordinator; Alice Petrossian, AIWA Board Advisor; Diane Cabraloff, AIWA Board VP & Assist. Treasurer; Veronika Zonabend; Houry Aposhian, AIWA-LA Chair; Hermine Janoyan, AIWA-LA Founding member; and Nora J. Balikian, AIWA -LA Publicity & Media Liaison.

AIWA Honors Veronika Zonabend with Impact on Education Award

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — The Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) this month hosted an intimate breakfast at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel to present Veronika Zonabend with the Distinguished Impact on Education Award. The ceremony marked a milestone recognizing her extraordinary vision and steadfast dedication to education, alongside her husband, Ruben Vardanyan, in their shared pursuit of peace and global citizenship.

The Distinguished Impact on Education Award was slated to be presented at AIWA's 9th International Conference in Yerevan in May 2024. Due to circumstances surrounding Zonabend's husband, Ruben Vardanyan, who remains unjustly detained in Baku, Azerbaijan, she could not attend the event. The opportunity to celebrate her accomplishments arose during her visit to Los Angeles.

Presentation remarks were delivered by Diane Cabraloff, AIWA Board VP and Assistant Treasurer, on behalf of President Silva Katchiguiyan (who was out of the country) and AIWA Board Advisor Alice Petrossian. The remarks highlighted Zonabend's leadership as Founding Partner and Chair of the Board of Governors of UWC Dilijan, and her collaborators' shared commitment to education as a path to peace.

Cited in the presentation included Ms. Zonabend's board roles and affiliations with UWC International UK Philanthropy Committee, the American University of Armenia, Teach for Armenia Educational Foundation, among others, which amplify the impact on thousands of youth by equipping them with the skills, confidence, and platforms to become future stewards of peace and progress.

Inspiration and resilience were emphasized in the presentation. AIWA commended Ms. Zonabend for enduring numerous personal challenges while advancing education and cross-cultural collaboration. "Education is the bedrock of nations, the engine that sustains hope, fosters dialogue, and builds bridges across cultures," Katchiguiyan had written.

In a heartfelt message to the AIWA Board, Zonabend expressed deep gratitude for the honor and AIWA's leadership. She noted, "My heartfelt thanks to the AIWA Board who lead with courage, intellect, and generosity." She added that the award belongs as much to the UWC Dilijan community — where their work began — as to the women she has encountered and drawn inspiration from along the way. "Education is a promise we make to the future. In Armenia—where I consider myself Armenian by Choice—and across the diaspora, that promise carries the resilience of our history and the hope of our next generation," she stated. "When we open doors for every learner — especially girls and young women — we don't just change a classroom, we strengthen a nation."

Inspired by Veronika Zonabend and Ruben Vardanyan's resilience, AIWA reaffirmed its solidarity with Ruben Vardanyan and the hope for his safe and swift return and commended Veronika's tireless effort and perseverance, confirming that "education is the cornerstone of nations and a critical driver of dialogue and collaboration."

Zonabend is recognized for her leadership as Founding Partner and Chair of the Board of Governors of UWC Dilijan. Her work embodies a bold commitment to education as a pathway to peace, transcending borders and inspiring young minds to dream bigger, act wiser, and approach the world with empathy and collaboration.

Assemblymember Harabedian's Bill Expanding Middle Eastern and North African Representation Clears Legislature

SACRAMENTO — Assemblymember John Harabedian (D-Pasadena) announced today that his bill AB 91, the MENA Inclusion Act, has cleared the California Legislature and is now on Governor Gavin Newsom's desk for signature.

The bill requires California state and local agencies to add a distinct Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) category to demographic



"FOR DECADES, CALIFORNIANS OF MIDDLE EASTERN AND NORTH AFRICAN DESCENT HAVE BEEN INVISIBLE IN THE DATA OUR STATE USES TO MAKE DECISIONS,"

—JOHN HARABEDIAN
(D-PASADENA)

data collection, ensuring that one of the state's fastest-growing and historically undercounted communities is finally recognized in government decision-making.

"For decades, Californians of Middle Eastern and North African descent have been invisible in the data our state uses to make decisions," said Harabedian. "AB 91 will guarantee families in the MENA community are counted, their needs are addressed, and their voices are heard. Accurate data means better policy, better services, and a stronger California for everyone."

More than 740,000 Californians identify as MENA, yet they have long been categorized as "white" in demographic forms, masking their unique health, economic, and social needs. AB 91 will allow policymakers to identify inequities, direct resources more effectively, and strengthen representation.

AB 91 passed the Assembly on a unanimous 79-0 vote and advanced through the Senate with strong bipartisan support, signaling broad recognition of the need for equity and inclusion.

The governor has until October 13, 2025 to either veto the bill or sign it into law.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Young Australian Filmmaker Completes ‘When Dogs Bark’

Australian writer and director Matthew Keisoglu recently finished and released “When Dogs Bark,” a short horror film.

In an unspecified place and time, “When Dogs Bark” opens in the aftermath of a slaughter. In a farmland sheep pen, a widowed farmer discovers the mutilated remains of his lambs: corpses torn apart, bones and heads scattered, paw prints in the bloodied dirt. From the wind comes the sound of wild dogs — sniffing, digging, chewing — and with them, the echo of genocide: boots marching, shovels striking earth, children screaming. Memories resurface of a forest years ago, where a young child hid among the bodies as a pack of dogs dragged his mother away.

That child grows into the son, an intellectual who has long since left the shack for the city.

Set in stark black-and-white and framed in 4:3, the film unfolds between the Father’s obsessive listening and the Son’s detached dismissal. Crucifixes, family photographs, mass graves, and pomegranates surround them as sound — owls, wind, soldiers, and dogs — fills the silence.

The film, part of Keisoglu’s master’s degree program at Deakin University, is in Greek and English.

“I come from a family shaped by the Armenian genocide of 1915. Stories passed down to me have influenced how I understand identity, memory, and how history marks individuals and generations. That inherited experience is central to my creative work, but it is not unique to me. Genocide and mass violence have left lasting scars across many regions, from the Holocaust, Cambodia, Armenia, Palestine and Bosnia to Rwanda and Ukraine. The legacies of cultural erasure and systemic violence also endure among Indigenous peoples, including Native Americans and Indigenous Australians. These histories, often underacknowledged, continue to shape identity, memory and lived experience. This film is for any nation that has heard the sound of marching soldiers, the barking of dogs searching for them, and has unearthed the mass graves they left behind,” he said.

He added, “The film is presented in Greek, not only because of our cast’s cultural background, but also because the story transcends language. Its emotional truth is meant to resonate with anyone who has lived through or inherited the aftershocks of violence. ‘When Dogs Bark’ is a reflection and testimony to how the effects of genocide continue to be felt today. Specifically, what is remem-



bered, what is handed down, and what is carried forward.”

Keisoglu is a multi-award-winning Armenian-Australian filmmaker and Founder/Festival Director of the Multicultural Mental Health Film Festival, facilitated by the Mental Health Foundation Australia. He is currently pursuing his Master of Arts. His previous films, “It Comes From” and “His Trembling Hands: An Immigrant Ghost Story” have received international recognition, with screenings in Istanbul, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, London, and various virtual festivals worldwide.

NAASR to Host Graduate Symposium as Part of 70th Anniversary Events

BELMONT, Mass. — As part of the celebration of its 70th Anniversary, on October 2 and 3, the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will host the Pamela and Edward Avedisian Graduate Symposium in Armenian Studies at the NAASR Vartan Gregorian Building, 395 Concord Ave. An international lineup of speakers will present papers on a wide range of topics. The public is invited to attend sessions.

This symposium is presented in honor of Pamela and Edward Avedisian in recognition of and with gratitude for their support of NAASR and its mission.

The symposium will cover topics including Art and Architecture, Music and Poetry, Literature and Language, Late Ottoman Genocide and Mass Violence, and Modern Armenia and Diaspora.

NAASR has organized and co-sponsored dozens of conferences over the course of its 70-year history, including the first conferences focusing on the nascent field of Armenian Studies in the U.S., “Armenian Studies and Research: Problems and Needs” in 1955 and “Searchlight on Armenian Studies: Conference on Problems and Areas of Research” in 1956.

Following the two-day graduate symposium, NAASR will mark its 70th anniversary with a gala celebration at the Fairmont Copley Plaza, featuring Dr. Anthony Marx, President and CEO of the New York Public Library, as the featured speaker and Pamela Avedisian and Yervant Chekjian as Honorary Chairs.



ԹԵԿԵԱՆ ՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ՄՈՒԹԻՒՆ
ՄԵԾԱԳՈՅՆ ԼՈՍ ԱՆՃԵԼԵՍԻ
ՄԱՍՆԱԺԻՐ

Հովանավորությամբ՝
ԳԵՐԸ Տ. ՅՈՎԱՆԱՆ ԱՐՔ. ՏԵՐՏԵՐԵԱՆԻ
Առաջնորդ Հայաստանեայց Առաքելական
Եկեղեցու Հիսախային Ամերիկայի
Արեւմտեան Թեմի

ՅՈՒՇԱՅԱՆԴԵՍ
ՆՈՒԻՐՈՒԱԾ՝
ՄԵԾԱՆՈՒՆ ԳՐՈՂ ԵՒ ԹԱՐԳՄԱՆԻՉ
ՍՏԵՓԱՆ ԱԼԱՅԱՋԻԱՆԻ
ԳՐԱԿԱՆ ԿԱՍՏԱԿԻՆ
1924 – 2010

Գլխավոր բանախօս՝
Հրաչ Սեփերճեան

Գեղարուեստական յայտագրին
կը մասնակցին՝
Նունէ Աւետիսեան
Հռիփսիմէ Ռշտունի

Կիրակի, 5 Հոկտեմբեր 2025
Կ.Ե. Ժամը 4:00
Կլետնեյի Կեդրոնական Գրադարան

**TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION
METRO LOS ANGELES CHAPTER**

Under the Auspices of
**His Eminence
Archbishop Hovnan Derderian,**
Primate, Western Diocese of the
Armenian Church of North America

**A Program Dedicated to
STEPAN ALAJAJIAN
1924 - 2010**
Writer, Prosaist and Translator

**Keynote Speaker
Hratch Sepetjian**

**Cultural program
with the participation of
Nune Avetisyan &
Ripsime Rshtuni**

Sunday, October 5, 2025, 4 PM
Glendale Central Library

222 E. Harvard Street, Glendale, CA 91205
info@tekeyanla.org

CONCERT DE LA RÉSILIENCE



SHOUJOUNIAN 5 RECITATIFS
MOZART REQUIEM
CHŒUR A CAPPELLA D'YVERDON
CHŒUR SYMPHONIQUE DE VEVEY
ORCHESTRE DES VARIATIONS SYMPHONIQUES
Sofia RAUSS - Valérie PELLEGRINI
Baptiste JONDEAU - Patrice BERGER
Luc BAGHDASSARIAN Direction

SAMEDI 04 OCTOBRE 2025

À 19H15
ENTRÉE GRATUITE

Proposé gracieusement par **UGAB**

Comité SUISSE de
l'UNION GÉNÉRALE ARMÉNIENNE DE BIENFAISANCE

Avec le soutien de



CATHÉDRALE SAINT-PIERRE GENÈVE



COMMUNITY NEWS

Nadine Menendez Blames Her Husband Before Being Sentenced to 4 1/2 Years

By Tracey Tully, Samantha Latson and Benjamin Weiser

NEW YORK (*New York Times*) — Nadine Arslanian Menendez, the wife of New Jersey's former senator, was sentenced on Thursday, September 11, to four and a half years in prison for her role in a scheme to trade her husband's clout for cash, gold and a Mercedes-Benz.

In an emotional address before the judge imposed the sentence, Menendez, 58, laid blame for much of her conduct on her husband, Robert Menendez, once one of the country's most powerful Democrats.

"I put my life in his hands and he strung me like a puppet," she said through tears.

"He was my god," she added. "I felt safe following him through life. He was one of the most powerful men in the most powerful country in the world. There was no way he would lead me astray or ask me to do anything illegal — or so I thought."

"The blindfold is off," she concluded. "I now know he is not my savior. He is not the man I thought he was."

