

Lachin Blockade
‘Eco-Activist’ among
Delegation Meeting
Armenian Counterparts
In Yerevan

By Nate Ostiller During a meeting of Azerbaijani civil society members with their Armenian counterparts in Yerevan on Wednesday, October 22, one of the attendees from the Azerbaijani side was Dilara Efendiyeva — a prominent “eco-activist” who participated in the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2022–2023 and is closely linked with the government. The other Azerbaijani participants are all connected to pro-government NGOs, opposition figures have said. The meeting was headed by the head of Armenia’s Security Council, Armen Grigoryan. The Azerbaijani pro-government media outlet APA said the talks were “aimed to promote the peace agenda in the spirit of the Joint Declaration adopted in Washington on 8 August 2025”, referring to the meeting between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and US President Donald Trump. “The parties discussed a number of issues of interest to both societies, including the prospects for the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, humanitarian issues, economic and logistical opportunities in the context of the normalization of relations, as well as measures to further strengthen trust”, APA wrote. APA did not include Efendiyeva as one of the participants, although other Azerbaijani media outlets did. see ACTIVIST, page 4



Dilara Efendiyeva President Ilham Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and US President Donald Trump.

Vahan Tekeyan Awards
Presented at Yerevan’s
Tekeyan Center

Azadian Documentary
Screened

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff YEREVAN — The Tekeyan Awards, annually presented in the name of the famous poet Vahan Tekeyan, are a way of highlighting exceptional contributions to Armenian culture by intellectuals and artists in Armenia and abroad. This year, the winners of the 31st set of these international awards were announced at Yerevan’s Tekeyan Center on October 21. The premiere of an Armenian-language documentary film titled “Between Homeland and Diaspora,” dedicated to the life of Edmond Y. Azadian, one of the founders of the awards ceremony who indeed worked throughout his life to bridge Armenia

and its diaspora, was a special addition to the event. Bishop Anushavan Zhamgochyan, dean of the Yerevan State University Faculty of Theology, opened the ceremony with a prayer, and conveyed the blessings and praise of Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II. see AWARDS, page 3



From left, the representative of Artsakh Carpet LLC, Birgit Kofler-Bettschart, and Hermine Avagyan



Award winners cut the cake: from left, Stas Namin, Prof. Armen Ayvazyan, Birgit Kofler-Bettschart and Hermine Avagyan

Armenian Church
Barred From Medieval
Monastery

By Naira Bulghadarian YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The Armenian Apostolic Church has accused authorities of illegally stripping it of access to a medieval monastery where a defrocked priest held a liturgy on October 26, attended by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Several hundred people, among them many central and local government officials and other ruling party figures, also joined the ceremony which Pashinyan said is part of his drive to depose the supreme head of the church, Catholicos Karekin II. The former priest, Stepan Asatryan, publicly admitted supporting that campaign right after being defrocked by the church leadership a week ago. He has



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan kisses a cross held by defrocked priest Stepan Asatryan during a ceremony at Hovhannavank monastery, October 26, 2025 defied the widely anticipated decision, refusing to leave the Hovhannavank monastery 30 kilometers northwest of Yerevan where he has served for the past several years. Several priests dispatched by the church’s Mother See in Echmiadzin were driven out of the monastery by Asatryan’s supporters when they visited it last week see CONFRONTATION, page 2

Prof. Tessa Hofmann Receives the
German Federal Cross of Merit

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator BERLIN — It could have been an ecumenical conference of Eastern Christians: there were Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic and Orthodox, Syriac Aramaic; but there were also Turks, Kurds and Alevites, as well as many, many Germans. They had all gathered in Berlin-Friedenau on October 20 to celebrate together the festive bestowal of the German Federal Cross of Merit on Tessa Hofmann Savvidis. see HOFMANN, page 6



Tessa Hofmann and Kerstin Richter-Kotowski (photo Lili Nahapetian)

Aïda Aznavour-Garvarentz, Sister of
Legendary Singer, Dies at 102

PARIS — Aïda Aznavour-Garvarentz, the sister of Charles Aznavour. Aïda passed away peacefully at the age of 102, leaving behind a life full of love, strength, grace, and devotion to her family and heritage. Born in Thessaloniki in 1923, Aïda shared with her brother not only their Armenian roots and Parisian upbringing, but also a lifelong bond of affection and understanding. Their connection was profound - rooted in shared history, music, and compassion. Aïda and Charles Aznavour’s relationship was one of deep mutual respect and artistic kinship. The two see AZNAVOUR, page 20



Aïda Aznavour-Garvarentz and her brother, Charles Aznavour



NEWS from ARMENIA

Opposition MP Urges Euronest to Demand Release of Armenian Prisoners in Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Opposition lawmaker Artur Khachatryan on October 28 called on the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly to demand the immediate release of Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan.

Speaking at a meeting of Euronest's Committee on Political Affairs, Human Rights and Democracy in Yerevan, the Hayastan faction MP said lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan must be "just and based on fairness and justice".

He highlighted that Azerbaijan continues to occupy over 200 square kilometers of sovereign Armenian territory and meddle in Armenia's domestic affairs, including by demanding constitutional changes as a precondition for the conclusion of a bilateral peace treaty.

Khachatryan also condemned the ethnic cleansing against the Armenian population of Karabakh. The MP proposed that Euronest send a message to Baku, declaring that it would not tolerate "inhumane actions by Azerbaijan's fascist regime."

Lawyer Alexander Kochubayev Released From Custody

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Lawyer Alexander Kochubayev was released from custody after his detention measure was changed to a travel ban, on October 27.

His lawyer, Erik Aleksanyan, said on Tuesday that Kochubayev would soon reunite with his wife and thanked Prosecutor General Anna Vardapetyan for what he called a "humane approach", as well as the media, relatives and friends for their support.

According to the Prosecutor General's Office, Vardapetyan decided to alter the measure after reviewing the defense motion and medical documents concerning Kochubayev's wife, who is currently in intensive care after childbirth.

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) condemned the arrest which took place on October 16, purportedly as a result of statements allegedly defamatory of justice officials he is supposed to have made in the course of an ongoing criminal case in which he represents Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan and 14 other defendants. The Archbishop, who is the head of the Tavush Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church, along with others, was arrested in June 2025 and charged with preparing acts of terrorism, organizing mass riots and attempting to seize power.

Officers of the Investigative Committee detained Kochubayev at the Shengavit District Court shortly after a hearing in the Galstanyan case. On October 17, the Yerevan Court remanded Kochubayev in custody.

Armenia Marks 27th Anniversary Of Parliament Attack

YEREVAN (Armenpress/Panorama.am) — Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Speaker of Parliament Alen Simonyan have visited the memorial to the victims of the 1999 parliament shooting to pay tribute to the memory of the victims on the 27th anniversary of the terror attack.

On October 27, 1999, a group of five heavily armed led by Nairi Hunanyan burst into parliament, killing Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, Speaker Karen Demirchyan, Deputy Speakers Yuri Bakhshyan and Ruben Miroyan, as well as three lawmakers and a Cabinet member. The gunmen held the remaining MPs hostage until surrendering to authorities the next day. The perpetrators were sentenced to life imprisonment.

There have since been many theories on possible masterminds or accomplices, including possible foreign involvement behind the attack. An investigation was reopened in 2019.

Earlier this year, Armenia's top prosecutor said that the reopened investigation was in "active phase".

Republic Party leader Aram Sargsyan claims that the 1999 parliament shooting cannot be considered solved until possible foreign involvement is fully investigated.

"Of course, October 27 has not been revealed," Sargsyan, the brother of slain Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, told reporters after laying flowers at the memorial



From left, President Khachaturyan, Prime Minister Pashinyan, Speaker Simonyan

to the victims outside the National Assembly on Monday.

"I've repeatedly stated that until possible foreign involvement is checked, the case cannot be considered as solved," he said.

Sargsyan added that even if foreign

forces were involved, they could not have carried out the attack without internal assistance.

He noted that he had been questioned several times about the case, most recently two months ago.

Armenian Church Barred From Medieval Monastery

CONFRONTATION, from page 1
to formally notify him of his defrocking. The aggressive men went on to attack, threaten and swear at journalists present there. Police officers standing nearby did not intervene despite witnessing the ugly scenes.

Another Echmiadzin-based cleric as well as a lawyer representing the church, Ara Zohrabyan, tried unsuccessfully to visit Hovhannavank ahead of Sunday's mass declared illegal by the church. A group of men presenting themselves as residents of a local village did not allow them to even approach the worship site belonging to the Mother See. According to Zohrabian, a deputy interior minister then told them to leave the scene to "avoid clashes."

"This is a crime," the lawyer told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on Monday, October 27. "The police demonstrated unlawful inaction. The police did not ensure our right to free movement."

Another law-enforcement body, the Investigative Committee, sent on Saturday summonses to 21 priests serving at the surrounding Aragatsotn Diocese of the Armenian Church. They all ignored the summons, saying that they cannot skip Sunday masses in their parishes. Karekin's office says that the authorities tried to keep them from going to Hovhannavank and disrupting the "fake liturgy."

The church officially protested against the holding of the ceremony on Saturday, saying that it violates an Armenian law

which makes it a crime to obstruct the activities of religious organizations.

"In fact, no one interferes in the affairs of the church," Justice Minister Srubhi Galyan insisted on Monday.



A security officer shuts a protester's mouth during a ceremony at Hovhannavank monastery, October 26, 2025

The Hovhannavank ceremony took place amid tight security, with police presence outside the monastery, mostly built in the 13th century, stretching for several kilometers. It was marred by an incident during which a man shouted at Asatryan, saying that he has no right to hold a mass. Plainclothes officers quickly shut his mouth and removed him from the church.

Moments later, the defrocked priest thanked Pashinyan for helping him "keep my mouth open" and speak out against the top clergy. The audience responded with applause not allowed inside Armenian churches.

In a video message broadcast earlier on Sunday, Pashinyan declared that the

Hovhannavank ceremony "symbolizes the start of the practical phase of the liberation process of the Mother See." He said nothing about his further actions. Armenian opposition leaders and other government

critics scoffed at that statement after seeing images of the less-than-spectacular attendance of the event.