Her dramatic admission capped a saga that burst fully into view in September 2023, when the couple was indicted on a raft of charges that stunned Washington and upended politics in New Jersey, where Senator Menendez had been a fixture for decades. The senator, a bulletproof political survivor, suddenly faced serious challenges angling for his seat. Still, he remained defiant, resigning only reluctantly after he became the first senator convicted of acting as an agent of a foreign government.

On Thursday, his downfall appeared nearly complete as he was depicted not only as a convict but also a cad, entangling his wife in his schemes and then blaming her.

The judge, Sidney H. Stein of Federal District Court in Manhattan, largely dismissed Ms. Menendez's effort to distance herself from the corruption, calling her a "central participant."

"You knew what you were doing," he said. "You were always purposeful."

"You set up meetings. You initiated actions. You involved others," he added.

Still, the judge acknowledged that she deserved a more lenient sentence than those imposed on her husband and two

other co-defendants who are already in prison. He noted her history of abusive relationships and a breast cancer diagnosis that had led him to separate her trial from her husband's and delay it by nearly a year.

With Menendez out of the case, the senator's lawyers, at his trial, adopted a strategy of blaming her for orchestrating the conspiracy — and duping her husband. "She tried to get cash and assets any which way she could," a lawyer for Senator Menendez, Avi Weitzman, told jurors.

It didn't work. The senator was convicted of acting as an agent of a foreign government and taking bribes in exchange for trying to steer aid to Egypt and quash criminal cases that threatened allies in New Jersey. He began serving an 11-year prison term in June.

Ms. Menendez, in the meantime, was treated for an advanced form of breast cancer and underwent a mastectomy and reconstructive surgery.

After a four-week trial, she was convicted this spring of taking bribes and trying to conceal them after becoming aware of the investigation. She is expected to appeal, her lawyer, Sarah Krissoff, said.

In lengthy comments Thursday in court, Krissoff outlined what she said were mitigating circumstances. She argued that Menendez's childhood in wartime Lebanon and past abusive relationships had made her easy prey for manipulative men. One boyfriend in 2017 beat her so badly that she was hospitalized for five days with a head injury that has diminished her brain function and affected her memory, Krissoff said.

"She was raised her entire life to be subservient to men," Krissoff told Judge Stein. She also cited her client's need for additional cancer surgery.

Judge Stein agreed to delay the start of Menendez's sentence for 10 months to allow her to complete her treatment.

Prosecutors had recommended that Menendez be sentenced to at least seven years for her role shuttling messages and bribes to the senator and arranging meetings with Egyptian officials. The officials were later instrumental in awarding a lucrative monopoly to a halal meat business founded by Menendez's longtime friend Wael Hana.

The company, IS EG Halal, was authorized to certify that all halal meat sold in



Nadine Menendez

Egypt had been prepared according to Islamic law. It was then used to funnel bribes to the couple, according to testimony.

The scheme began soon after the senator and Menendez began dating in 2018. At the time, Senator Menendez was a leader of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where he played a key role in crafting foreign policy and allocating military aid to U.S. allies.

"Today's sentence sends an important message: Our elected officials are not for sale," Jay Clayton, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, said in a statement after Ms. Menendez was sentenced.

Throughout the trials, prosecutors emphasized that the case was as much about her as it was about her husband.

"What else can the love of my life do for you?" she was overheard asking at a Washington steakhouse dinner, one of many meetings that prosecutors say she arranged between her husband and Egyptian officials.

Prosecutors cited that quote frequently as they worked to connect evidence seized by F.B.I. agents — 13 gold bars, \$566,000 in cash and the luxury car — to Senator Menendez's official acts.

The former senator, 71, writing from prison to Judge Stein before the sentencing, said that he regretted permitting his lawyers to depict his wife as desperate, broke and on the take.

"I regret that I didn't fully preview what my defense attorney said about Nadine during my trial," Menendez wrote. "To suggest that Nadine was money hungry or in financial need, and therefore would solicit others for help, is simply wrong."

But a prosecutor, Lara Pomerantz, said in court that Ms. Menendez "was not a bit player" in the scheme; she made her own choices and played a critical role.

"She got her hands dirty," Pomerantz said.

Pomerantz said that Menendez should face a penalty at least as severe as those imposed on the men convicted of bribing the couple — Hana and Fred Daibes, a New Jersey real estate developer.

Hana, a U.S. citizen born in Egypt, is serving an eight-year prison term. Daibes is serving a seven-year sentence.

A third businessman, Jose Uribe, a failed insurance broker who gave Ms. Menendez the Mercedes-Benz, pleaded guilty and became a star witness, testifying against both the senator and Ms. Menendez. He is to be sentenced on Oct. 9.

On Thursday, Nadine Menendez, who did not testify at the trial, sat quietly at the defense table as the prosecutor spoke.

She told the judge in her statement that even though her husband's trial strategy had relied on blaming her, she had remained a supportive — and silent — spouse. Her husband and his lawyers had assured her, she said, that if the senator was acquitted, the case against her would most likely "vanish."

Outside the courthouse after the sentencing, Ms. Menendez walked briskly toward a waiting vehicle as a reporter asked whether she intended to leave the former senator.

"I do not plan on divorcing him," she said.

OBITUARY

Rober Haddecian

Newspaper Editor, Writer and Playwright

ISTANBUL — Rober Haddecian, the editor in chief of the Armenian-language newspaper *Marmara*, a daily, from 1967 to his death, passed away on September 6. He was 99.

Haddecian was born on January 26, 1926 in Istanbul to Avedis and Siranush Haddecian. He attended the Pangalit Armenian Mkhitarist High School, graduating in 1955 and went on to Istanbul University.

He was named as the editor in chief of *Marmara* in 1967 after working there as a journalist. His columns in *Nor Marmara* were translated into Turkish by his daughter-in-law Karolin Haddeler and published in the weekly Turkish supplement of the publication.

He published more than 50 books, with the most famous being his novel *Arasdagh* (Ceiling), which has been published in Turkish under the title *Tavan*.

In 2011, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Republic of Armenia's



independence, President Serzh Sargsyan awarded him the Mesrob Mashdots Medal for his contributions to Armenian literature, theater and journalism.

Nardolillo Funeral Home

Est. 1906

John K. Najarian, Jr.

Rhode Island's Only Licensed Armenian Funeral Director

1278 Park Ave. Cranston, RI 02910 **(401) 942-1220**

1111 Boston Neck Rd. Narragansett, RI 02882 (401) 789-6300

www.nardolillo.com

James "Jack" Giragosian, CPC

Mark J. Giragosian

Giragosian
FUNERAL HOME

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

www.giragosianfuneralhome.com

Telephone (617) 924-7400

Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Inc.

Continuous Service By The Bedrosian Family Since 1945

558 MOUNT AUBURN STREET
WATERTOWN, MA 02472

MARION BEDROSIAN
PAUL BEDROSIAN
LARRY BEDROSIAN



COMMUNITY NEWS

Assembly Terjenian-Thomas Internship Program in Washington D.C. Highlights Importance of Connecting with People Shaping Policy

WASHINGTON — A talented and energetic group of 21 college students participated this summer in the Armenian Assembly of America's Terjenian-Thomas Internship Program in Washington, DC. They gained valuable professional skills interning at a variety of offices and experienced government in action. They participated as well in many local Armenian cultural activities and educational opportunities.

Participants had the opportunity to meet with key elected officials, academics and leading professionals. Through these meetings and the Assembly's Congressional relations efforts, students mastered the necessary skills to advocate for themselves and the Armenian American community.

Assembly interns met with Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX), Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Representative Paul Gosar (R-AZ), Representative Jim Costa (D-CA), Representative Laura Friedman (D-CA), Representative Young Kim (R-CA), Representative Dave Min (D-CA), Representative Jim McGovern (D-MA), Representative Rob Menendez (D-NJ), Representative Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Representative George Latimer (D-NY), and Representative Paul Tonko (D-NY). They discussed issues important to the Armenian community with staff members from the offices of Senators Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Elissa Slotkin (D-MI), Tim Sheehy (R-MT), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), and Tim Scott (R-SC), as well as Representatives Nanette Barragán (D-CA), Julia Brownley (D-CA), Jay Obernolte (R-CA), Juan Vargas (D-CA), Jahana Hayes (D-CT), Chris Pappas (D-NH), Donald Norcross (D-NJ), Dina Titus (D-NV), Joaquin Castro (D-TX), and Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL), this summer on Capitol Hill.

The summer interns took a leading role in the Knights and Daughters of Vartan successful Capitol Hill Advocacy Day hosted by the Armenian Assembly. The Assembly interns guided groups of Knights & Daugh-

ters through the labyrinth of Congressional hallways and offices, assisted in articulating community concerns and requests, and provided facts and information as needed.

"Advocating on Capitol Hill reminded me how important it is to engage directly with the people shaping policy. Throughout the Knights and Daughters Advocacy Day, I had the opportunity to actively contribute to meetings with Senator Padilla and several California House members, each one a chance to bring real concerns into the room. There was something genuinely meaningful about sitting across from people who influence national decisions and being able to speak to perspectives that often go unheard, especially on Armenian issues like regional security, humanitarian assistance, and genocide education. These are topics that don't always get the national attention they deserve and raising them in these spaces is a step toward ensuring they stay on the agenda," said Nellie Chobanyan, a student at Fresno State University and an intern with the Armenian National Institute.

Assembly interns also attended several important hearings, including the U.S. Helsinki Commission briefing on "Advancing the Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Deal" featuring Garo Paylan; the U.S. Helsinki Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe hearing on "The Cost of a Bad Deal in Ukraine;" and the Swiss Peace Initiative for Nagorno Karabakh briefing featuring Representative Wilson and Senator Wicker. The Assembly interns also enjoyed the benefit of Capitol Hill Tours lead by fellow Assembly interns Christian Abrimian, Maria Galstyan and Ofelia Yeghiyan working in Congressional offices.

Interns also met with Former Ambassador John Marshall Evans, director of the film "My Sweet Land" Sareen Hairabedian, incoming executive director of the Next 50 and former Michigan state representative Mari Manoogian, former congressional



The Armenian Assembly's Terjenian-Thomas interns on Capitol Hill

staffer Maria Martirosyan Issakhanian, former Department of Homeland Security staff member Noris Balabanian, president of the National Prayer Breakfast for Armenia; Emanuel Khachaturov, Deloitte DC's Armenian staffers lead by Tadeh Issakhanian,

Director of Research and Analysis at the Armenian Assembly of America Robert Avetisyan and Executive Director at the Armenian Assembly of America Bryan Ardouny. The summer interns also received a private

continued on next page

**Tekeyan Cultural Association
Boston Chapter
presents**

A Summer Concert

Greek-Armenian violinist
Emilya Gaspar and
her talented mother pianist
Jasmine Atabekyan
perform Armenian
and classical master-
pieces **Sunday**
Sept. 21, 4:30 p.m.



755 Mount Auburn St. Watertown
Please use Norseman Ave. entrance

Free, followed by small reception. Any
and all donations support Emilya's
education.

Telephone: 617 281-1447 or email
tekeyanboston@gmail.com for more info



70 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR ARMENIAN STUDIES AND RESEARCH

*Insulating the Ties of
Armenian Studies*

CELEBRATING 70 YEARS
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2025

FARMHOUT CORLEY PLAZA
138 ST. JAMES AVENUE
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

8PM COCKTAILS
7PM DINNER AND PROGRAM
9:15PM AFTER PARTY

HONORARY CHAIRS
PAMELA WOOD AYEDISIAN
YERVANT CHERKIAN

GUEST SPEAKER
DR. ANTHONY W. HARRIS
PRESIDENT AND CEO OF
THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

BUY TICKETS AT
<https://naasr.org/tickets>

QUESTIONS
info@naasr.org
617-489-1616



COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

tour of the Library of Congress hosted by Dr. Khachig Mouradian, the Armenian and Georgian Area Specialist in the African and Middle Eastern Division. Interns also attended dance classes with the Hay Hoki Dance Ensemble and attended the Nahigian Strategies 25th Anniversary Party.

After attending the Nahigian Strategies 25th anniversary party Sam Vahanian said, "As an Armenian American intern and business student from Georgia, I had the chance to speak with many businesspeople from the D.C. area. There was a lot of encouragement from local marketing people on conquering the intimidation factor of working in D.C. The environment was a perfect mix of professional attire and a relaxed scene, being a 2000s themed party. The highlight of my night was getting my picture with Robert F. Kennedy, which boosted morale of the whole event."