Ishkhan Saghatelyan, a leader of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun), spoke of a "botched show at Hovhannavank" while Levon Zurabyan, the deputy chairman of the Armenian National Congress, called it an "epic failure."

"The ritual performed by the defrocked priest backed by Pashinyan and the police acting on his orders was supposed to signal the return of Pashinyan's rallying 'greatness' and the beginning of the 'liberation'

of the Mother See," Zurabyan wrote on Facebook. "But the opposite of what Nikol expected happened. The people rejected the filth, division, and lawlessness that had been pouring from the lips of Pashinyan and his propagandists in recent days."

Pashinyan first threatened to forcibly remove Karekin from his Echmiadzin headquarters on June 26. In a July 20 appeal, the premier urged supporters to be ready to "free" the Mother See. He said they should specifically gear up for a rally at an adjacent square. Opposition leaders warned Pashinyan against trying to seize the seat of the Catholicos. They also told their own supporters to be ready to gather there in support of Karekin.



ARMENIA

Vahan Tekeyan Awards Presented in Yerevan

AWARDS. from page 1

President of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Armenia Professor Ruben Mirzakhanyan noted that around 200 people had received a Vahan Tekeyan Award in the past, and four more were now being added to that number. He proceeded to announce the names of the latest awardees: Hermine Avagyan in the field of literature, Birgit Kofler-Bettschart in the field of Armenian Studies, Stas Namin in the fine arts category, and Artsakh Carpet LLC in the decorative and applied arts category. This year, in addition to the usual awards, a fifth special award, the Bagrat Nazarian Award, was an-



Professor Armen Ayvazyan (photo Aram Arkun)

nounced, the winner of which was Professor Armen Ayvazyan.

Mirzakhanyan spoke a few words in Armenian about each of them before the formal introduction of each awardee by the head of the respective jury in each field, and spoke briefly in Russian as well. He said that Kofler-Bettschart came specially for the ceremony from Austria, while Namin arrived just yesterday from Russia. Mirzakhanyan explained that there was one

languages so the world learns more about Artsakh. Blue is the color of dreams or desires, Dolukhanyan said. The main female character of the poems constantly addresses her mother, who is dead, and God, the two of whom somehow are united. Dolukhanyan read some lines from the book after which Avagyan spoke words of thanks for the award.

Avagyan explained that she wrote the book during the difficult days of the blockade of the main road or bridge connecting Artsakh to Armenia. She was in Armenia at that time and could not go back to Artsakh, where her spiritual home lay. It was there that a Hermine lived who continues to remain there until today. Avagyan said to great applause that she believes that one day, instead of that true Hermine going across that bridge to Armenia, she will cross it back to Artsakh.

Avagyan said that her book is a type of confession. She has not lost her faith in realizing the pan-Armenian dream (of regaining Artsakh) and did not wish that the audience would lose it either but continue to speak about Artsakh at such events as this one. She ended by saying instead of just goodbye, "till we meet again in Artsakh."

Professor Ruben Safrastyan, an academician of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences and head of the Armenological jury, said that it was the title of Kofler-Bettschart's book that first captured his attention: I Killed a Man But I Am Not a Murderer. It is about cruelty and the triumph of justice, he said, and more specifically, about Operation Nemesis, which led to the assassination of many of the Young Turk leaders who carried



President of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Armenia Professor Ruben Mirzakhanyan (photo Aram Arkun)

suffering. Kofler-Bettschart said that the Tekeyan Award would be an encouragement and motivation for her to continue her work. A separate interview of Kofler-Bettschart will appear soon in the pages of the Mirror-Spectator.

Professor Ara Hakobyan, head of the jury on fine arts, spoke about Stas Namin's painting "Sanahin." He declared that to paint an entire religious complex created in medieval times which has played an important role in Armenian history is extremely difficult. He called attention to the beautiful use of colors, including the green which symbolizes life.

Namin, whose full name is actually Anastas Alekseevich Mikoyan, and who is the grandson of the famous Soviet Armenian politician Anastas Mikoyan, is a famous musician who was one of the creators of



Academician Ruben Safrastyan (photo Aram Arkun)

ate through many more complicated means. Director of Artsakh Carpets Sevak Khachatryan was traveling and could not be present, but had sent a representative in his stead to accept the award.

Donor Bagrat Nazarian of London, a member of the executive board of the Tekeyan Center of Yerevan, said that his award slightly deviated from the rule of the Tekeyan Awards because the book receiving the award, Armen Ayvazyan's Armenian Troops in Artsakh, 1722-1735, was published this year, in 2025. He praised the scholarly value of the book, which is based on many different archival sources. Interestingly, Armenian forces in Artsakh and Syunik had modern weapons of the 18th century when they faced Ottoman and Iranian forces, Nazarian noted.

Nazarian said that this book was important not only as a historical work but had implications for the present, as Armenians are facing problems similar to those 300 years ago, having to defend Armenian identity, security and independence.

Ayvazyan expressed his thanks for what he said was an unexpected honor. The book is part of a trilogy, the first two volumes of which was published in 2022 and 2024, presenting much historical military information for the first time as well as demographic information. Unlike in Syunik, in Artsakh the most important decisions in the 1720s were taken at meetings including representatives of all the social strata of the Armenians, Ayvazyan said.

Finally, the documentary film dedicated to the life of Edmond Azadian, which was prepared by Diana Markosyan, was screened, followed by a reception for all those present in a hall where they could also view art works submitted for the Tekeyan Awards competition.

The audience included ambassadors and representatives of cultural organizations, as well as Armenian intellectuals, writers, artists and public figures.

The Vahan Tekeyan Awards are sponsored by the Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada, with the help of the proceeds of the Akabi Shake Ghazarian Fund. Executive Director Aram Arkun represented the Central Board at the awards ceremony this year.



Professor Aelita Dolukhanyan (photo Aram Arkun)

firm rule for the awards. The work submitted must have been produced the prior year.

Professor Aelita Dolukhanyan, corresponding member of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, doctor of philology, and head of the jury for the literature category, related that Avag-



Birgit Kofler-Bettschart (photo Aram Arkun)

out the Armenian Genocide. Safrastyan revealed that his own grandfather was a participant in the Armenian Revolutionary Federation assembly which decided to carry out this operation.

One of the most important aspects of this book, written by a non-Armenian, said Safrastyan, is its investigative point of view, which was not emotional but delved into the broader human implications of the events which took place over a century ago.

Kofler-Bettschart then spoke in English while her words were interpreted into Armenian. She thanked the Tekeyan Cultural Association for the award as well as all those people who helped her in the research and writing of her book. She thanked among others the descendants of participants in Operation Nemesis, who helped the translation of her book from German into Armenian, especially Armen Gevorgyan, and declared that she finds the denial of the Armenian Genocide to this day unbearable. She said that she wrote the book originally in German in part because of this denial and misinformation in her native Austria and Germany.

Her book explores issues of law and justice. However, she did not know when she started to write the book how relevant it would be to current events, she said, as the international community continues to look the other way when it comes to Armenian



Professor Ara Hakobyan (photo Aram Arkun)

rock music in the Soviet Union, as well as being a writer and creator of art. He accepted his award and spoke in Russian. He noted that as a child, he often visited Armenia, admired nature there as well as historical and cultural monuments. He learned music from Arno Babajanian and Martiros Saryan was his first art teacher. Sanahin particularly impressed him and much later led him to paint it. A separate interview of Namin will soon be published in the Mirror-Spectator.

Hakobyan then presented the award in decorative arts to Artsakh Carpets for the carpet called "Bouquet of Flowers of Shushi." He said that with only two or three colors, its designers succeeded in eliciting the emotion that other artists attempt to cre-



Hermine Avagyan, left, receives her award from Professor Aelita Dolukhanyan

yan, born in Ashan village of the Martuni region of Artsakh, is a journalist and writer, and the author of four books. She has won both international and Armenian awards for her works, some of which have been turned into plays.

Avagyan's newest book, Kapoyt Tanikner [Blue Roofs], is short in length, Dolukhanyan said, but important in content and should be translated into various



Stas Namin, left, and Professor Ara Hakobyan



ARMENIA

Arrests Continue in Gyumri

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Law-enforcement authorities on October 24 detained three more local government officials in Gyumri on Friday after rounding up about four dozen people in connection with angry protests sparked by the arrest of the city’s opposition mayor.

The latest targets of the continuing crackdown on Mayor Vartan Ghukasyan’s supporters are female employees of the municipal administration’s education department. Armenia’s Anti-Corruption Committee (ACC) claims that they illegally ordered kindergarten directors and

staff to join the protests on Monday.

Curiously, one of the women is the mother-in-law of Karen Sarukhanyan, a controversial Gyumri-based member of the Armenian parliament affiliated with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party. She joined the municipality years

before Ghukasyan became mayor as a result of a local election held on May 30.

“My mother-in-law shares our political views,” Sarukhanyan, who is a vocal critic of Ghukasyan, said after her arrest. “If anything like that actually happened, it was the result of coercion, to say the least.”

The head of another municipality division as well as an adviser to the arrested mayor were arrested on October 22 in a separate criminal investigation into “mass disturbances” and obstruction of justice conducted by another law-enforcement agency, the Investigative Committee.

Security forces met with strong resistance from hundreds of Ghukasyan’s supporters when they raided the municipal administration building in order to demonstratively detain him. The Armenian police had to send reinforcements, including its main riot police units, from Yerevan to overcome that resistance. They clashed with protesters both inside and outside the building.

At least 33 protesters were arrested on the spot or in the following hours. The total number of arrests strongly condemned by the Armenian opposition exceeded 40 following the prosecution of the three female officials.

The Investigative Committee reported on the evening of October 22 that it has already indicted 29 suspects. Fifteen of them were remanded in pre-trial custody.

Ghukasyan, the city’s chief architect and six other persons are facing separate corruption charges leveled against them three weeks after Pashinyan publicly pledged to oust him. Ghukasyan rejects the charges as politically motivated. Opposition leaders likewise claim that the crackdown is part of Pashinyan’s efforts to overturn the results of the Gyumri election collectively won by four local opposition groups.

Lachin Blockade ‘Eco-Activist’ among Delegation Meeting Counterparts

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Shortly after, Armenian media noted that Efendiyeva had openly participated as an “eco-activist” in the nine-month blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh before

Azerbaijani troops ultimately launched their lightning offensive in September 2023.

The eco-activists are widely believed to have been backed by the Azerbaijani

government, with the ultimate goal of weakening the defense capabilities of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians ahead of the subsequent military attack.

The pretext of environmental concerns has also been characterized as an attempt to greenwash what was truly a campaign motivated by geopolitics.

It was not just Efendiyeva’s participation that drew the ire of many — Azerbaijani activist and PhD candidate Vafa Naghiyeva noted that “What the Azerbaijani government calls “civil society representatives” are, in fact, state-approved, regime-loyal NGOs.”

“These are not independent voices, but part of the system itself carefully selected and sent to Yerevan to act as a “civil society delegation.”

The government in Baku has intensified its crackdown on civil society and independent media in recent years.

Among those caught up in the repression was Azerbaijani peace activist and OC Media contributor Bahruz Samadov, who was sentenced to 15 years on treason charges in June 2025.

Many have criticized Samadov’s ongoing imprisonment, noting that his criminal charges stemmed from his alleged collaboration with Armenia — which Baku now openly encourages.



Dilara Efendiyeva, an “eco-activist” participating in the blockade of the Lachin Corridor in 2022 (right) and at the meeting with Armenian civil society members in Yerevan in October 2025 (left). Photos: Trend, Qafqazinfo.az.

Former Karabakh Army Chief Moved to House Arrest

By Naira Bulghadarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A former commander of Nagorno-Karabakh’s army has been moved to house arrest after being held in an Armenian prison for more than three years on charges stemming from the 2020 war with Azerbaijan.

Lieutenant-General Mikael Arzumanyan was arrested in August 2022. Armenia’s Investigative Committee initially indicted him over the capture by Azerbaijani forces of the Karabakh town of Shushi in early November 2020. It claims that he displayed negligence, failing to deploy more troops around Shushi beforehand.

The law-enforcement agency went on to also accuse Arzumanyan of ordering Karabakh Armenian forces to withdraw from “strategically important” positions retaken by them days after the war broke out on September 27, 2020. It said that the order was illegal and unjustified.

Arzumanyan denied the accusations both before and during his ongoing trial that began in April 2023. Ignoring appeals from Karabakh leaders and Armenian opposition figures, law-enforcement authorities have repeatedly refused to release him from custody pending a verdict in the case.

A court holding the trial agreed late on October 27 to move the 52-year-old general to house arrest in return for bail worth

30 million drams (\$78,000). His lawyer, Yerem Sargsyan, on October 28 attributed the decision to the fact that the statute of limitations for the first accusation leveled against his client expires on November 7.

Arzumanyan was appointed as commander of Karabakh’s Defense Army on October 27, 2020, the day after his predecessor, Lieutenant-General Jalal Harutiunian, was seriously wounded in an Azerbaijani missile strike.

Harutiunian was prosecuted in September 2022 on various charges related to the 2020 war and also denied by him. Although Harutiunian avoided pre-trial arrest, an Armenian court of first instance sentenced him to five and a half years in prison in February this year. The prison sentence was subsequently upheld by two higher courts.

Armenian opposition leaders have criticized criminal proceedings launched against these and other generals, saying that they are part of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s efforts to deflect blame for the disastrous war. They hold Pashinyan primarily responsible for Armenia’s defeat in the six-week hostilities. The premier has put the blame on the country’s former leaders.

In February 2022, the pro-government majority in the Armenian parliament set up an ad hoc commission with the stated aim of examining the causes of the defeat,

assessing the Armenian government’s and military’s actions and looking into what had been done for national defense before the hostilities. Opposition lawmakers boycotted the commission, saying that

plenary session of the Armenian parliament in September. However, Simonian unexpectedly blocked the discussion and classified the 215-page report.

The decision means that only parlia-



Nagorno-Karabakh - Lieutenant-General Mikael Arzumanyan

its primary mission is to cover up Pashinyan’s wartime incompetence and disastrous decision making.

The commission chairman, Andranik Kocharyan, submitted his findings to parliament speaker Alen Simonyan two months ago. The report was expected to be mostly released and debated during a

ment deputies with security clearance are allowed to read the document. Gegham Manukyan of the opposition Hayastan alliance was the first to do that earlier this month. He claimed afterwards that the parliamentary commission did not absolve Pashinyan of blame for the war’s outcome.



INTERNATIONAL

Vardanyan Issues Statement on Decision to Dismiss Attorney

Last week, Ruben Vardanyan issued a statement announcing his decision to dismiss his attorney in Baku, Avraam Berman. In a statement this week, he explained his decision had nothing to do with his efforts or abilities, but the Azerbaijani legal system's blatant disregard for fairness.

His explanation appears in full below:

"During the court hearing on October 21, I announced my decision to dismiss my attorney, Avraam Berman. This was a forced decision. The blatant violations of international and Azerbaijani legal standards throughout the ongoing proceedings have turned the hearings into an outright farce. Under these circumstances, all procedural opportunities for the defense have been exhausted over the past months.

I was not allowed to review the case materials or the indictment. Access to the case materials continues to be denied: I

still have not been given the opportunity to review the 422 volumes of my case file, and the court has failed to provide official translations of key procedural documents.

I was deprived of the opportunity to defend myself in court. I was unable to exchange documents with my attorney freely and without prior inspection in preparation for hearings, and I was denied access to audio and video evidence.

Over dozens of hearings, my counsel and I filed more than 60 motions and applications to the Baku Military Court to challenge egregious abuses of my due process rights. Yet none of the critical motions were approved. At the same time, more than 60% of these motions were simply ignored by the Court. Yet under Azerbaijani law, the Court is required to consider all such motions "without delay," and act upon, either by granting them or rejecting them,

"no later than 3 (three days) after receipt" by the Court.

Another reason for my decision to dismiss my attorney, as a form of protest against this staged secret and closed military tribunal, was the court's refusal to summon witnesses who could clarify the circumstances of the case and confirm facts crucial to the defense. The court's rejection of this motion deprived the process of any remaining semblance of objectivity and fairness.

As time has passed, the situation has only worsened. In this theater of the absurd, the role of the attorney — regardless of his will or efforts — has been reduced to maintaining the illusion of legality in the proceedings. I refuse to take part in this farce. I do not need the illusion of defense — I demand the actual observance of my procedural rights."

Russia Will Be Able to Send Cargo through Azerbaijan to Armenia

By Nate Ostiller

Russia will be able to transit goods to Armenia through Azerbaijan using Baku's rail networks, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksei Overchuk has said.

"The Azerbaijani side has confirmed the possibility of using Azerbaijani railways for the transit of Russian products through Azerbaijan to Armenia," Overchuk said according to media reports published on Sunday, October 26.

"Russian Railways is currently working with its regional colleagues on the organization of these shipments. We have also given relevant instructions to the Ministry of Agriculture to prepare this new logistics route," Overchuk said.

The move comes after Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev announced earlier in October that all trade restrictions with Armenia had been lifted, and that the first tranche of goods — a shipment of Kazakh grain — was going to be transported to Armenia from Azerbaijan.

"This is an extremely important announcement, and I would like to express my appreciation to the President of Azerbaijan for this step and to welcome the statement," Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said in response, adding that the transit of goods from Azerbaijan to Armenia would have been "unthinkable" even a few months ago.

Separately, Pashinyan said, "We are ready, not only politically but also technically, starting today, to ensure the transit of freight trucks through Armenian territory from Turkey to Azerbaijan and from Azerbaijan to Turkey."

The same is true for transit in both directions from Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhichevan through Armenian territory, Pashinyan added, while acknowledging that "technically, we are not yet ready due to the lack of infrastructure."

Restoration works are required for rail links to be opened in all directions, Pashinyan said.

During the same address, Pashinyan also spoke about the planned connection between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan, known as the Trump Route or TRIPP.

"We confirm our determination to pursue efforts in good faith to achieve this goal in the most expeditious manner," Pashinyan said, without adding a timeline for when

the project would be completed.

On Monday, October 27, Pashinyan said Armenia is ready to facilitate lorry transit in both directions between Turkey and Azerbaijan through Armenian territory, adding that it could begin "today."

"Just as Azerbaijan has lifted the transit restrictions for us, we are lifting the transit restrictions as well," he added.

In August, Aliyev and Pashinyan held a

historic meeting in Washington, hosted by US President Donald Trump, during which a peace deal was initialed, but not signed.

As part of the ongoing peace process, the two countries have been working to normalize relations and open their long-closed borders for trade and other regional connectivity links.

(This story originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on October 27.)

Georgian Dream Turning Totalitarian

The Georgian Dream-led counter-revolution in Tbilisi seems to be moving from an authoritarian phase to a totalitarian era.

Over the past few weeks, since claiming a convincing victory in municipal elections that were never competitive, the Georgian Dream leadership has intensified efforts to stifle all dissent. Special forces squads have started conducting security sweeps, bursting into private residences and taking suspected anti-government agitators into custody. Dozens of individuals, arrested in successive waves, now face criminal charges in connection with a protest outside the presidential residence in Tbilisi on October 4.

Meanwhile, the parliament has adopted legislation significantly tightening criminal penalties covering expressions of dissent. Offenses, such as "illegally blocking a road," once punishable with fines, now carry a potential jail sentence of up to 15 days, and a repeat offender can face up to a year behind bars.

Among those detained under the tightened criminal code is Vakho Sanaia, lead anchor at Formula TV, a broadcaster critical of the government, who attended a protest on October 18.

Parliament also has adopted a law allowing the Constitutional Court to dissolve political parties and ban individuals from engaging in political activity or founding new parties. Critics view it as part of the ruling party's ongoing effort to outlaw opposition.

"No Georgian citizen is safe as long as [Bidzina] Ivanishvili holds power," read a statement issued by the Lelo opposition coalition, referring to Georgian Dream's founder and financier.