Following the groups meeting with Ambassador Evans, Assembly intern Charles Schlindwein, who spent the summer working for the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, shared: "Ambassador Evans was very knowledgeable and humble gentleman. He spoke with expertise about Armenian and American foreign relations, especially with Russia. I was very impressed that he won the Morgenthau Award as well. Morgenthau helped my grandmother write a book about my great grandfather's experiences in the Armenian Genocide. I thought Ambassador Evans' responses to our questions were very in depth and contained valuable insights."

The Terjenian-Thomas Assembly 2025 Internship Program participants included: Christian Abrimian attending Fairfield University; Levon Alyanakian attending the University of California, Los Angeles; Arshak Avetisyan attending the College of William and Mary; Adeline Chanti attending Scripps College; Nellie Chobanyan attending Fresno State University; Kyle Fitzpatrick attending American University; Maria Galstyan attending Georgetown University; Diana Grigoryan attending the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Sergey Khachatrian attending the University of California, Irvine; Elizabeth Margaryan attending the University of California, Irvine; Victoria Mnatsakanyan attending Yale University; Arin Musurlian attending the University of California, Irvine; Chloe Nishanian attending Chapman University; Erik Saakyan attending the University of California Los Angeles; Charles Schlindwein attending Ursinus College; Sosie Scott attending the University of Delaware; Eric Tsaturyan attending Glendale Community College; Samuel Vahanian attending Kennesaw State University; Ellen Vartanyan attending Pasadena City College; Ofelia Yeghiyan attending Michigan State University; and joined remotely by Lucy Boyadzhyan attending Cornell University.

Intern Coordinator David Babigian, who participated in the program last summer as intern for Schoening Strategies, praised the 2025 cohort for their advocacy efforts.

"Having the chance to return to the Armenian Assembly this summer as Intern Coordinator was incredibly rewarding" said Babigian, a rising first year at the University of Connecticut School of Law. "In this role, I helped guide our interns as they engaged with policymakers and advocated for pro-Armenian issues. Watching the interns navigate D.C. and take advantage of all the opportunities this program offers really shows its lasting impact."

The Assembly's Terjenian-Thomas Internship Program, which marks its 48th year, along with its sister Summer Internship Program in Armenia, has welcomed over 1,200 students over the decades. The programs offer students internships in government agencies, non-governmental



The Assembly Terjenian-Thomas interns with Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ)

organizations, and mass media, as well as meetings with elected officials, community leaders, entrepreneurs and leading professionals in various fields including law, business, and academics.

"Every summer the Armenian Assembly welcomes a new class of college students to the nation's capital. The program encourages and enhances their interest in government, media, advocacy, policy, and research," said Executive Director Bryan Ardouny. "The Assembly's Internship Pro-

grams serve as a foundation with students taking their positive experiences with them and continue their involvement and activism for the betterment of the Armenian people."

The Armenian Assembly of America Summer Internship Program has been celebrated and strongly supported by the Armenian community with major gifts from the Richard Tufenkian Memorial Fund, the John Hanessian Scholarship Fund, the Armen Astarjian Scholarship Fund, the Ohanian Memorial Fund, Ann Hintlian, Ann

Nahigian, James and Connie Melikian, the Knights of Vartan, the Estate of Haig J. Boyadjian, and the Estate of George Judge Karabedian (George Kay), as well as generous contributions in memory of former Assembly Board Members Dr. Lionel Galstaun, Peter Kezirian, and John O'Connor. In 2003, the Armenian Assembly's Summer Internship Program was renamed in honor of Aram and Florence Terjenian and Annie Thomas in honor of their support for the program.



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

Tekeyan Family Fun Day at Angels Stadium: Another Hit

By Alique Bardakian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

ANAHEIM, Calif. — On September 6, the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter hosted an evening at Angels Stadium. Seventy-six members and friends came together to enjoy the Sacramento A's and Los Angeles Angels baseball game.

Prior to the game, the group met with Los Angeles Angels General Manager Perry Minasian in the team's press conference room. The general manager provided updates on the team and answered questions about recent draft picks. General Manager Minasian also spoke proudly



Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter members and friends



Los Angeles Angels General Manager Perry Minasian addressing the group in the press conference room


about his Armenian heritage, which continues to define his identity.

A “Welcome Tekeyan Cultural Association” message was prominently displayed on the scoreboard located near the left and right field foul poles at various times throughout the game. This was the fourth year in a row the TCA Metro Los Angeles Chapter organized a group outing to an Angels baseball game. The evening produced a special experience for everyone despite the Angels’ defeat to the A’s.


The baseball game united Tekeyan Cultural Association members and friends from Los Angeles and Orange County. The evening ended with fireworks in the sky while General Manager Perry Minasian’s words and the excitement of the night remained with everyone who attended.

St. James Armenian Church, Tekeyan Cultural Association
Boston Chapter & Society
of Istanbul Armenians of Boston
present
NY's TCA Mher Megerdchian
Theatrical Group.
in
Anton Chekhov's
**The Marriage
Proposal**
A comedy directed by
Harout Chatmajian
*performed in Armenian
with English subtitles*
surprise preshow
Sunday Oct. 26
3:45 pm doors open
4 pm lavish dinner
5 pm show

AN EVENING OF
Dinner Theater





St. James Armenian
Church Keljik Hall
465 Mt. Auburn St.,
Watertown, MA
\$75 plus cash bar
Reservations at Eventbrite:
themarriageproposal.eventbrite.com
Or use this QR code







**ARMENIAN CULTURAL FOUNDATION**
ՀԱՅ ԱՃԻՍԿԱՅԻՆ ԳԻՏԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ

**Presents: A Conversation and Meeting with
Muriel Mirak-Weissbach**



BOOK LAUNCH

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2025 AT 4 PM

CO-SPONSORED BY:    

ARMENIAN CULTURAL FOUNDATION, 441 MYSTIC STREET (ROUTE 3), ARLINGTON, MA
FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, RECEPTION TO FOLLOW • FOR DETAILS CALL 781-444-3090
armenianculturalfoundation.net • armeniancultural.fdn@gmail.com

"This is a very valid inquiry into a multifaceted, fascinating German general during a late-Ottoman era of extremes... Based on primary sources, the author succeeds in giving a sober, but poignant portrait of a man of 'honor' in times of disregard for human dignity."

— Hans-Lukas Rösler, University of Newcastle, Australia

Arts & Culture

Andrew Hagopian to Speak on Preserving Identity Through Sound: Armenians in California from 1900 To 1960

FRESNO — Andrew Hagopian will speak on “Preserving Identity Through Sound: Armenians in California from 1900 to 1960” at on Thursday, September 25, at 7 p.m., in the University Business Center (5245 N. Backer Ave.), Alice Peters Auditorium, on the Fresno State campus.

Hagopian’s presentation is part of the Armenian Studies Program Fall 2025 Lecture Series and is supported by the Florence Elaine Hamparson Armenian Memorial Fund.

In his presentation, Hagopian will examine how Armenian immigrants and their descendants safeguarded and reshaped their musical heritage in the diaspora. Drawing from his recently completed Master’s thesis at Fresno State, Hagopian explores the critical role that music played in preserving Armenian identity in California, particularly in the Central Valley, where Armenian communities flourished after the genocide of 1915. His research relies on oral histories, rare private recordings, community archives, and published works to demonstrate how musicians and entrepreneurs kept Armenian song and dance traditions alive while adapting them to their new environment.

Hagopian documents this cultural legacy through the lives of musicians,



Andrew Hagopian

entrepreneurs and community leaders who not only performed and recorded music but also created spaces, picnics, nightclubs, and coffeehouses, where Armenian sound became central to communal identity. Inspired in part by his own grandfather, the renowned oud master Richard Hagopian, Andrew situates his family’s story within the broader narrative of Armenian survival and creativity in the diaspora. His grandfather’s career, rooted in the music of the first generation of survivors, served as the inspiration for Andrew’s thesis and he himself reflects intergenerational preservation of Armenian music his research documents.

Hagopian’s lecture will feature rare photographs and original sound see SOUND, page 17



Charles Aznavour’s family attended the opening of the Armenian Film Festival (Katia is in the middle with blond hair, and Seda is wearing a hat) (Karine Armen photo)

Another Packed AFS Film Festival Concludes

By Karine Armen
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GLENDALE — Armenian Film Society (AFS) opened its annual film festival on Wednesday, September 3, at the historic Alex Theatre with the movie “Monsieur Aznavour.”

AFS’s founder and CEO, Armen Karaoghlanian, welcomed the audience and said, “We started at Abril Books, an Armenian bookstore with a few people, and tonight we have a full house.”

The five-day event concluded with their first gala, which honored three filmmakers and inducted one into the Hall of Fame.

“Monsieur Aznavour” is a biographical film based on the life of Charles Aznavour. It is in French with English subtitles. It is written and directed by Mehdi Idir, and produced by Jean-Rachid Kallouche, who is married to Aznavour’s daughter, Katia. Kallouche and Katia Aznavour attended the opening event with their daughter. Kallouche said, “This film was a family project.” In addition, Seda Aznavour, her son, and his family were in attendance. Seda and Katia welcomed the audience before the screening.

Tahar Rahim portrays the title character. The veteran actor was born in France to an Algerian family. “Monsieur Aznavour” opened in France but was not distributed in the U.S.

The second day of the film festival had a packed house at the AMC Theatres in Glendale for the screening of a romantic comedy called “A Winter’s Song” directed by Angela Asatrian. In the film, the protagonist travels to Armenia, and it becomes a journey to self-discovery. The footage of the scenery during the Christmas holiday is breathtaking. The mesmerizing music is composed by Arman Aloyan. There are many scenes featuring traditional Armenian foods.

“A Winter’s Song” was produced in association with Strobila Foundation.

Before the Q&A, Christine Soussa, the founder of the foundation, said, “We hope that through this movie you see the magic and splendor of Armenia.” She added, “We are so happy that you’re the first to see this film.”

see FESTIVAL, page 14



From left: the crew of “A Winter’s Song,” composer Arman Aloyan, actor Edgar Damatian, director Angela Asatrian, actress Jessie Bedrossian, and the leading actress, Krista Marina (Karine Armen photo)

Anthony Tchekemian

The Scientist, the Athlete, The Armenian of Tahiti

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/ FAA’A, Tahiti, French Polynesia — Anthony Tchekémian, born in Valence, France, holds a Post-doctoral Research Habilitation (HDR), earned in 2023, from the University of French Polynesia. A specialist in human geography, geopolitics, environmental sciences, agronomy, planning and urban development and regional planning, he has been teaching and researching in Papeete since 2013.

Tchekémian’s academic journey began with studies in urban planning at UPMF Grenoble, followed by a position at the University of Lorraine. His doctoral thesis examined the impact of the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy on rural communities in France, a study that earned him the Medal of the French Academy of Agriculture in 2010.

Today, Tchekémian continues to publish and pursue research on the development of island territories, with a particular focus on French Polynesia, where global challenges such as climate change and food sovereignty intersect with local traditions and resilience. In 2023 he published Cliperton, the Remains of La Passion: Insights into the Only French Coral Atoll in the Northeastern Pacific Ocean (in French), about a little-known yet mysterious French atoll. After a month-long mission of total immersion, he returned with numerous observations and scientific data, including rare color photographs, which allow us to discover this French atoll at the edge of the world, serving as a sentinel island in terms of environmental protection.



Dear Anthony, how would you describe your academic path?

My academic path is somewhat unconventional. I began with vocational studies in environmental sciences, before turning to marine biology. My university degree later allowed me to focus on the relationship between “cities and nature” at the Grenoble Institute of Urban Planning, where I earned a bachelor’s and then a master’s degree in planning and research. After four years of teaching at the University of Lorraine, I decided to settle in French Polynesia. There, my work as a researcher has brought me the emotional depth and introspection that my earlier training lacked. I need to feel different, yet rooted in a sense of kinship and closeness. French Polynesia, through its culture and values,

see TCHEKEMIAN, page 15

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Awe-Inspiring Bourbon Pecan Pie

BLOOMINGTON HILLS, MI - Chef and author George Vutetakis learned “the language of food” as a young boy in his Greek grandmother’s kitchen. It was there that he was first exposed to the value of cultural traditions in cooking. His discoveries later continued with his travels to India, where he learned traditional food preparation methods. Whether he’s discussing vegetarian cultures and traditions (he studied in India as a teenager), the benefits of green papaya (it’s a good source for papain, a natural digestive enzyme), or countertops (the more, the better), for Vutetakis the bottom line is quality.