Amid Georgian Dream's totalitarian turn, some erstwhile party loyalists are finding themselves on the wrong side of the power divide.

On October 18, the State Security Service announced it had raided 24 properties linked to former prime minister Irakli Gharibashvili (who still is GD party chair), former State Security Service head Grigol Liluashvili, former prosecutor general Otar Partskhaladze, and five other figures. Authorities reportedly seized around \$7 million in cash, hundreds of pieces of jewelry and watches and several expensive paintings.

Gharibashvili, a longtime Ivanishvili loyalist, had served in a variety of top governmental posts before resigning just last year.

Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003 was a groundbreaking event in Eurasia's post-Soviet history, ushering in an era of hope that rule of law could start to take root in a region steeped in traditions of arbitrary rule and grand corruption. Over the ensuing two decades, Georgia made major democratization strides. Georgian Dream's rejection of liberal values and the restoration of a one-party system has occurred with stunning speed. The European Union offered Tbilisi candidate status less than two years ago. Now, Georgian Dream leaders seem to treat the EU, and Western-oriented institutions in general, as mortal enemies.

On October 16, the ruling party fined the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Finnish Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen around \$1,850 for "blocking a road" on Rustaveli Avenue. Meanwhile, on October 19, the German Foreign Ministry announced it was recalling Berlin's envoy to Tbilisi, citing Georgian Dream's persistent "agitating against the EU." Also on October 19, a pro-government television channel, Imedi TV, broadcast a report accusing the EU of violating Georgia law to finance anti-government activity.

(This article originally appeared on www.eurasianet.org on October 20.)

INTERNATIONAL

Armenia, WHO Regional Office for Europe Sign Five-Year Cooperation Strategy

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Ministry of Health of Armenia announced on Monday that it had signed the five-year cooperation strategy for 2026–2030 with the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe.

In a press release, the ministry said that the strategy aligns with Armenia's national health priorities, namely: strengthening primary healthcare through the introduction of an insurance system, ensuring equal access to health services for all, promoting demographic sustainability, enhancing health security, and improving preparedness for emergencies.

Armenian Minister of Health Anahit Avanesyan discussed ongoing health programs with WHO Regional Director for Europe Dr. Hans Henri P. Kluge, focusing in particular on steps toward implementing health insurance.

Anahit Avanesyan was in Copenhagen, Denmark, for a two-day visit to attend the 75th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe.

Azerbaijan to Skip Euronest Meeting

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Azerbaijan's parliamentary delegation did not attend the 12th plenary session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly set to take place in Yerevan from October 28 to 30, the Azerbaijani media reported.

Delegation head Tahir Mirkishili said the European Parliament's documents and statements "contradict Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

He added that recent "non-constructive" remarks by the European Parliament after an August meeting between the Azerbaijani president and the Armenian prime minister in Washington undermined trust in cooperation within Euronest.

Mirkishili stressed that the decision is unrelated to the event's location in Armenia, noting that "peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia has already been achieved" and both sides are taking practical steps to normalize relations.

Four Buildings Collapse In Turkey after Quake

ISTANBUL (news.am) — Four buildings collapsed in Balıkesir Province, located in northwestern Turkey, as a result of the earthquake, NTV reported on October 27.

Minister of Internal Affairs Ali Yerlikaya stated that specialists recorded the collapse of three houses and one building.

According to journalists, there are no casualties.

The report noted that during the earthquake, residents of several neighborhoods left their homes and are now afraid to return. They prefer to stay outdoors in case another tremor occurs.

Lawyers Petition UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to Order Immediate Release of Vicken Euljekjian

GENEVA — The legal representatives of Vicken Euljekjian, a 46-year-old Armenian tour guide arbitrarily detained in Azerbaijan, have formally requested the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) to order his immediate release, citing grave violations of international law and severe detention conditions that endanger his life.

Euljekjian was arrested on November 10, 2020, in Shushi (Nagorno-Karabakh), one day after the ceasefire that ended the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan war. On June 14, 2021, the Baku Military Court sentenced him to 20 years in prison on charges of “mercenary activity” and “terrorism.” His lawyers argue that his detention and conviction are arbitrary and violate fundamental human rights protections.

The petition, submitted by María Luciana Minassian (Argentina) and Aitor Martínez Jiménez (Spain), advances two key arguments:

Jurisdictional violation: Azerbaijan treated Euljekjian as a civilian, yet a military court tried and convicted him,

contrary to established UNWGAD precedent that military courts lack jurisdiction over civilians.

Misapplication of the “mercenary” charge: As an Armenian national, Euljekjian cannot be legally classified as a mercenary under the Geneva Conventions.

Additionally, his lawyers have requested the recusal of WGAD member Ganna Yudkivska due to potential conflicts of interest arising from her professional association with the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) and personal ties to Azerbaijan. The petition references an expert opinion by the founding Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court Luis Moreno Ocampo, and a formal complaint submitted by the Center for Truth and Justice (CFTJ), a Los Angeles-based organization defending the rights of Armenians affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Luciana Minassian is an Argentine-Armenian lawyer representing Armenian victims, a Professor of Genocide Studies at the University of Tucumán, and a Senate candidate in Buenos Aires.



Vicken Euljekjian

Aitor Martínez is a Spanish lawyer and professor, with extensive experience before the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. He has represented Julian Assange and other relevant figures worldwide. He has successfully brought cases against different countries before UN and other international mechanisms. He is also Counsel before the International

Criminal Court.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, established in 1991 as part of the UN Human Rights Council’s special procedures, investigates cases of unlawful deprivation of liberty and issues legal opinions, urgent appeals, and recommendations for remedies, including release and reparations.

Tessa Hofmann Receives the German Federal Cross of Merit

HOFMANN, from page 1

Their presence symbolized at once the diversity — and the unity — of religious, ethnic and political communities with whom Hofmann has collaborated and for whose human rights she has fought.

State Secretary for Culture and Solidarity Kerstin Richter-Kotowski officially presented the award, reading the decree signed by German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Sketching Hofmann’s career, Richter-Kotowski introduced her as a scholar, a graduate of the Berlin Free University, who specialized in sociology, Armenian and Slavic languages. A teacher and author of numerous academic studies on the genocide under the Ottoman Empire, Hofmann, she said, was also an active human rights campaigner and founder of organizations and initiatives dedicated to defending minorities, among them, the Working Group for Recognition, Against Genocide, for International Understanding (AGA) and the Berlin Ecumenical Memorial for the Victims of the Genocide of Christians in the Ottoman Empire (FÖGG).

As Richter-Kotowski pinned the medal on Hofmann’s jacket and handed her the award, the entire room rose for a standing ovation, cheering her on.

Hofmann accepted the award “as a tribute to all the goals that those present here

ing,” she said, thanking them for “supporting and contributing to my human rights work and related causes over the years, and in some cases even decades, as civil society initiatives, associations, institutions, and individuals.”

She sketched the process through which, in university studies of Armenian and Slavic languages, she became aware of the genocide against the Armenians, then the Greeks and Syrian Christians, as well as victims of subsequent genocides. From lecturing and publishing, she progressed to active campaigning for genocide recognition, and defending human rights of other oppressed minorities. Hofmann’s Slavic language studies and sociology led her to discover Armenia, divided and contested by the Russian and Ottoman empires, and further study of its history and literature revealed the wound left by the genocide — a wound that Turkey’s denial has kept open.

“Nothing poisons relations between peoples as much as the denial of genocide,” she stated.

Scholar, Author, Educator, Human Rights Campaigner

It is the wide range of Hofmann’s activities and achievements that guest speakers highlighted, first and foremost her pioneering role in genocide recognition. It began with publications that brought the history of the Armenian genocide to the reading public. As Richter-Kotowski mentioned, and Sarah Reinke, head of human rights work at the Society for Threatened Peoples, highlighted, as early as 1980 Hofmann published *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern vor Gericht* (The Armenian Genocide in Court), the protocol of the 1921 Berlin trial of Talaat Pasha’s assassin, Soghomon Tehlirian. It was followed in 1985 by *Das Verbrechen des Schweigens* (The Crime of Silence), and both are standard works today.

“Tessa Hofmann is not only a scholar, but also a bridge builder,” Reinke continued. “She creates connections between academia and civil society, between the diaspora and the political public sphere — and in doing so, she always remains humane,



Tessa Hofmann (photo Lili Nahapetian)

respectful and uncompromising in her work.”

Dr. Gerayer Koutcharian, founding member with Hofmann of AGA and FÖGG, who has known her since 1973, lauded her not only for bringing the Ottoman genocide of Christians back to public awareness in Germany, but for ensuring “that justice, albeit very belated, was done to these more than three million dead.” He recalled the day in April 2000, when she and Turkish human rights colleague Ali Ertem “presented a petition signed by 16,000 people to the Petitions Committee of the German Bundestag calling for the recognition and condemnation of the Ottoman genocide.” A good two-thirds of the names were Turks and Kurds, whose “desire for coming to terms with the past, justice and reconciliation found lasting support from leading international genocide researchers, including Prof. Yehuda Bauer from the International Institute for Holocaust Research in Yad Vashem and Prof. Israel Charny, then executive director of the Holocaust and Genocide Institute in Jerusalem.”

It was that petition that launched the 16-year campaign leading to the German parliament’s recognition of the genocide.

When the debate finally opened in the Bundestag in 2015, the Armenian embassy

opposed public memorial events, reportedly to avoid interference with the Bundestag sessions. Mikayel Minasyan, Chairman of the Association of European and Armenian Experts, recounted that he, Hofmann, and Ms. Eypper from the Armenian church community in Berlin (who was also present), held a memorial event in the Marienkirche in Berlin, and Kurdish and Turkish human rights activists joined in solidarity.

Into the Future

Although it was the past 50 years of Hofmann’s dedication to human rights, justice, reconciliation and peaceful cooperation among peoples that the large gathering was celebrating, no one could overlook the relevance of these values today.

Amill Gorgis, a Syrian Orthodox Christian, who had proposed Hofmann’s name for Steinmeier’s consideration, brought the matter into current focus. He spoke on behalf of the community of indigenous Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Thanking Hofmann for allowing him and others to be part of her journey, in “fighting ideologies that lead to genocide and mass murder,” he lamented the fact that “this ideology is still present today. And that is precisely why your commitment, dear Tessa, is so important — for all those victims who had and still have no advocate, no voice.”

Hofmann herself made this a central point in her acceptance speech. “With regard to genocides,” she said, “we see that not only do they continue, but that the world public continues to have a partial view of them, i.e., crimes that are perceived and ignored.”

She cited the case of South Sudan, where, despite the killing of 150,000 people, displacement of more than 14 million, and around 25 million threatened with starvation, “South Sudan remains a footnote.” This means, “there is still much to be done.” She concluded, “And for my part, I promise that I will continue to work against forgetting, against denying or trivializing current and historical genocide, and above all against its perpetration, for as long as I have a head on my shoulders. I very much hope that you will remain by my side!”



have also dedicated their lives to achiev-

Community News

Armenian Bar Association Welcomes Seza Mikikian’s Judicial Appointment to the Los Angeles County Superior Court

LOS ANGELES — The Armenian Bar Association proudly announced recently the appointment of its long-time member, Seza Caroline Mikikian, to the Los Angeles County Superior Court. The Armenian Bar’s Judicial Evaluation Committee (JEC) comprehensively reviewed, vetted and, ultimately, wholeheartedly supported Mikikian’s application, unanimously recommending her as “exceptionally well-qualified” for this esteemed judicial position.



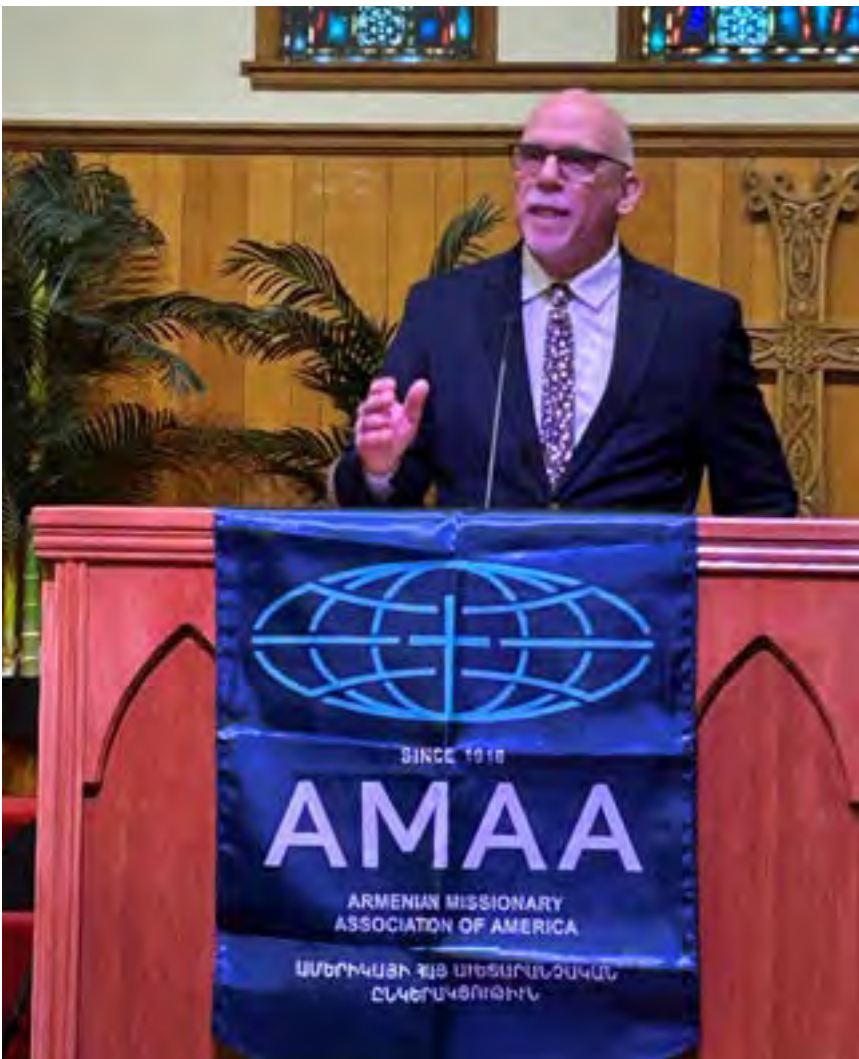
Seza Mikikian

Mikikian’s legal career is distinguished by her public service as a Level IV Deputy District Attorney with the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office. She has demonstrated exceptional skill and commitment by trying nearly thirty felony and misdemeanor trials, as well as prosecuting civil cases in the Consumer Protection Division, safeguarding the public’s interests under Business and Professions Codes §17200 and §17500.

The Armenian Bar’s JEC, comprised of seasoned judges and legal practitioners, interviewed Ms. Mikikian and undertook a thorough evaluation of her qualifications, professional conduct, and judicial temperament. Her extensive courtroom experience, intellectual rigor, and balanced approach to both civil and criminal law made her stand out as an exemplary candidate to join the Superior Court bench.

As a first-generation American raised in a single-parent household, Mikikian’s inspiring journey — from working through community college to earning her degree at UCLA and gaining early career insights with the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) — has shaped her profound understanding of the diverse communities she will serve.

“We are honored to have supported Ms. Mikikian through our Judicial Evaluation Committee process and are confident that she will serve the people of Los Angeles County with distinction and integrity,” said Ara Jabaghourian, the co-chair of the Armenian Bar Association’s Judicial Evaluation Committee. “Her appointment is a testament to her hard work, legal expertise, and deep commitment to the rule of law.”



Rev. Calvin Sagherian offered the English message at the Sunday Service.

AMAA Holds 106th Annual Meeting in Glendale

By Louisa Janbazian

GLENDAL — The Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) held its 106th Annual Meeting on Saturday, October 18, hosted by the Armenian Evangelical Church of the Nazarene in Glendale, CA. The theme of this year’s gathering and its related activities was “Faithful to Our Legacy.”

AMAA Board President Gary R. Phillips, Esq. opened the meeting by welcoming delegates and inviting Rev. Serop Megerditchian, Senior Pastor of the host church, to lead the devotional and opening prayer. Drawing inspiration from Micah 6:8, Rev. Megerditchian reminded attendees that “AMAA’s mission is not merely a program or a project, but a divine calling—an expression of faith lived out through justice, mercy, and humility.”

During the meeting, Board President Gary R. Phillips, CEO/Executive Director Serge D. Buchakjian, and Treasurer Dr. Nurhan Helvacian presented detailed reports highlighting the Association’s activities throughout the 2024–2025 fiscal year. Additional reports were shared by AMAA’s Armenia team, Committee Chairs, and representatives of the Armenian Evangelical Unions, the Armenian Evangelical World Council, and affiliated organizations—all expressing gratitude for another year of fruitful ministry.

The general membership elected nine members to serve on the AMAA Board of Directors, Class of 2028, for a three-year term: Bryan Agbabian, Vahe Balouzian, Bryan Bedrosian, Gregory Bilezikian, Mark Kassabian, Esq., Kevin Kevorkian, M.D., Arda Melkonian, Joseph A. Sarafian, AIA, and Michèle Simourian.

The meeting concluded with a closing prayer led by Rev. Gilbert Léonian, President of the Armenian Evangelical Fellowship of Europe.

The weekend program included a special Board session on October 17, with a devotional by Rev. Hendrik Shanazarian, Minister of the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America, who reflected on Philippians 1:3–6 and the spirit of partnership that defines AMAA’s ministry.



Dr. Krikor Youmshajekian offers the Armenian message at the Sunday Worship Service

Young Leaders Council Masquerade Raises Support For the Armenian-American Museum

GLENDAL — The Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center of California’s Young Leaders Council hosted the Young Leaders Council Masquerade on Saturday, October 18, at the InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown. Guests came together for a lively evening of music, laughter, and community in support of the landmark museum.

The Masquerade was hosted by Master of Ceremonies comedian Jack Jr., who brought his signature wit to the stage and had guests in laughter throughout the night.

The Hollywood Ballroom was transformed into a scene of glamour and celebration, featuring DJ Greg, Masquerade Dancers and a Champagne Lady by Envy Events, coffee by Cappuccino Express, and floral designs by Design by Four Seasons.

Guests also enjoyed a Pixter Photo-booth, hookah by Darkside Hookah, cigars by Papisiano Cigar Bars, and late-night wraps by Kebab Daddy.

Program highlights included welcoming remarks from Arsine Torosyan, Communications Director for the Armenian American Museum, and Masquerade Co-Chairs Sera Najarian and Eric Davidian, who thanked the Young Leaders Council team, sponsors, vendors, and supporters and reflected on the significance of the evening and the growing momentum of the Armenian American Museum.

“Tonight is all about celebrating our culture, community, and the amazing spirit that brings us together,” stated Co-Chair Sera Najarian. “Thank you to our generous Masquerade sponsors, the museum team, the InterContinental team, our incredible vendors, our hilarious Master of Ceremonies Jack Jr., and of course, all of our guests who made this special evening possible.”

“We’re not just here to plan events. We’re here to build a movement—a coalition of young professionals, entrepreneurs, and community builders who see culture as a connector, not a divider,” stated Co-Chair Eric Davidian. “We’re dreamers, doers, and innovators who see this museum not just as a monument to our past, but as a launchpad for our future.”

The Young Leaders Council, chaired by Aleen Ohanian, promotes the mission of the Armenian American Museum, connects young professionals throughout the community, and empowers the next generation of leaders. The Council is composed entirely of dedicated volunteers who devote their time and creativity to supporting the museum’s mission through social, educational, and philanthropic events throughout the year.

Masquerade Gold Sponsors include 301AD, Andrea Sells LA, Bank of America, Darkside Tobacco, Design by Four Seasons, IMEG, Kebab Daddy, Law Offices of Jacob H. Khachatryan, Thomas & Tama see MASQUERADE, page 9



OBITUARY

Merritt ‘Skip’ Agabian

Korean War Veteran

EAST WALPOLE, Mass. — Merritt “Skip” Agabian, age 95, passed away on Sunday, October 19, 2025, at his home in East Walpole, surrounded by his loving family. Born in Worcester, Massachusetts on December 22, 1929, he was the son of the late George and Zanik (Koshgarian) Agabian. Skip was raised in Oxford, Mass. and graduated from Oxford High School in 1948.