Vutetakis is an award-winning vegan chef/restaurateur who has been an integral part of the plant-based food revolution since the early 1980s. His business acumen and entrepreneurial approach have brought success to many projects. In addition to his consulting company site, Veg Traditions, he shares his vast food knowledge and delicious vegan recipes on his popular blog and his cookbook, Vegetarian Traditions: Favorite Recipes From My Years at the Legendary Inn Season Cafe.

Looking to impress your guests at the holidays, or for a delicious dessert to make any random occasion special? Check this impressive pie recipe from Chef George.

Crust for one 9-inch pie crust
Preheat oven to 350°F. Bake the formed crust for 7 minutes.

INGREDIENTS:
Base:
4 tablespoons bourbon
2 tablespoon Bob’s Red Mill egg replacer
14 large pitted medjool dates
2/3 cup maple syrup
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
5 tablespoons Miyokos Oat Milk Butter* (Use as a 1:1 swap in any recipe. Perfect for spreading, sautéing, and so much more.)
1 1/2 cups pecan halves and pieces

Mix all ingredients in food processor until cohesive. Spread into the pie shell.

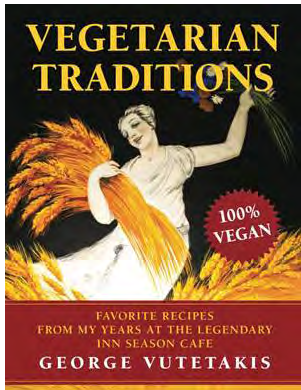
Top layer:
2 tablespoons Miyokos Oat Milk Butter
1 1/2 cups pecan halves
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 tablespoons bourbon
1/3 cup coconut sugar**

PREPARATION:
In a skillet on medium low, melt oat milk butter then add pecans, toast for 1 minute. Add vanilla, bourbon and sugar. Cook for 1 minute and put on top of base. Bake pie for 30 minutes. Allow to sit for 45 minutes before serving.

For this recipe, go to: <https://vegtraditions.com/awe-inspiring-bourbon-pecan-pie>
For more recipes, go to: <https://vegtraditions.com/theveggy-blog>
* Plant-based butter can be a good butter alternative for people who want to limit their dairy consumption or lower their cholesterol.
**Coconut sugar: Made from the nectar of coconut palm trees, it contains less fructose than other sugars.

Vegetarian Traditions: Favorite Recipes From My Years At The Legendary Inn Season Cafe as a SOFTCOVER and an EBOOK. The new release of the landmark book Vegetarian Traditions brings the reader into the creative world of Inn Season Cafe which, for almost forty years, was a pioneer of delicious plant-based cuisine in the Midwest.

Dive into the world of vegetarian cuisine with Vegetarian Traditions, an exquisite cookbook by Chef George Vutetakis. This culinary masterpiece offers over 150 recipes that encapsulate the essence of the acclaimed Inn Season Cafe in Royal Oak, Michigan. Each dish in this collection is a testament to Chef George’s pioneering efforts in vegetarian and plant-based cooking, bringing to your table the most beloved and requested recipes from this award-winning establishment.



COPYRIGHT © 2024 THEVEGETARIANGUY.COM. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Another Packed AFS Film Festival Concludes

FESTIVAL, from page 13

The Q&A panelists were the director, and actors Krista Marina, Edgar Damatian, Jessie Bedrossian, Judah McFadden, producer Annie Dashtoyan, and producer/editor Yvette Amirian. Director Asatrian said, “I want to show the world the beauty of our country, our culture, music, and food.” The American actor Judah McFadden said, “Armenia, yes kez siroum em. (I love you.) The people of Armenia were amazing.”

The festival featured three short film blocks: Around the World, which included filmmakers from the Armenian diaspora; Made in Armenia; and Student Filmmakers.

Friday evening’s short film block included “Before They Joined Us” by Arshile Khanjian Egoyan. During the Q&A, Egoyan said, “This was my mother’s immigration story. She had a short role where you can get a glimpse of her profile.”

Another short film featured was by actor/director Tigran Tovmasian from Australia. Tovmasian said, “The producer, Daniel Havas, suggested cutting down the script from 40 to 15 pages and took a year to shoot it.” He added, “I am thankful for the kindness of many people, especially the composer Arman Aloyan.” Following the shorts was “Thus Spoke the Wind,” directed by Maria Rigel.

Saturday’s shorts also had Q&As after

each set. Lily Ghazaryan, who directed “The Doorman,” discussed her experience and the challenges she faced. In the afternoon, they screened five short films by students. The two were in attendance and spoke with Karaoghlanian, who expressed his amazement at the quality of the films by the students. “How It Should Be” was Natalie Yerelekian’s high school project. Artur Haroutoun Andonian directed “Long Time No See” for his graduation from Film

Production in Toronto, Canada.

“Words Left Unspoken” was screened Saturday night to a packed house. The film follows Joze Piranian over eight years as he overcomes his shyness and stutter. The filmmaker Josiane Blanc and Piranian traveled to Lebanon to meet with his family, who are an essential part of the documentary. As a child, Piranian did not speak for a long time, but he overcame his challenges and performed comedy in front of a large

audience. Piranian, who currently lives in Toronto, is fluent in English, French, Armenian, and Arabic. He welcomed the audience before the screening. During the Q&A, he said, “We all stutter. We can overcome them by self-awareness. We need to be patient and let people express themselves. Not just with people who stutter but people who speak another language.”

On Sunday, September 7, a special panel discussion featuring Sev Ohanian and Ryan Coogler took place to discuss their collaboration and success. The two had collaborated on the smash hit “Sinners.” Ohanian said, “My company is called Proximity Media. We want to bring the audience into the proximity of real subjects, including stories from our culture.”

The film festival ended with a gala celebrating their tenth anniversary on Sunday evening at the Vertigo Event Venue, hosted by Sona Movsesian. AFS honored visionary storytellers in the film industry. Vache Tovmasyan presented Karren Karagulian, Pixar’s Katherine Sarafian presented Madeline Sharafian, and Ryan Coogler presented Sev Ohanian. Each honoree received an award modeled after Mother Armenia. The mayor of Glendale, Ara Najarian, presented Ohanian with a symbolic Key to the City as the highest form of recognition for his accomplishments. AFS has created the Hall of Fame award, and Ohanian was the first inductee.



From left: Producer Daniel Havas, actor/director Tigran Tovmasian, filmmaker Arshile Khanjian Egoyan, and actor Karren Karagulian (Karine Armen photo)



ARTS & CULTURE

Anthony Tchekemian: The Scientist, the Athlete, the Armenian Of Tahiti

TCHEKMENIAN, from page 13
suits me best because it resonates with my distant Armenian origin.

My work follows a multidisciplinary and intercultural approach, connected to the research units SECOPOL (Tahiti) and Espace-Dev (Avignon).

I assume it should be very interesting to live on a tropical island and conduct research.

My research focuses on territorial and health issues in tropical island spaces. I analyze tensions between agro-industrial models and traditional practices, while emphasizing local solutions such as community gardens and short food supply chains. My work explores the link between food sovereignty, subsistence agriculture, public health policies, and local dynamics. The aim is to develop broader reflections on territories in transition, facing globalization and climate change.

I stand out for my inclusive approach, grounded in respect for local communities, while striving to make my research accessible to the general public. My work in critical and cross-disciplinary geography aims to identify concrete solutions and contribute to more sustainable and just development for island populations.

Sport seems to be another foundational aspect of your life.

I started practicing judo at the age of seven, with Bernard Tchoullouyan (1953–2019), as a model, the French-Armenian judoka who became world champion in 1981. And I still practice today, at 50. I hold a 2nd dan black belt and had the chance to be selected to represent Polynesia at the Pacific Games in 2023 and 2024 in the seniors' (-60 kg) category. I was French Polynesia champion in 2022 (-60 kg), runner-up in 2021 (-66 kg), and twice selected for the French corporate championships (2009 and 2011) in Paris. But beyond the results, judo has been much more than a sport for me: a balance, a way of life, a space for self-overcoming. The moral code—politeness, courage, sincerity, honor, modesty, respect, self-control, friendship—became a compass I apply in my family, professional, and personal life. I also had a long experience of voluntary teaching, in clubs, in schools, with varied audiences, including children with disabilities. Transmitting judo is not only transmitting a technique: it is sharing a philosophy of life.

I stopped competing at 50, after being selected for the Pacific Games. The moral code of this martial art has helped me face adversity and live by strong values, especially in the academic world where underhanded tactics and jealousy are common. Now, stepping away from competition, I strive to become “more like a reed than an oak.”

I also played rugby for four years as a hooker, one year in juniors, then three in seniors, to obtain a federal teaching diploma. This collective combat sport fascinated me: “courage and intelligence,” they said in the definition given during the diploma course. Coming from judo, at 17, I loved this collective combat sport, the mates, the friends, the loves, the troubles... as Charles Aznavour sang.

Even today, I consider these two combat sports, one individual, the other collective, as having forged me: two different but complementary disciplines, which taught me to face challenges, not to fear “mountains,” to face adversity, to remain faithful to an ethic, to one's word, one's honor, to friendship... to live with intensity and to pass on to my children the taste for life.

Please tell us about your Armenian an-

cestors.

My story begins in Valence (Drôme), France, a city with a strong Armenian community. I am the product of my family's history of exile and resilience — a story that, I believe, reflects the courage of our people.

My paternal grandmother, Aravnie (Aghavni) Garabedian, was born in Beirut in 1922, after the “death marches” of the Armenian Genocide. Left for dead, she miraculously survived thanks to an uncle before eventually joining her family in France. With no status other than that of stateless refugees, the family found shelter in Valence. My grandfather, Bedros Tchékémian, fought for France during the Second World War and was taken prisoner for seven years, at a time when he had not yet been naturalized.

This story of survival and struggle forms the foundation of my identity and fuels my humanist commitment. Visiting the Armenian Heritage Center of Valence and discovering our family name there moved me deeply.

You said that Polynesia suited you particularly well because it resonated with your distant Armenian origins. Could you elaborate a bit more?

Polynesia resonates for me as a land of memory and resilience, echoing my Armenian origin. I even explained this in the foreword of my book *Tropical Agriculture in an Island Environment* between Tradition and Innovation, perhaps as a way of showing my respect to the Polynesian people. I grew up in a family marked by history: the genocide, the torturers, the states that were deaf and blind to the horror of death marches, massacres, rapes, and the most sordid and inhuman murders. I very quickly learned these words and understood their meaning, words that should be foreign to children: exile, suffering, and reconstruction.

The sounds of the Armenian language my father spoke, those I heard at my grandmother Aravnie's home, from her friends and my aunts Vartouhie and Alis, already transported me as a child to that land. Polynesia, a land of migrations, of mixing, and of rebirth after historical trials, feels familiar to me: it resonates with the history of the Armenians, a people forced to reinvent themselves in part within the diaspora. Living here, I rediscovered that strength of belonging to a land and of transmission, which is also essential for my own identity.

I am proud of this family name that I passed on to my two children, born in Tahiti: Anouk-Aravnie-Atea, with the Polynesian name, and Axel-Azad-Aroma. I assert my origin, most certainly because I am part of the third generation, the one that saw its grandparents and parents work themselves to exhaustion, accepting “to earn their living, the first job that was vacant [...] It could be done with an accent,” to quote the Great Charles. To integrate well, not to stand out, to try at all costs to show that we were good French citizens... But what for? I experienced racism as early as primary school, simply because of a family name of immigrant origin, very different from Lemaire, Reboule, Mondet, Palanque, Bouyet... So, very quickly I took the side of the underdogs, of the disabled, of foreigners — in short, of the different and often rejected. My parents took care to give me a first name that would mask the foreignness, to “sound French”: Anthony. Pity, I would have loved to be called Azad, “Freedom,” like in Henri Verneuil's “Mayrig.” For indeed, freedom is precious for a people wounded before everyone's eyes, without anyone reacting... So, I no longer hide. I live, I work, I succeed. Everything I do, everything I achieve is for my own, to show that I could make it, to thank them for their support, their kindness, so that they may be proud of me, of us, of themselves!