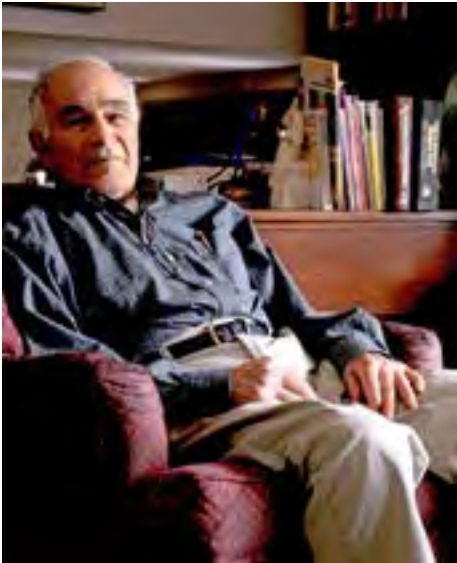
After high school, Skip found employment at A & M Tool & Die for a year before continuing his education at Clark University in Worcester. Two years into his studies, Skip was drafted into the United States Army to serve in the Korean War for 22 months, which he described as a seminal experience in his life, teaching him discipline and camaraderie. Selected for leadership school, he was promoted to Sergeant First Class. He was a proud member of the 623rd Field Artillery Regiment and was responsible for more than 2,000 men on their return home, just three days after the armistice. Skip was honorably discharged on September 2, 1953, having earned a Bronze Service Star. Back at home, Skip returned to Clark University, receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1955, majoring in mathematics and minoring in physics.

A son of Armenian immigrants, Skip was proud of his heritage. He often attended Armenian community gatherings, including dances, which is where he met

the love of his life, Sylvia Messerlian. The pair were wed on October 27, 1957, in Worcester, and made their married home in Norwood. This was a convenient location for Skip, as he had accepted a position as an appraiser for the Factory Mutual Engineering Corp based in the same town, appraising large industrial properties for clients such as Armstrong Rubber, Johnson & Johnson, and Sylvania.

In 1961, Skip and Sylvia moved to the neighboring town of Walpole. He and his father, George, a union carpenter, worked together to build the new home, which was necessary to accommodate their growing family. Skip and Sylvia would welcome three children over the coming years, and Skip would continually improve his home, even building a back porch himself.

Skip left Factory Mutual in 1962, taking a position with Marshall & Stevens where he supervised appraisals for the General Services Administration, Exeter Academy, Beth Israel Hospital, and more. In 1969, he struck out on his own, creating A & M Appraisal Company, which he ran until his retirement in 2004, taking care of clients such as Shawmut Bank, the Grand Lodge of Masons, General Electric, and Boston Sand and Gravel. Skip also served as an expert witness in Superior Courts across New England. Performing appraisals across twenty-eight states and five Canadian provinces, Skip took on leadership roles in the American Society of Appraisers,



(GREG JUNDANIAN PHOTO)

serving as President of the Greater Boston Chapter and as International Regional Governor for New England. He used this wealth of knowledge to author a chapter of McGraw Hill’s Appraising Machinery and Equipment textbook.

In his free time, Skip enjoyed nature, taking walks through the Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary in Sharon, and Francis William Bird Park in East Walpole. He loved watching the birds and hearing their songs. He and Sylvia enjoyed traveling together, visiting Armenia, Europe, the Caribbean, and almost every state in the U.S.

At home, Skip enjoyed dinner dates with Sylvia at their favorite local restaurants and avidly reading a few newspapers every morning. He enjoyed Boston sports, especially watching the Patriots play in Foxborough. He loved to stay active, riding

his bike around the neighborhood, and later, as he aged, his stationary bike every day.

He managed to find time to give back to his community as well, serving on the Walpole Finance Committee for half a dozen years.

Skip was a humble man with a great sense of humor. With his infectious smile and laugh, he approached everyone he met with a quiet, respectful curiosity. He was a great husband and a wonderful father who will be deeply missed.

He was predeceased by his wife, Sylvia. He leaves his children Susan V. Agabian of Watertown, Kenneth P. Agabian of Boston, and Nancy M. Agabian of North Attleborough. He was the brother of the late Mary “Margo” Agabian, Esther Agabian, Theresa Susca, and Sarah Agabian and uncle of Victoria, Judy, Jennifer, George, and their families. He is also survived by many extended relatives, friends, and colleagues.

Services were held at the James H. Delaney and Son Funeral Home, Walpole, with Interment at Maple Grove Cemetery in Walpole.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations in Skip’s name may be made to All for Armenia by visiting <https://allforarmenia.org/donate/> OR to the Massachusetts Audubon Society at Fund for Nature c/o Member Services, Mass Audubon, 208 South Great Road, Lincoln, MA 01773 or by visiting <https://www.massaudubon.org/> OR to the Armenian Mirror-Spectator c/o Baikar Association, Inc 755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472 or by visiting <https://givebutter.com/COz5Uy>

Archbishop Kissag Mouradian

Central Figure in Argentinian-Armenian Community

BUENOS AIRES (*Sardarabad*)— The Armenian Archdiocese of the Republic of Argentina confirmed on Saturday, October 25, the passing of Archbishop Kissag Mouradian, a central figure in the religious and community life of Armenians in Argentina over the past five decades.

Born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1951, his baptismal name was Manuk Mouradian. From a very young age, he embraced the religious vocation, studying at the National Seminary of Qamishli and later at the Seminary of St. James in Jerusalem, where he was ordained a deacon in 1968 and a priest in 1971.

In 1975, he arrived in Argentina to serve the local Armenian community, initially for a five-year period, but his commitment led him to stay permanently. He served as parish priest of the St. Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral in Buenos Aires, where he carried out an intense pastoral, educational, and cultural mission.

In 1990, he was consecrated bishop and appointed Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Argentina and Chile, and in 1996, he received the title of archbishop, becoming the highest spiritual authority of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the region.

Throughout his ministry, Archbishop Mouradian stood out for his unwavering dedication, his ecumenical work, and his commitment to interfaith dialogue. He served as president of the Ecumenical Commission of Christian Churches of Argentina (CEICA) and maintained a close



friendship with then-Archbishop of Buenos Aires Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, sharing a deep bond of faith and brotherhood.

A staunch defender of Armenian identity and memory, Archbishop Mouradian promoted the teaching of the Armenian language, history, and culture, as well as the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide. His presence was constant in every commemoration, liturgical celebration, and community gathering, where he combined spirituality, wisdom, and human warmth.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination in 2021, he expressed his wish “to be remembered as someone who worked for the good of the community.” Today, those words reflect the gratitude and respect with which the Armenian community bids him farewell.

His funeral and memorial services will be held at St. Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral.

Richard Hratch Tashjian

Noted Artist, WWII Veteran

SANTA FE, N.M. — Richard Hratch Tashjian, a well-known artist, passed away peacefully on October 21, 2025, at the age of 99 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Born on June 27, 1926, in Dorchester, Massachusetts, Richard lived a life rich in creativity, love of nature and devotion to the fine arts.

Richard served honorably in the United States Naval Reserve during World War II from 1944 to 1946, where he was an aerial photographer. Following his military service, Richard pursued his education with fervor, graduating from the Museum School of Fine Arts in Boston in 1950 and further enhanced his skills in design under the tutelage of Professor Gyorgy Kepes at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology School of Visual Design Architectural Center in Cambridge.

Throughout his career Richard established himself in the field of advertising art. He worked for The Boston Herald and Stone and Webster Engineering Company before opening his own art studio and gallery in Watertown, Massachusetts, where he shared his talent and passion with the community for many years.

His artistic contributions were widely recognized. In 1975, he received the A.S.A. Ara S. Boyan Award in Humanities for his role in Living Arts and in 1990 he was honored with a commemorative medal in Theodosia, Crimea, as a visiting artist celebrating the 100th Anniversary of Hovhannes Aivazovski.

Richard was deeply devoted to his heritage and community. He was the founder of the Armenian American Artists Association of America and travelled widely to exhibit his work across the Armenian diaspora and beyond. His paintings can be viewed



in galleries in Santa Fe, NM, Los Angeles, CA, the Armenian National Gallery in Yerevan, Armenia, the Minas Avetisyan Museum in Jajur, Armenia and the Armenian Museum of America in Watertown.

A native of Watertown, Richard captured the landscapes of New England and later traveled extensively to Armenia, Crimea, Russia and France.

In 1983 he lost his first wife, Gladys Zevart Tashjian after 35 years of marriage. He later married Aelita Tashjian, with whom he shared many years. The couple eventually relocated to Santa Fe, NM where Richard found renewed inspiration in the vast western landscapes and continued to paint for many years.

Richard is survived by his wife, Aelita Tashjian; his son, Steven Tashjian, and his wife Della, along with their children, Steven and Nicholas and; his daughter Diane Keverian and her husband George, and their children Niari, Hagop, Ani, and Lori and; his daughter Pearlene Varjabedian and her husband Harutian, and their children Lara and Aram. Richard is also survived by his great grandchildren Kaley Rose Tashjian and Michael Nazaret Kibarian.

A private memorial service will be held in Santa Fe, NM, where he will be laid to rest.

Donations

Eileen Koshgarian of Providence, RI, donated \$100.00 to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* in memory of Merritt Agabian.

Ann and Edmond Danielson of Lexington, Mass. donated \$50 to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* in memory of Merritt Agabian.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Heritage Park Sculpture Reconfigured

BOSTON — On the morning of Sunday, October 12, the annual Reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture at Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston took place. This marked the twelfth annual re-

create a new sculpture shape, symbolic of a new life. The reconfiguration represents all who were pulled away, or were forced to pull away, from their country of origin and came

the one and one-half million victims of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923. May it serve in remembrance of all genocides that have followed, and celebrate the diversity of the communities that have re-formed in the safety of these shores.”