Apart from the Armenian first names your children bear, are there other Armenian influences in your family?

Yes, many. First, the language: my father spoke it, and although I did not inherit it fluently, I kept in memory certain expressions and sounds that shape an identity. In Gardanne, while I was studying for a BTSA, I even tried to learn Armenian through an association, but a year was not enough to master such a beautiful, rich, and complex language.

Then, the cuisine, a true living and delicious heritage. I grew up with the smells of kitchens, of pastirma, sujuk, coffee, olives, dates, apricots... I loved it when the kitchen was taken over by the ladies preparing dolma, börek, and other specialties difficult to make, yet quickly eaten! My grandmother, an excellent cook, prepared dishes whose flavors remain unmatched, beyond anything I've ever tasted in Middle Eastern restaurants or even during my travels in Turkey, especially in Malatya, where she had lived. My French mother also learned to cook Armenian dishes, and we enjoyed her little meals at home. My aunt Alice still carries on this link, delighting me with specialties, and in particular regularly sending me oriental-ground coffee, which I can't find here in Tahiti. Every morning, our family shares an Armenian-Tahitian coffee, brewed in an enameled srjep (or jazzve) that belonged to my grandmother: it is a ritual for us and for my children who watch me prepare it! My father used to make me drink some when, as a child, he prepared me to leave for judo competitions. This simple ritual is a way of keeping memory alive in daily life.

I also think of the figures of my personal Pantheon. There was a very important one in my family, alongside my aunt Alice, my father's sister: my uncle Gilbert. Passionate about Armenian history and culture, he had accumulated impressive knowledge about this people and its destiny. It is not always easy for refugee survivors to delve into this history. His readings, stories, analyses, and vision deeply marked me: like A Dagger in This Garden by Vahé Katcha. He also took me to listen to Gérard Chaliand, the French-Armenian geopolitician and essayist, near Charenton-le-Pont, and gave me *Mémoire de ma mémoire*, a collection of memories that I devoured. A few years later, I dared to ask Gérard Chaliand to write the preface to my book *Clipperton, the Remains of La Passion*, which he kindly agreed to do, telling me that his mother's name was also Tchekemian. My uncle was, as we affectionately said, “the most Armenian of the French.” His words nourished my imagination and reinforced that feeling of belonging to a history larger than myself.

After that, I don't know how much Armenia there is in me, but it seems to dominate: I don't know why but, quite innately, I love galloping on horseback imagining myself as a warrior of the steppes, eating pomegranates, practicing judo under the influence of Eastern countries (more wrestling-oriented), I love the scents of jasmine, cumin...

Have you ever met other people of Armenian origin in Polynesia? A few years ago, I was in contact with Natacha Mirimanoff, of Armenian-Tahitian origin, and last year I interviewed Vadim Toumaniantz from Papeete.

Yes, even if such encounters are rare, they are always precious. Doesn't a proverb say: “where there are two Armenians, they will meet”? In Papeete, I recently received a very kind message from Vadim Toumaniantz, who told me about your work and expressed his goodwill. This gesture deeply touched me. I have not yet had the chance to meet him in person, nor Natacha Mirimanoff, but I know their names and their background. Their presence in Polynesia bears witness to the discreet but very real existence of the Armenian diaspora in these islands. Each encounter, even virtual, creates an immediate sense of complicity and recognition.

Have you ever been to Armenia?

I haven't had the chance yet, but it is an essential project for me. In the meantime, I

raise my children by telling them about the diaspora, the life journeys of their ancestors, and by passing on to them some knowledge of this civilization, this culture, this Armenian heritage. I tell them that Armenia was one of the oldest civilizations in the world, renowned even in Egypt at the time of the pharaohs for its exceptional musicians. It was also the first nation to adopt Christianity in 301, and its landscapes around Mount Ararat, now in Turkey, are filled with symbols. I tell them about the kingdoms of Urartu and the Indo-European peoples who shaped this history, but also about the rich heritage of monasteries and churches, and the terrible ordeals, especially the genocide of 1915. I also show them the complexity of the Caucasus, a powder keg, its political, ethnic, religious, linguistic divisions, and the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, the rivalries between powers, so that they understand that Armenian history can only be read in relation to its neighbors and great empires. Moreover, I will keep speaking about it as long as persecution remains of no concern to others... It is my way of fighting. Who remembers that in December 2022, in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Azerbaijani army blocked the Lachin corridor, the only road link between Stepanakert and Yerevan, thus preventing the supply of civilians in the middle of winter?

Moreover, I explain in my courses on the geography of conflicts that although it is commonly called Nagorno-Karabakh, I prefer the name Artsakh, since the former expression is built from words imposed by others: Turkish kara (black) and Persian bagh (garden), to which the Russians added nagorny (mountainous). The expression “Nagorno-Karabakh” is thus a condensation of Armenian pain, through the three powers that occupied, ruled, and sometimes persecuted the inhabitants of this region.

Such a trip to Armenia would have a two-fold significance for me: an intimate return to my family roots, and a way of passing on to my children a living heritage, not confined to the past but rooted in the present and future. In my profession as a teacher, particularly in my geopolitics courses, I also strive to make this country known, to explain its complexity and importance, and to show students both the richness and fragility of this region.

Anything else you would care to add?

Yes, several things... I am deeply moved by the personality and life of Missak Manouchian, and so happy and proud that he has finally entered the Panthéon, as a French Resistance fighter of Armenian origin, in France and for France against Nazi barbarism. His courage, his commitment, and his sacrifice embody the dignity of a people fighting for survival and freedom. His memory nourishes me, as it nourishes so many descendants of the diaspora: it reminds us that it is possible to remain faithful to one's values, even in extreme adversity, without bowing down or making pacts with evil.

I was also cradled by the voice and words of Charles Aznavour, who accompanied my childhood near Valence. His songs — well beyond La Mama, Ils sont tombés, Autobiographie — bring back that time to me with deep nostalgia. My father would sing at the top of his lungs at home: he could have been Monsieur Charles' double! I particularly remember a gift from my grandmother to congratulate me for earning my doctorate: a seat in the front rows of the Palais des Congrès to go see him, while she herself sat further back in the hall. I cried from the beginning to the end of the concert, I could not stop. This gesture touched me, shook me deeply. Here in Tahiti, I had the incredible chance to see him in concert, and I even managed to get the handkerchief from La Bohème. My father, a die-hard fan, has seven. This object, beyond the anecdote, has become for me a symbolic treasure, linking the artist, my family, my memory, and my Armenian tears.

Books

Mirak-Weissbach Seeks to Restore the Legacy of Otto Liman von Sanders in New Book

By Alin K. Gregorian

Mirror-Spectator Staff

In her latest book, author and reporter Muriel Mirak-Weissbach pays tribute to — or better yet sets the record straight regarding — Otto Liman von Sanders, a German general who served in the Ottoman Empire in the era of World War I and the Armenian Genocide.

A *German General and The Armenian Genocide: Otto von Sanders Between Honor and State*, in a sober and methodical way, weaves together the various strands comprising the life of the German general who because of a variety of reasons, including honor, did not cultivate superficial relationships with those who could sing his praises to historians and journalists during his lifetime. As a result, he has been tainted by suspicion of collusion during the Armenian Genocide.

Mirak-Weissbach, a regular contributor to this newspaper from her base in Germany, has written several times about Liman von Sanders whose legacy has been unfairly tarnished by history.

The book, published by Berghahn, was released in July. It is a slim volume which offers a helpful chronology and detailed footnotes and sources.

There is a thread of duality throughout the book: German and Ottoman cooperation, Armenian history and German history, a private man versus a public face of a government and a member of an oppressed minority struggling with discrimination while representing a great power. In it, Mirak-Weissbach also weaves the two strands of her life, a German resident as well as an Armenian-American descendent of survivors of the Genocide.

Mirak-Weissbach paints Liman von Sanders as an up-right though not always likable figure, one who tried to do the right thing, even if it meant experiencing hardship or creating an uncomfortable situation.

Assignment Constantinople

Liman von Sanders was born in 1855 to a wealthy family in the province of Pomerania. The fly in the ointment for him was that he was descended from a Jewish great-grandfather, which forever cast a shadow on him, and yet being a part of a misunderstood minority, gave him the gift of empathy. He married an aristocratic woman and together they had three children. Sadly, his wife

when Germany was facing off against the Entente Powers, which eventually led to World War I.

There, the general took over the Ottoman forces, leading them to victory in Gallipoli.

In the Battle of Gallipoli, the French and British forces were trying to take over the Strait of Dardanelles, but the Ottoman forces, led by Liman von Sanders, prevailed in repelling the attack.

As Mirak-Weissbach quotes Kaiser Wilhelm II's message to the general: "With the definitive expulsion of the enemy from the Gallipoli Peninsula, one phase of the war has come to an end in which you, at the head of the other German officers sent to Turkey and the courageous Ottoman army entrusted by the Sultan to you, have won immortal laurels."

While he was a brilliant strategist, the author points out again and again that the general was an honorable man; while he was trained to obey orders, he was a fundamentally decent man who many times ignored the Ottoman leaders' orders to round up Armenian, Greek or Jewish residents.

He served the leaders of the Committee for Union and Progress, the triumvirate of Enver, Jemal and Talaat. In the book, he is quoted as someone who has an intense dislike for Enver, in particular, because of his stupidity as well as his lust for blood.

By this point, "emergency deportations" of Armenians had been launched, and the mass arrests of April 24, 1915, had taken place.

"As head of the military mission, Liman was responsible only to the kaiser, who had cautioned him to avoid international political issues. That he had frequently argued against deportations on political grounds was not only ironic; as a German officer trained in the Prussian military tradition, he must have grasped the link between politics and war," she writes on page 48.

One of the first times he stood up for a minority group was when he stopped the expulsion of Greeks from the town of Urla.

Next he reported the mass roundups of the Greeks and Armenians to the German government, though he had been told by the Kaiser's government that he should not interfere with the internal goings-on in the Ottoman Empire. However, again and again he raised the alarm and whenever asked to help with those efforts, he declined.

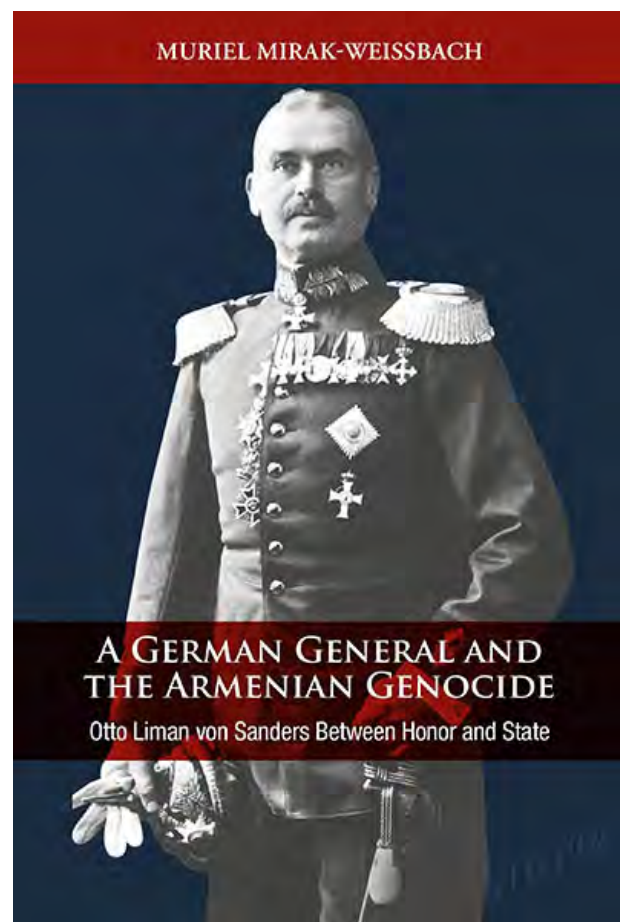
Mirak-Weissbach writes, "His report on [the town of] Aivalik is explicit on this point; he rules out the use of violence unconditionally. Ultimately it was always the moral choice of the soldier that counted; he had to decide whether or not to follow orders violating these principles."