The annual reconfiguration follows the Instruction Manual that outlines the twenty-five reconfigurations, created by Donald J. Telalian, AIA, the Park’s architect/designer. The annual reconfiguration is supported by the pPark’s Charles and Doreen Bilezikian Endowed Fund. A&A Industries, Aurelian and Anahid Mardiros, manufactured the Abstract Sculpture, their generous gift in kind. Aurelian Mardiros and Gary Mardiros oversee the annual reconfiguration with William Martin who plans the reconfiguration on behalf of the Foundation. Brodmerkle Machinery Moving, Inc operates the crane for the reconfiguration.

The park’s geometric features, the Abstract Sculpture and the Labyrinth, symbolic of life’s journey, tell the story of the immigrant experience. Etched around the Labyrinth’s Circle are the words - Art, Science, Service and Commerce - in tribute to contributions made by all immigrants. Please visit ArmenianHeritagePark.org



The 2025 Reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture at Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Matthew J. Conti photo

configuration of the Abstract Sculpture, a split rhomboid dodecahedron. Annually, the two halves of the Abstract Sculpture are pulled apart by a crane and reconfigured to

to this country to start a new life. The Abstract Sculpture, as stated on the Inscription on the Reflecting Pool upon which the Abstract Sculpture sits, is “offered in honor of

Young Leaders Council Masquerade Raises Support For the Armenian-American Museum

MASQUERADE, from page 7
Najarian, Normandy Pharmacy, State Farm – George Timuryan, Tazah, and Vault Exotics
Masquerade Silver Sponsors include Achkt Louys Matchmaking, Bank of America, Carpenter & Zuckerman Personal Injury Attorneys, Luxury Design Furniture, Narbeh Pezeshkian Crypto.com Events Premium Pez, New York Life, Serov Social Club, Skinovate Medical Spa, and St. Vincent Jewelry Center.



The Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center of California is a world-class educational and cultural institution currently under construction in the heart of Glendale’s Arts and Entertainment District. The museum will feature Core and Temporary Exhibitions, an Auditorium, Learning Center, Demonstration Kitchen, Archives Center, and more. Its mission is to promote understanding and appreciation of America’s ethnic and cultural diversity by sharing the Armenian American experience.

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St. Garabed Armenian Church of Kansas City Celebrates Armenian Cultural Month, Feast of Discovery of Holy Cross

KANSAS CITY, MO — On Sunday, October 26, St. Garabed Armenian Church of Kansas City celebrated Armenian Cultural Month in conjunction with the Feast of the Discovery of the Holy Cross, one of the most sacred and historically significant feasts in the Armenian Apostolic Church calendar.

The day began with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, officiated by Fr. Nareg Keutelain, who delivered a sermon reflecting on the history and enduring meaning of this ancient feast.

In his homily, Fr. Nareg recounted the 4th-century origins of the Feast, tracing it to the devout pilgrimage of Empress Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, to the Holy Land. Guided by faith, Empress Helena sought to uncover the True Cross — the cross upon which Jesus Christ was crucified.

“Golgotha had become a neglected and forgotten hill,” the celebrant said. “The world had tried to bury not only the Cross but also the memory of Christ’s sacrifice. But truth cannot stay buried.”

According to sacred tradition, after excavating the site, three wooden crosses were found. To discern which was the True Cross, the faithful brought forth a young man who had just died. As the third cross touched his body, he was miraculously restored to life — revealing the True and Holy Cross of Christ.

Fr. Nareg emphasized that the Feast of the Discovery of the Holy Cross remains a timeless reminder of the redemptive power



Rose Youssefi

of faith, the enduring truth of the Gospel, and the central role of the Cross in Armenian Christian identity.

Following the Divine Liturgy, parishioners gathered in the newly renovated Bedros Hall. The event, marking Armenian Cultural Month, drew enthusiastic participation from the community and highlighted the vibrancy of Armenian history, language, and faith.

bet and translators of the Holy Bible. She also paid tribute to other revered scholars, including Yeghishe, Movses of Khoren, David the Invincible, and Nersess Shnorhali, whose writings and translations enriched Armenian Christian thought across centuries.

Her detailed PowerPoint presentation, titled “The Armenian Presence in the Holy Land,” explored the deep-rooted Armenian legacy in Jerusalem and the surrounding regions. She emphasized the Armenians’ role as equal custodians of holy sites and their longstanding contributions to the Christian community.

Highlighting the trilingual sign at the entrance of the St. James Armenian Monastery — written in Armenian, Arabic, and French — Youssefi explained the French phrase “Couvent Arménien St. Jacques.” She noted that “Jacques” is the plural form of Jacques or “James,” referring to the two patriarchs of Jerusalem: James, the Brother of the Lord, and James, the Son of Zebedee, one of Christ’s apostles.

Youssefi concluded by encouraging attendees to visit Jerusalem to experience the Armenian presence and heritage firsthand. She also announced the upcoming Diocesan pilgrimage to Jerusalem, themed “Journey to the Heart of Our Faith,” led by His Grace Bishop Mesrop, Diocesan Primate, who will celebrate Armenian Christmas on January 19.

For more information about the pilgrimage, visit: <https://armenianchurch.us/pilgrimage-to-jerusalem/>



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COMMUNITY NEWS

AMAA's 106th Annual Meeting Banquet Honors Former Board President Nazareth E. Darakjian, M.D.

By Louisa Janbazian

LOS ANGELES — The Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) hosted its 106th Annual Meeting Banquet on Saturday, October 18, 2025, at the historic Jonathan Club in Los Angeles. The evening brought together community members, dignitaries, friends of the AMAA, as well as representatives from worldwide Ar-

Serge D. Buchakjian.

In his remarks, Phillips praised Dr. Darakjian for his decade of wise and humble leadership, which strengthened AMAA ministries in 23 countries and guided the Association through times of profound challenges. He highlighted Darakjian's role in launching "Project Revive" to support displaced families from Artsakh, and his role in advancing tangible growth — from



Rev. Haig Darakjian offers opening prayer



AMAA Board CEO/Executive Director Serge D. Buchakjian

menian Evangelical Churches and Unions to celebrate a century-long legacy of faith and service, while honoring Dr. Nazareth E. Darakjian, former president of the AMAA Board of Directors.

Guests were welcomed in both English and Armenian by the event Co-Chairs LindaKay Abdulian, Lori Muncherian, Arsine Phillips, Helga Sarkis and Tina Segel.

In her opening remarks, Banquet MC Abdulian recognized the distinguished dignitaries in attendance, including His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church; His Eminence Archbishop Kegham Khatcherian, Prelate of the Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church; Dr. Karen Israyelyan, Consul General of Armenia in Los Angeles; and Councilmember of the City of Los Angeles Adrin Nazarian.

Following the national anthems performed by Nazani Mncherian, Rev. Haig Darakjian, Pastor of Student Ministries and Staff Elder at Mount Bible Church in Winnetka, CA, offered the invocation.

Short messages were delivered by AMAA Board President Gary R. Phillips, Esq., and AMAA CEO/Executive Director

inaugurating the new building of Avedisian High School in Yerevan to expanding Shogh Day Centers and initiating the Camp Hankavan renovation. Phillips also praised the Nazo-Zaven Khanjian partnership as a "dream team" and affirmed that, in keeping with the evening's theme, the AMAA is



AMAA Board President Gary R. Phillips, Esq.



Banquet Co-Chair LindaKay Abdulian

well-positioned under CEO/Executive Director Serge Buchakjian to carry the mission forward.

Buchakjian added, "For a decade, Dr. Darakjian's leadership has been marked by wisdom, compassion, and unwavering faith. Under his guidance, the AMAA has expanded its reach, strengthened its programs, and deepened its impact — uplifting countless families, supporting schools and churches, and providing hope where it's needed most."

Before dinner, guests enjoyed a special video presentation reflecting the Banquet's theme, Faithful to Our Legacy.

The highlight of the evening was a musical performance in honor of Drs. Nazareth and Ani Darakjian by talented musicians from LA Operass Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young artist's program featuring pianist and coach Gabriele Zemaityte, soprano Emily Damasco, and baritone Hyungjin Son. Their performance included Wolfram's Aria from Tannhäuser and the love duet "Nedda! Silvio, a quest'ora" from Pagliacci.

A special tribute video followed, showcasing photos of Dr. Darakjian from his childhood to the present day.

AMAA Board Member Jack Muncherian then took the stage to honor Dr. Darakjian, describing him as "disciplined, poised, dedicated, a visionary, a true leader, and a philanthropist who carries these qualities with humility." He invited Drs. Nazareth and Ani Darakjian to the podium and presented them with a special gift of appreciation.

In his remarks, Darakjian expressed his gratitude to the AMAA, saying, "This evening's celebration is not about me or any-

thing I have accomplished. Tonight, we celebrate the century-old AMAA and the vision of those individuals in Worcester, MA, who, by faith, founded this organization during the challenging years of World War I, following the Armenian Genocide. Over the years, the AMAA has improved the lives of many of our compatriots in Armenia and throughout the Diaspora, offering Christian spiritual awakening, education, and direct humanitarian support."

The evening concluded with a closing prayer and Benediction offered by Rev. Serop Megerditchian, senior pastor of the Armenian Church of the Nazarene in Glendale, CA.

AMAA Holds 106th Annual Meeting in Glendale

AMAA, from page 7

The AMAA Annual Meeting weekend concluded with a Worship Service on October 20, held at the Armenian Church of the Nazarene. The service was led by Rev. Megerditchian and featured two sermons. Rev. Calvin Sagherian, Moderator of the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America and Pastor of Calvary Armenian Congregational Church of San Francisco, CA, delivered the English sermon on the topic "Find Us Faithful," based on Acts 1:1-8 and Rev. Dr. Krikor Youmshajekian, President/CEO of the AMA-Australia, delivered the Armenian sermon on the topic "Faithful to Our Legacy – We Are the Builders," based on I Corinthians 3:1-17.

During the service, a special prayer of remembrance was offered by Rev. Shanazarian, honoring AMAA members and friends who entered eternal life since the previous Annual Meeting.