In his military position there, he came into direct conflict with Gen. Fritz Bronsart von Schellendorf, the German chief of staff of Enver.

Before long, the Armenian Genocide got fully underway by the Young Turks. Smyrna in particular was a target by the central government as it was a city dominated by the Greeks. The government focused on the Armenian and Greek populations for arrests and forced marches.

"As such deportations infringe on the military sector — those li-

able for military service, the use of railroads, health measures, unrest among the population of a town close to the enemy, etc., — I informed the vali that without my permission, such mass arrests and deportations would no longer be allowed to take place. I informed the vali that weap-



ons would be used to prevent such a situation, should it be repeated. The vali then gave in and told me that it would not happen again," the author quotes Liman von Sanders.

In fact, he knew better than to appeal to the triumvirate's humanity, instead appealing to the waste of resources in rounding up minorities.

He often met up with Johannes Lepsius, a German missionary who was active in trying to help the Armenians.

After providing honorable service to his government, at the end of World War I, in which his country was defeated, Liman von Sanders boarded a British ship to go home. Little did he know that instead of being treated as an officer of high rank, as he expected, he was arrested as a prisoner and dropped off in Malta, where he was imprisoned.

Mirak-Weissbach details how the British were trying to prove the general's role in the very thing he was trying to thwart, the Armenian Genocide. It is easy to forget that the defeated Ottoman Turkish government also held trials in absentia for the Committee for Union and Progress triumvirate who had given the orders for the Genocide, and where in fact each was found guilty and sentenced to death in 1919.

The British government said they were waiting for proof of the general's complicity from the French but as the months went by, no evidence was brought forth. In the meantime, the general's mental and physical health deteriorated. Again and again, he proclaimed his innocence.

She writes, "As to the claims that he had mistreated the Armenians, Greeks and Syrians, Liman listed the missives (and dates) he had sent to the Swedish embassy in Constantinople, refuting such slanders," (page 90).

And on the same page, she quotes one of his letters. "Now that the War Office after five months declares it does not really know the reasons for my arrest, which took place through the Governor of Malta on orders of the War Office, I deem it now a duty of honor on the part of the War Office to have the competent authorities bring about the speediest clarification so that I will not be unjustly held one day longer and to send me an immediate decision."

He was released and sent home fairly soon after that. He made it to Berlin in time to testify at the trial of Soghomon Tehlirian, who had been arrested for assassinating Talaat Pasha.

Still, despite his efforts to do the right thing as much as he could, his name was tainted because he committed perjury when he said that no German officers were complicit in the Genocide.

She quotes him on page 150, "For our part, I can say — because we, as Dr. Lepsius was good enough to note, have been so grossly maligned — there was not a single German officer involved in any of the actions taken against the Armenians. The fact of the matter is that we intervened whenever and wherever we could."

Of course, that statement was not true, but again, Liman showed his loyalty to the army.

Mirak-Weissbach does an admirable job in trying to remind Armenians as well as Germans of the honor and dignity that Liman von Sanders brought to his role.

A *German General and The Armenian Genocide: Otto von Sanders Between Honor and State* is available from the publishers or from Amazon.



Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

passed away young and when the opportunity arose, he took two of his daughters with him to his new assignment in the Ottoman Empire.

Liman von Sanders arrived there as the leader the German military mission in 1913, during an unstable time,



ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

- SEPTEMBER 7-FEBRUARY 28** — Armenian Museum of America, through February 28, 2026 Adele & Haig Der Manuelian Galleries “The Art of Disruption: The Art & Impact of Serj Tankian” World renowned musician Serj Tankian is the lead singer and songwriter for the band, System Of A Down, a visionary poet, visual artist, and outspoken advocate for human rights. Inspired by his 2024 memoir, *Down with the System*, the exhibition immerses visitors in the dynamic intersections of music, painting, and protest that define Tankian’s work. This exhibition is curated by Ryann Casey. Sponsored by Carolyn Mugar and the Alan K. & Isabelle DerKazarian Foundation. Hours: Thursday-Sunday 12pm-6pm 65 Main St., Watertown. (617) 926-2562 or armenianmuseum.org
- SEPTEMBER 20** — **CELEBRATE ARMENIA!** Heritage. Culture. Traditions. On the occasion of Armenian Independence Day on September 21. 1-8 p.m. Saturday. **ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK ON THE GREENWAY, BOSTON** rain date: September 27. For the schedule, email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org
- SEPTEMBER 21** — The Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter presents A Summer Concert featuring Greek-Armenian violinist Emilya Gaspar and her mother, pianist Jasmine Atabekyan. The duo will perform Armenian and classical masterpieces. 4.30 p.m. 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. Please use Norseman Avenue entrance. Free, followed by a small reception. All donations will support Emilya’s education. For reservations or information, call Sossy at 617-281-1647 or email syogurtian@comcast.net.
- SEPTEMBER 21** — Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City Association (CYSCA) will host an interactive booth at the Cambridge Science Festival (CSC) titled “Barev STEM! Together We Build Tomorrow.” Fun games and demonstrations for children and families. Featuring 2 NGOs in Armenia that work with youth: Armath (technology education) and Maqoor (ecological education). Free and open to the public. At the Kendall/MIT Open Space at 292 Main Street, Cambridge, from 12– 4 PM. For more info, email info@cambridgeyerevan.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
- SEPTEMBER 28** — Book Launch and Reception. An afternoon with Muriel Mirak-Weissbach on the occasion of the release in English of her book, *A German General and the Armenian Genocide: Otto Liman von Sanders Between Honor and State*. Sunday, 4 p.m., at ACF. Co-sponsored by NAASR, the Tekeyan Cultural Association, Goethe Institut and Berghahn Publishing House. Free and Open to the Public
- SEPTEMBER 28** — Wellesley Symphony Orchestra performs Alan Hovhanness’s Exile Symphony, a remembrance and commemoration of the Armenian genocide of 1915. Mass Bay Community College, 50 Oakland Street, Wellesley. 2 p.m. Tickets \$30 on-line and at the door. <https://www.wellesleysymphony.org>
- OCTOBER 4** — National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) - “Celebrating 70 Years- Building the Future of Armenian Studies” Gala at the Fairmont Copley Plaza in Boston. Honorees, Pamela Avedisian and Yervant Chekijian. For tickets and sponsorship opportunities please go to <http://naasr.org/gala70>
- OCTOBER 6** — St. James Men’s Club & Trinity Men’s Union Joint Meeting, with special guest and speaker Ernie Boch, Jr. Boch serves as President and CEO of Subaru of New England. In 2006, Boch established Music Drives, which funds musical opportunities for the underserved throughout New England. Boch invested in the future of Boston’s culture and performing arts in 2016 with the Boch Center, housing the city’s landmark Wang and Shubert Theatres and sits on the organization’s Board of Directors. Boch opened the Boch Medical Center in the rural village of Wajinja, Uganda. Losh Kebab & Kheyima Dinner \$25 per person. 6;15 mezza &social hour, & 7 p.m. dinner, 7.30 speaker St. James Armenian church Cultural and Youth Center, 465 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown. For info contact Robert Berberian 339-293-2514.
- OCTOBER 18** — The Music for Future Foundation’s visiting fellows from Armenia will present a special concert, showcasing their artistic talents while raising awareness and financial support for the Foundation’s impactful work. Musicians aged 10 to 18 will perform works by Babadjanyan, Beethoven, Chopin, Dvorak, Khachaturian, Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Saint-Saens and Boston premieres by composers Yuri Gevorgyan and Arno Melkonyan. International violinist/violist Ara Gregorian, Chair of String and Piano Chamber Music at the New England Conservatory of Music will also be on

- hand to discuss music education opportunities in the United States. For tickets and information, visit www.FACSBoston.org
- OCTOBER 19** — **CELEBRATING WHAT UNITES US!** Highlighting Ireland. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Wednesday, 4 p.m. Monthly series in collaboration with the City of Boston Office of Immigrant Advancement and Age Friendly Boston RSVP appreciated, hello@armenianheritagepark.org
- OCTOBER 24** — 20th Anniversary Celebration of Father Khachatur Kesablian’s Ordination to Priesthood. Presentation of Floral (Dzaghga) Pilon by His Eminence, Bishop Mesrob Parsamyan, Primate. Dinner and Program to follow. Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church, 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. 6 p.m. For tickets and further information, contact Dara Hagopian, djuke@comcast.net, 508-364-9729, or got to www.stsvartanantz.com. Tickets must be purchased by October 17. No tickets will be sold at the door.
- OCTOBER 25** — Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church 85th Anniversary Gala Fundraising Dinner, Saturday, 6:00 PM Cocktail, 7 p.m. Dinner & Program, Sheraton Boston Hotel. Celebrate 85 years of Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in New England. Details and tickets: www.holycrossarmenian.com
- OCTOBER 26** — TCA Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group presents Chekhov’s “The Marriage Proposal” in Western Armenian at St. James Armenian Church, a cosponsor along with Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter and the Society of Istanbul Armenians, 4 p.m. Tickets \$75/person at themarriageproposal.eventbrite.com
- NOVEMBER 1** — Debut performance of the Massachusetts Chamber Music Artists. Program. Music by Frank Bridge, Komitas, Mendelssohn. Haig Hovsepian and Michael Fisher on violin, Yeh-Chun Lin on viola, Edward Arron on cello and Dina Vainshtein on piano. First Parish in Bedford, 75 Great Road, Bedford. 6 to 7.30 p.m. Tickets \$24 to \$30. Visit www.mcmartists.org.
- NOVEMBER 9** — **GIVING THANKS: COMING TOGETHER. ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK ON THE GREENWAY**, Boston. 2pm. View the new Reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture. Meet & Greet. Cider & Sweets. Refreshments. RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org
- NOVEMBER 21** — AMAA’s Boston Child Care Committee presents an evening supporting the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan, Armenia, **FEATURING COMEDIAN KEV ORKIAN. COCKTAILS, DINNER & LIVE AUCTION.** Wellesley Country Club, Wellesley Hills. **SPONSOR BY AUGUST 1, 2025, TO BE LISTED ON THE INVITATION!** (Individual Tickets will commence at a later date). For more info visit: <https://amaa.org/hyemindsboston2025/>
- DECEMBER 7 CANDLELIT LABYRINTH WALK: IN PEACE & HARMONY** Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Sunday at 4:45pm. Meet & Greet. Walk the Candlelit Labyrinth Walk. Enjoy Hot Chocolate & Sweet Treats. RSVP appreciated. hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

NEW JERSEY

- NOVEMBER 22** — **12 VOCATIONS: VARIETY OF GIFTS - ONE SPIRIT.** Join St. Nersess Seminary and celebrate the vocations of its next 12 alumni, including three bishops, seven priests, a deacon and a lay minister at a gala banquet to be held at Macaluso’s, Hawthorne, NJ. Starts at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$200 per person. Details, invitations, and booklet donations can be found on www.stnersess.edu.

RHODE ISLAND

- OCTOBER 18** — Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church presents “GALA KEF Dinner Dance” dedicated to 30th Anniversary of Cultural Committee featuring Ken Kalajian - guitar, Charles Kalajian - percussions, Leon Janikian - clarinet, Harry Bedrossian - oud & vocal. Egavian Cultural Center - 70 Jefferson Street, Providence, 6 – 7 pm Cocktail Hour, 7 pm - Dinner, 8 pm – 11 Band. General Admission : \$60 (\$75 after October 12) Call for tickets: Zara Vartanian: 401-439-5971, Elvira Hovagimian: 860-462-3610.
- NOVEMBER 1** — The Cultural Committee of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church presents a “Spiritual Music Festival”, dedicated to the memory of Maestro Khoren Mekhanejian featuring the Choirs & Soloists of Rhode Island Orthodox Churches. Special guests: Hasmik Mekhanejian, mezzo-soprano (NY), Anahit Zakarian, soprano (NY). In the Sanctuary of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church at 3 p.m. 70 Jefferson Street, Providence. Donations Gratefully Appreciated. Refreshments will be served

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.

Preserving Identity Through Sound: Armenians in California from 1900 To 1960

SOUND, from page 13
clips from the period 1900-1960, offering the audience a chance to hear and see the cultural torchbearers whose efforts bridged Old World traditions with New World experiences. Through this work, Hagopian contributes to the growing field of diaspora and ethnomusicology studies

by showing that Armenians in California did not merely preserve their heritage, they actively reshaped it, creating a unique Armenian-American sound that continues to resonate across generations.
Raised in the Fresno Armenian community, Hagopian has been immersed in the traditions he now studies, giving him a rare

insider’s perspective. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Middle Eastern and Armenian Studies and a Master of Arts in History from Fresno State, dedicating the latter part of his undergraduate and all of his graduate research to understanding the preservation of Armenian music in California.
The lecture is free and open to the public.

Parking is available in Fresno State Lot P6, near the University Business Center. Permits are required for Thursday night lectures and a free permit and directions can be accessed at this link: bit.ly/hagopianparking.
The presentation will also be live-streamed on YouTube at: <https://bit.ly/armenianstudiesyoutube>.

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 Hovsepan, 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.	\$100 one year
Canada	\$150 one year
Other Countries	\$230 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.**

What to Expect from Current Armenia-Turkey Rapprochement Negotiations

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Ambassador Serdar Kiliç, the Turkish representative in the Armenian-Turkish negotiation group, is likely to visit Armenia soon at the head of a delegation, according to recent reports in Turkish and Armenian media, in order to meet with Armenian governmental leaders. As Armenian-Azerbaijani relations progress, so too do Armenian-Turkish relations. This visit indicates another active phase in Armenian-Turkish relations, and the public awaits potential forthcoming statements, possibly including the initialing or pre-signing of protocols or agreements regarding establishing diplomatic relations or opening borders that have been blocked by Turkey since the 1990s.

The current process differs from previous attempts to normalize Armenian-Turkish relations in that it lacks mediators or public diplomacy engagement. From 1991 onward, the United States was the primary mediator in such efforts. The Bush Sr., Clinton, Obama, and Biden administrations largely employed backstage diplomacy, though public statements were also made. Hillary Clinton's active involvement as secretary of state during the Obama administration was salient. Currently, there is no publicly available information indicating US involvement in the ongoing Armenian-Turkish normalization process. However, it should not be ruled out that American involvement continues behind the scenes.

The absence of a mediator presents a challenge for Armenia, as the power imbalance between Armenia and Turkey risks pressuring Armenia into unilateral concessions. Turkey is a strong regional power with an established practice of diplomacy. In fact, if Armenia fulfills all of Turkey's preconditions (which include satisfying Azerbaijan's preconditions too), the very term "negotiations" becomes questionable as this would represent a unilateral concession and amounts to diplomatic capitulation.

The imbalance is clear from the backgrounds of the main negotiators, Ambassador Kiliç and Armenian Vice President of Parliament Ruben Rubinyan. Kiliç is an accomplished diplomat who formerly was the Turkish ambassador to the US, where he was considered active and effective. Rubinyan, in contrast, lacks prior diplomatic experience, having been appointed deputy min-

ister of Foreign Affairs following the 2018 revolution without previous preparation.

Recently, Rubinyan stated that he sees no reason why the Turkish side should delay opening the borders. In fact, many questions arise here. First, Turkey will most likely wait until relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan are finally normalized. Of course, Armenia is preparing to change its constitution, but it is unlikely that Turkey and Azerbaijan will want to take active steps

until Armenia has actually done this. Therefore, from this point of view, we can ask why Turkey should not delay opening the border until it receives the green light from Baku.

Rubinyan says that Armenia is ready to have open borders and establish diplomatic relations tomorrow. Of course, everyone understands that Armenia has been ready to open its borders and establish diplomatic relations since 1991, but the border is unilaterally closed by Turkey, and the establishment of diplomatic relations has also been con-

stantly aborted by Turkey and Azerbaijan. Rubinyan does not realize that this process depends not on what he negotiates, but solely on the Armenian side fulfilling all the preconditions.

As for Kiliç's visit, the last time the negotiators met in Turkey; now the host should be the Armenian side. Probably, after the signing of the statements in Washington by Armenia and Azerbaijan, Yerevan and Ankara will work to clarify some of their own issues.

Given that Turkey has waited 35 years for Armenia to meet the necessary preconditions, the question remains: why open the borders now, rather than waiting until Armenia amends its constitution? Turkey owes nothing to anyone and should only proceed if it completely trusts Armenia's commitment to constitutional reform and its successful ratification via referendum. While Turkey could then open the borders to goods or third-country citizens, there is no clear rationale for it to do so.

(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.)



Preserving Memory of the Perished, Not Politics: On the Urgent Renovation of Armenia's Genocide Memorial

By Bedross Der Matossian

In the past few weeks, a significant controversy has erupted over the renovations at the Armenian Genocide Memorial. What was initially a routine maintenance and preservation project by the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI) has been framed by some as a political maneuver, sparking intense debate both within Armenia and across the diaspora. Critics argue that these renovations are part of a deliberate effort to modify or even destroy the memorial, while others question the government's true intentions. In a matter of just two weeks, the memorial — one of the most important symbols uniting Armenians globally as a testament to both suffering and resilience — has become the center of a heated political dispute.

This debate, however, obscures a far simpler reality. Dzidzernagapert (Tsitsernakaberd), like many historical monuments, has suffered from decades of neglect. The structure and its associated museum were

in urgent need of repair due to long-term exposure to the elements. The fact that the current government, whose policies on the Armenian Genocide I do not support, is managing the renovations, has led some to treat the entire project with suspicion. I have previously argued that while the Pashinyan government's policies toward Turkey and Azerbaijan — including the controversial Washington Declaration on "peace" — may be questionable, it does not follow that every action undertaken by this administration should automatically be assumed malicious. Preservation of national heritage should not be politicized.

The Armenian Genocide Memorial was constructed in 1967 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the genocide. Since its construction, it has never undergone a comprehensive renovation. Over decades, rain and snow infiltrated the Eternity Hall, which consists of twelve inward-leaning basalt slabs, causing severe structural damage. The absence of a proper drainage system allowed water to weaken the

foundation, threatening the integrity of the monument.

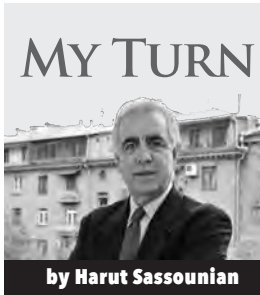
The Obelisk, also built in 1967 and an integral component of the memorial, has been renovated several times, most recently during the centennial of the genocide. That renovation addressed the same issues being tackled today: water damage and structural degradation. Stones were temporarily removed, a drainage and waterproofing system was installed, and new stones were set in place. The Armenian Genocide Museum, built in 1995, and the administrative building, completed in 2015, have faced similar problems, with heavy rainfall causing water seepage and damage to ceilings and interiors.

Recognizing the urgency of these issues, the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI) applied to the Government of Armenia in spring 2020 for funding to address the deteriorating conditions. A team of specialists conducted a thorough inspection of the memorial and museum and concluded

continued on next page



COMMENTARY



Pashinyan's Government: Dismantling Armenia from Within

Armenia's crisis deepens. With each passing day, the country's incompetent rulers strip away its sovereignty piece-by-piece, dismantling the nation they were elected to protect.

Armenia's leaders now echo the talking points of its sworn enemies — the presidents of Turkey and Azerbaijan — as though they occupy Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's chair in Yerevan.

Armenia's highest officials made several contradictory and anti-Armenian statements this past week:

In the run-up to next June's parliamentary elections, Pashinyan has flooded the public with hollow promises of peace. Yet, even after he made series of humiliating concessions, President Ilham Aliyev spurns the so-called treaty, despite the August 8 White House meeting, which was staged to sign it.

On rare occasions, Pashinyan and Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan have admitted the truth. In 2024, Pashinyan flippantly told the inhabitants of the border town of Kirants: "You may live without danger for seven days, but the eighth day may not be safe. What do I know?" Mirzoyan made the same admission last week while addressing the National Assembly: "Peace will not be fully established even if the agreement is signed with Azerbaijan." But they quickly revert to the fiction that "peace has been established between Armenia and Azerbaijan."

President Trump's August 8 promise to Pashinyan at the White House that he would urge Aliyev to release the Armenian prisoners has yielded nothing beyond mere words. Worse, Pashinyan asked Trump not to mention the prisoners in the Memorandum of Understanding, fearing that his political rivals, when released, could challenge him in next year's elections.

After complying with Aliyev's demand to dissolve the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, Pashinyan used the excuse that it was "useless," even though it kept the war at bay for nearly three decades. He even declared that the Karabagh issue was "resolved long ago." If that were true, why would Aliyev need to wage a bloody war in 2020 to seize it?

The truth is Pashinyan surrendered Artsakh by scrapping negotiations, ignoring the Minsk Group proposals, and arrogantly declaring in 2019: "I started the negotiations not from [Pres.] Serzh Sargsyan's point, but from my own point. This is an important nuance." Aliyev threateningly responded: "Negotiations with Pashinyan are useless and senseless.... In the absence of success in negotiations, Azerbaijan has the right to solve the problem with war." After losing Artsakh, Pashinyan absurdly claimed that Armenia is now "more independent than ever before!" How can losing territory and thou-

sands of lives make a country more independent? Would Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu return the West Bank, recognize Palestine, and then claim that Israel has become "more independent?" Only a defeated leader would come up with such a nonsense excuse.

Pashinyan also denied agreeing at the White House to give a U.S. company a 99-year lease to manage the road linking mainland Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan, thus contradicting President Trump's public statement.

At a press conference on August 28, Pashinyan boasted: "I am the government. No one can have any position that contradicts my position." This is the clearest proof of his dictatorial mindset, despite his constant claims of leading a democratic country. The next morning, he fired Liparit Drmeyan, head of the International Legal Affairs Office, for acknowledging Armenia's obligation to comply with an international arbitration ruling against the government's illegal seizure of Samvel Karapetyan's electricity network company. Even though Armenia had lost the arbitration decision, Pashinyan falsely claimed: "We have won in arbitration court."

Not to be outdone, Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan on September 11 made statements which are contrary to Armenia's interests, by expressing empathy with Azerbaijan.

Asked whether Baku should allow the same reciprocal procedures for Armenian cargo crossing Azerbaijan, Simonyan responded: "The wounds are fresh, both on our side and theirs. Didn't we also kill people? Didn't people also die on the Azerbaijani side? It's about face-to-face contact [on the border].... During this sensitive period of rebuilding relationships and trust, the goal is to minimize that contact. Azerbaijan also has very big wounds. Azerbaijan reckons that ... Armenia kept 20 percent of their country under occupation for 30 years and goes as far as making statements about genocide. This is their way of thinking, and it is obvious that it is very important for Azerbaijan to prevent any possible future threat." Simonyan seems to have forgotten he is the Speaker of Armenia's Parliament, not Azerbaijan's.

Simonyan also mocked the political opposition parties, claiming they "cannot gather more than seven people in the streets of Yerevan," and boasting that "a lot more people will gather in the streets if I put my picture there." An opposition leader retorted: "Yes, a lot more people will gather around Simonyan's picture in the street, to spit on it."

Finally, the latest example of Pashinyan government abandoning Armenia's sacred symbols is its decision to remove, as of November 1, the image of Mt. Ararat from the seal that border agents stamp on passengers' passports. Will the capitulating government next rename the country "Ermenistan"?

Since Armenia's government is not defending the nation, then the citizens must defend it. Every concession, every erased symbol, every echo of the enemy's narrative is another step toward national erasure. The Armenian people — at home and abroad — must finally wake up and bring to power new leaders who will serve Armenia's interests, not its adversaries. History will not forgive complacency. The time to act is now — before there is no Armenia left to defend.

from previous page

unequivocally that substantial renovations were necessary. Based on these findings, AGMI formally requested state funding for the works. The drafting of renovation plans was entrusted to Haynaxagits company, with Sashur Kalashyan, one of the original architects of the memorial, overseeing both the planning and execution phases.

Following the preparation of draft plans and a preliminary budget, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports

exposure to harsh weather, is being reinforced and fully waterproofed. A state-of-the-art drainage system will channel rainwater away from the building, preventing future seepage, ceiling damage, and structural deterioration. This measure is essential to protect valuable archival materials and exhibits housed within the Museum.

Interior reconstruction and structural reinforcements: Inside the Museum-Institute, ceilings, walls, and other structural elements are being repaired and strength-

upper stones using techniques proven during the Obelisk renovation of 2015. All work is guided by the original architectural vision, with attention to preserving historical accuracy and the monument's symbolic integrity.

Enhancement of surrounding green areas: The landscape surrounding the memorial, including Memory Alley Park, is being upgraded to improve both aesthetics and environmental resilience. A modern drip irrigation system will maintain green-

Rather than succumbing to conspiracy theories, individuals and the public should approach these renovations with critical thinking and an informed perspective. It is crucial to differentiate between legitimate preservation work and politically motivated narratives. The media, particularly in Armenia, also bears a responsibility to provide unbiased, fact-based reporting rather than amplifying polarization. Unfortunately, media sensationalism has obscured the realities of the renovations, draining resources, energy, and valuable time from AGMI staff, whose efforts could have been dedicated to research, exhibitions, and educational programs that serve both Armenians and the international community.

Preserving Dzidzernagapert is not just about maintaining a physical structure; it is about safeguarding a symbol of memory, resilience, and historical truth for future generations. Renovation and restoration are acts of respect and remembrance, not political statements, and should be understood as such by both the public and the media.

(Bedross Der Matossian is Professor of Modern Middle East History and the Hymen Rosenberg Professor in Judaic Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA. He is the author, editor, and co-editor of seven books, including *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire* (2014) and *The Horrors of Adana: Revolution and Violence in the Early Twentieth Century* (2022). His most recent edited volume, *Denial of Genocides in the Twenty-First Century*, was published by the University of Nebraska Press in 2023.)

PRESERVING DZIDZERNAGAPERT IS NOT JUST ABOUT MAINTAINING A PHYSICAL STRUCTURE; IT IS ABOUT SAFEGUARDING A SYMBOL OF MEMORY, RESILIENCE, AND HISTORICAL TRUTH FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS. RENOVATION AND RESTORATION ARE ACTS OF RESPECT AND REMEMBRANCE, NOT POLITICAL STATEMENTS, AND SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD AS SUCH BY BOTH THE PUBLIC AND THE MEDIA.

announced a public tender in accordance with the RA Law on Procurement. Only one company submitted a bid, winning the contract. A separate company was appointed to oversee technical control, while Haynaxagits, under Kalashyan's direct supervision, conducted the author's supervision to ensure fidelity to the original design and historical accuracy.

The renovation project includes several critical interventions designed to ensure the long-term preservation and integrity of the Armenian Genocide Memorial and its surrounding facilities:

Repair of the Museum-Institute's roof and installation of a modern drainage system: The roof, having suffered decades of

ened where necessary. These interventions aim not only to restore aesthetic quality but also to address underlying safety concerns caused by long-term wear and water infiltration. Critical reinforcement work ensures that both the building and its collections can withstand future environmental stresses.

Restoration of the Memorial's twelve basalt slabs: The centerpiece of Dzidzernagapert — the twelve inward-leaning basalt slabs of Eternity Hall — is undergoing meticulous restoration. This includes the installation of a new drainage system beneath and around the slabs, application of waterproofing materials to protect against moisture, and careful replacement of the

ery efficiently, while landscaping improvements aim to create a more inviting and contemplative space for visitors. This work ensures that the memorial's exterior environment complements the solemnity of the site and supports long-term preservation of the grounds.

Tragically, what should have been a technical and preservation-focused project to safeguard one of the most sacred sites for Armenians has been politicized. Work on the memorial began in October of the previous year, and the renovation of the slabs had been ongoing for two months when an unprecedented campaign against the project began, casting suspicion on the motives behind routine repairs.

LETTERS

Self-Creation of the US and Creation of Armenia: A Shared Legacy of Independence, Relief and Responsibility

To the Editor:

The U.S. Declaration of Independence (1776) on July 4, 1776, the thirteen American colonies proclaimed their Declaration of Independence. This act of self-creation established the right of a people to govern themselves, free from oppression, and became a guiding principle for nations worldwide. The American experiment in liberty, rooted in the will of its people, has inspired movements for justice and independence for nearly 250 years.

Armenia’s Fight for Survival and Recognition Nearly a century and a half later, in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, the Armenian people faced annihilation. More than a million were killed, and hundreds of thousands became refugees. In response, the international community turned to the United States to safeguard Armenia’s survival. The League of Nations offered the U.S. the Mandate for Armenia. On November 22, 1920, President Woodrow Wilson issued his Arbitral Award, delineating Armenia’s borders with Turkey, granting access to the Black Sea, and establishing a demilitarized zone for its protection. This award was a binding legal act under international law. In that moment, America’s role as a champion of self-determination was extended beyond its own 1776 struggle to the salvation of another ancient nation.

Near East Relief: “God’s Work on Earth”

Even before Wilson’s decision, Americans responded with extraordinary compassion. The Near East Relief (NER) mission (1915–1930) became an unprecedented humanitarian efforts in the history of civilization. Called ‘God’s work on earth, NER created and maintained more than 130 orphanages, caring for over 130,000 Armenian orphans—26,000 of them in Gyumri alone, where a Russian garrison stands today. NER also partnered with other nations in issuing “Nansen passports” to survivors, allowing stateless Armenians to rebuild their lives abroad. Remarkably, the orphanages remained open until 1930, demonstrating America’s

sustained commitment. In 1923, President Calvin Coolidge declared “Golden Rule Sunday,” asking U.S. citizens to eat only bread and milk for one meal and donate the savings to Armenian orphans. Millions of Americans participated, embodying the principle that the strength of a great nation lies not only in its power but in its compassion.

Shared Legacies of Independence and Responsibility. The United States, in 1776, proclaimed its independence and right to self-determination. In 1920, it recognized Armenia’s survival as a matter of international justice, assigning borders and obligations under Wilson’s Arbitral Award. Simultaneously, through Near East Relief, it carried out a humanitarian mission without precedent, proving that principles of liberty must be matched by action. Yet the failure to enforce Wilson’s Award, the silence regarding Turkey’s reparations, and the acceptance of illegal treaties like Moscow and Kars (1921) left Armenia vulnerable. This neglect has echoed into the present, culminating in the blockade of Armenia and the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh in 2023.

Conclusion: Returning to Founding Principles

The story of the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the creation of Armenia (1920) are linked by the principle that people have the right to exist, to be free, and to live in dignity. The legacy of Near East Relief further proves that America, at its best, has acted not only as a defender of freedom but as a savior of humanity. Suppose the United States is to remain true to its founding ideals. In that case, it must return to its legal and moral commitments to Armenia—implementing Wilson’s Arbitral Award, ensuring reparations, and standing against blockades and ethnic cleansing. History shows that when America acts on principle, it shapes the destiny not only of itself but of nations in need.

V.Pilosyan M.D.
Los Angeles



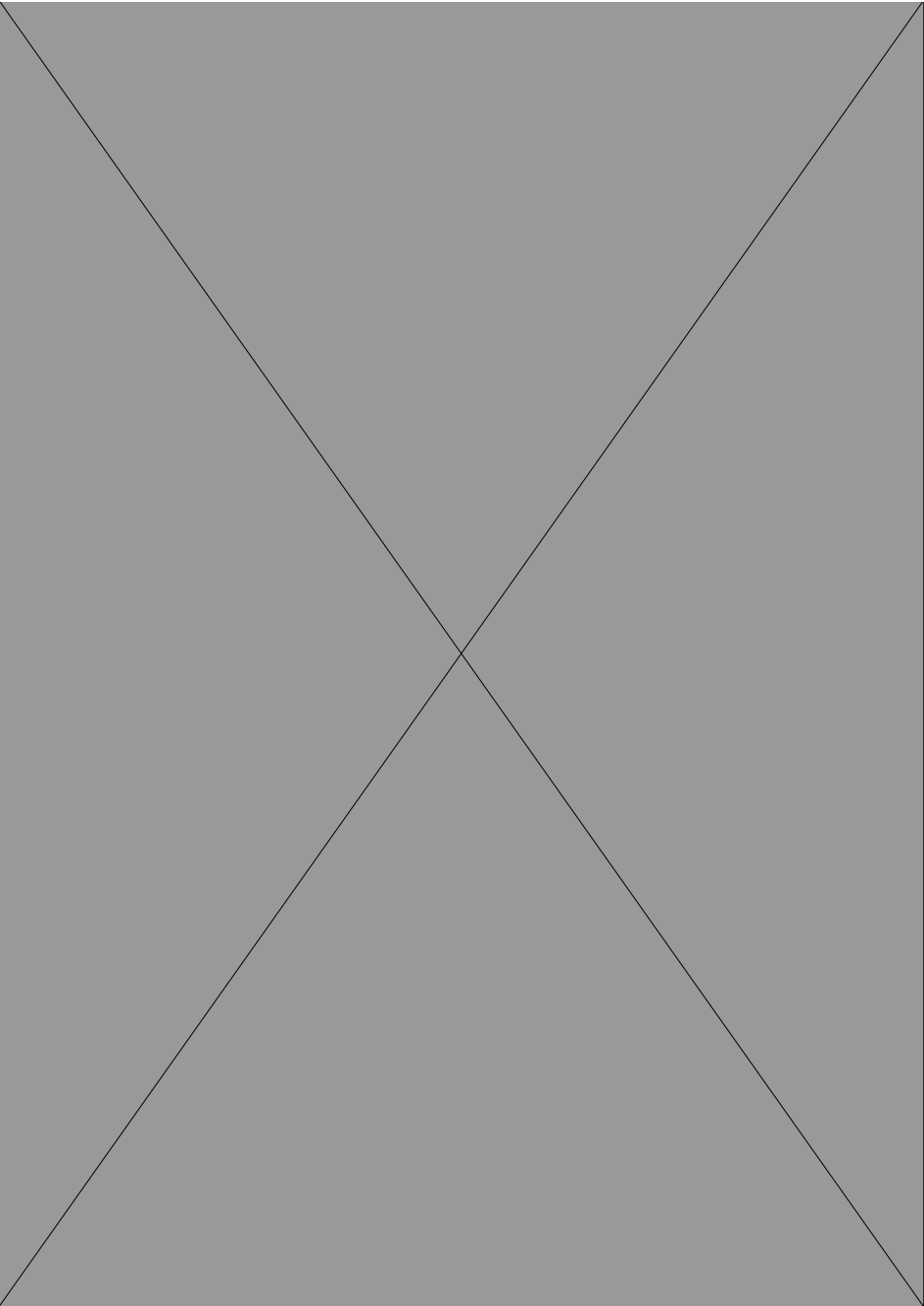
Museum Honoring Fallen Hero Albert Hovhannisyan Opens in Yerevan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — A museum dedicated to Albert Hovhannisyan, a hero Armenian soldier who fell on the Artsakh frontline during the 2020 war, opened in Yerevan on what would have been his 24th birthday, September 15.

The museum was established by his family on Varshavyan Street, overcoming what his father, Artak Hovhannisyan, described as “many obstacles and ill-willed people”. He called the site not only a memorial but also “a small school where future generations can learn how to live from a true hero”.

Captain Mnatsakan Avetisyan, Hovhannisyan’s commander, recalled his final battle, when Albert, an artilleryman, defied orders to take cover and continued firing to stop an enemy breakthrough before being fatally wounded by cluster munitions.

Hovhannisyan, posthumously awarded the title Hero of Artsakh and the Medal of Courage, is buried at Yerablur Military Pantheon.



AGBU

ARMENIAN GENERAL BENEVOLENT UNION

LOS ANGELES SPECIAL EVENTS COMMITTEE

AGBU LA Special Events Committee
& Tekeyan Cultural Association, LA Chapter
are honored to Invite you to a lecture by

ROUPEN AVSHARIAN, Esq.

**“Syria - Post Assad Environment
& the Syrian Armenians”**

Սիրիա: Յետ-Ասատեան
Իրավիճակն ու Սիրիահայուրթիւնը

THURSDAY, SEP 25, 2025 AT 7:00PM

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

Reception to follow . Հիւրասիրութիւն