At the end of the Worship Service, Rev. Dr. Vahan H. Tootikian, Executive Director of the Armenian Evangelical World Council, led the installation of the officers of the AMAA Board of Directors, and, together with the attending ministers, offered the Benediction.

AMAA CEO/Executive Director Serge D. Buchakjian expressed his gratitude, and said, "I would like to thank the members of the Armenian Church of the Nazarene and its Senior Pastor Rev. Serop Megerditchian for hosting this year's Annual Meeting and for their warm hospitality. May God continue to bless this congregation and their ministry abundantly in the Glendale area."



Arts & Culture

For Serouj Kradjian, Mozart and Fairuz Go Hand in Hand

By Dr. Tamar Marie Boyadjian

My own work as a fantasy author and medievalist often involves tracing the interconnectedness of cultures across time and geography. It was a natural fit, then, to speak with Serouj Kradjian, an artist whose very approach to music defies boundaries. In this interview, we discuss his new show, “Piano Rhapsody,” and explore how his journey of synthesizing genres, from classical to Latin to Armenian folk, creates a new, universal language of sound.

The Grammy-nominated and multiple Juno award-winning artist Kradjian discussed his music journey, defying boundaries through its interconnectedness and visionary approach.

TAMAR MARIE BOYADJIAN (TMB): You’ve had such a multifaceted musical journey. What’s the very first moment you remember connecting with music?

SEROUJ KRADJIAN (SK): I was probably two or three years old. My father had these LPs, and apparently, I would always point at them until they were put on the record player. I even have a cassette tape of myself at two years old, creating songs based on the names of relatives and family members.

During the Lebanese Civil War, the Lebanese National TV organized a National Competition for Young talents, which included all instruments and voice. At that time, I was only six years old and had been teaching myself piano. I had some lessons, but it was irregular. It was only about a year and a half that a piano arrived in our home. My family encouraged me to participate in the competition. So I began to prepare. We only had a few months’ notice. I found notes for Brahms’ Hungarian Dance and Mozart Fantasy, so I chose those pieces. I began to play them by sight-reading.

Really, the pressure was on. And it wasn’t only the fact that I was going to play, but that it was going to be broadcasted live on national TV. A war was going on, and in the midst of all that, I went to the TV studio with my family. I played in front of cameras, lights, and a jury. Going from my living room piano to national TV was a really big step—and it was my first time ever playing in public.

A couple days later they announced I was the winner. It was a very proud moment for me, my family, but also the entire Armenian community of Lebanon. In the middle of the anxiety of war, they turn on their TVs and this Armenian kid is announced to have won the competition.

I earned a trophy and then was
see KRADJIAN, page 15



Violinist Narine Dellalian with her husband Levon Mouradian, who is the grandson of Hayrik Mouradian. (Karine Armen photo)

Music of Hayrik Mouradian Celebrated At UCLA

By Karine Armen
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES — The Armenian Music Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) honored Hayrik Mouradian’s 120th anniversary on Friday, October 17, at the Herb Alpert School of Music, with special guests Narine Dellalian and Levon Mouradian.

Melissa Bilal, assistant professor of ethnomusicology and the Armenian Promise Institute Chair in Armenian Music, Arts, and Culture, and the director of the Armenian Music Program, introduced Narine Dellalian, who talked about Hayrik Mouradian and his significance in preserving the traditional songs.

The special guests had come from Lisbon, Portugal. Narine Dellalian is married to Levon Mouradian, who is the grandson of Hayrik Mouradian. Dellalian, the president of Hayrik Mouradian NGO, is the daughter of composer Harutiun Dellalian (1937-1990). In 1986, the elder Dellalian composed a piece called Topophonon, commissioned by Aram Gharabegian for Simfonova’s concert at the Los Angeles Music Center. Harutiun Dellalian’s two daughters are accomplished musicians who live in Lisbon, Portugal.

continued on next page



Cellist Levon Mouradian with VEM String Quartet, from left: Movses Pogossian and Ally Cho on violin, Niall Tarō Ferguson on cello, and Damon Zavala on viola. (Karine Armen photo)

Virginia Mendoza on The Magic Of Armenia

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN-CASTELSERÁS (Teruel, Spain) — Spanish journalist and anthropologist Virginia Mendoza (born in 1987 in Valdepeñas, Ciudad Real, Spain) holds degrees in both disciplines from the Universidad Miguel Hernández in Elche.

In 2013, she traveled to Armenia to work on a project about ethnic minorities as part of the European Voluntary Service. The country captivated her so deeply that she continued living in Yerevan, while also traveling to gather stories for a year and a half for various media outlets. She created her blog Cuaderno armenio as a sort of diary. The result of this confessed passion was her book Heridas del viento. Crónicas armenias con manchas de jugo de Granada (Wounds of the Wind: Armenian Chronicles Stained with Pomegranate Juice), self-published in 2015 and later republished by La línea del horizonte to reach a wider readership.



She is also the author of Quién te cerrará los ojos. Historias de arraigo y soledad en la España rural (Who Will Close Your Eyes: Stories of Roots and Loneliness in Rural Spain, Libros del KO, 2017).

Dear Virginia, I read Heridas del viento in Hasmik Amirgahyan’s wonderful Armenian translation. I hope the book was also well received in Spain. We Armenians often feel that our stories remain invisible to the wider world. As a Spanish journalist, what responsibility do you feel when writing about small nations and their struggles for recognition?

This is something piercing all my work, which I could say started in Armenia. I don’t think this is a question of responsibility, but interest in hidden or forgotten stories that could be in my rural origin.

In your book, Armenia is not only a setting but almost a living character. How did you manage to capture the soul of a country that at first was completely foreign to you?

Because I’m Armenian (laughs). Even when I’m joking, there’s some truth in it: everyone I met in Armenia thought I was Armenian. What I felt is that Armenians are very open to foreigners—especially to those who
see MUSIC, page 16

ARTS & CULTURE

Grisha Martirosyan Among Operalia 2025 winners

SOFIA, Bulgaria — Armenian baritone Grisha Martirosyan has claimed the second prize at the 2025 edition of Operalia, the prestigious world opera competition founded by Plácido Domingo.

Martirosyan also won the Don Plácido Domingo Ferrer Prize of Zarzuela, organizers announced on October 27.

This year's competition took place in Sofia, October 20 to 26.

A total of eleven contestants advanced to the final round.

The Armenian baritone Grisha Martirosyan studied at the Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan and at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow. He is a prize-winner of several international singing competitions, with awards including first prize at the Gohar Gasparyan Singing Competition in Yerevan in 2019, second prize and the audience prize at the Concorso Lirico Internazionale Magda Olivero in 2022, and first prize, audience prize and the Dame Joan Sutherland Prize at the Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition, also in 2022. He is a member of the Mascarade Emerging Artists Programme in Florence, under whose auspices he appeared in April 2022 in excerpts from Pagliacci (Tonio) and Don Pasquale (Malatesta) at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice. In student productions he has appeared in scenes from Eugene Onegin (title role), L'elisir d'amore (Belcore), Il barbiere di Siviglia (Figaro), La traviata (Giorgio Germont) and Lucia di Lammermoor (Enrico). Grisha Martirosyan will participate in the Jette Parker Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, from 2023 to 2025.



New International Series in Development to Honor Diana Apcar's Legacy

YEREVAN — October 17, marks the 166th birthday of Diana Apcar, a visionary humanitarian, writer, and the world's first woman to be appointed Honorary Consul. Her remarkable life remains a beacon of compassion and moral courage, inspiring creative voices across borders.

To bring Apcar's extraordinary story to global audiences, Armenian filmmaker Jivan Avetisyan — a member of the European Film Academy, Berlinale Talents 2020, and an international award-winning director from Artsakh — is developing a six-episode mini-series titled "The Stateless Diplomat." Inspired by Apcar's life, the series follows a young woman of mixed Japanese and Armenian heritage on a journey of self-discovery that unveils Apcar's humanitarian legacy and enduring influence.

"Years ago, I came across Diana Apcar's story; it affected me deeply. I instantly felt that her legacy should be shared with the world, as I feel a personal connection to her mission. Through this series, we want to finally bring her voice to the forefront," said Jivan Avetisyan, director and creator of the series.

The treatment for the project has been completed, based on family archives of Apcar's great-granddaughter and scriptwriter Mimi Malayan and the historical research of Dr. Meline Mesropyan. The team is currently in active discussion with an award-winning Japanese scriptwriter to join the project.

Over the past four years, the project has been developed through several prestigious international industry platforms — the Marché du Film at the Cannes Film Festival, one of the world's leading film markets; the European Film Market (EFM) at the Berlinale; and the MIDPOINT Institute's Cold Open program, a selective European training and development lab dedicated to nurturing high-quality drama series for the global market. Through these opportunities, the project has evolved into a truly international collaboration uniting Japanese, European, and Canadian producers. Among the project's key creative team are producer Adrineh Mirzayan and creative consultant Viken Attarian, who bring invaluable experience and vision to the development process.

To further advance the project's growth and its global vision, an Advisory Board has been established, bringing together Armenian women leaders in academia, business and human rights, who seek to continue Diana Apcar's legacy of empathy, resilience, and advocacy. The Board includes Hourii Berberian (Professor of History and Meghrouni Family Presidential Chair in Armenian Studies, UC Irvine), Anahit Markosian (founder of Nairian skincare & cosmetics), Nvair Beylerian (producer and owner of HYEfamily.com, founder of worldFLATS), Lerna Ekmekcioglu (McMillan-Stewart Associate Professor of History at MIT), Melissa Bilal (Assistant Professor of



Ethnomusicology, Promise Chair in Armenian Music, Arts, and Culture, Director of the Armenian Music Program, UCLA), Sheila Paylan (International Human Rights Lawyer, Senior Legal Consultant at the United Nations), Tatev Beybutyan (founder of Madam Women's Union), and Lilya Avagyan (Chair of the Transportation Commission for the City of Glendale).

The initiative builds on Mimi Malayan's 2018 documentary, also titled "The Stateless Diplomat." "This captivating series will attract international audiences and finally give Diana Apcar the global recognition she deserves as Armenia's greatest humanitarian and as a ground-breaking woman of the early 20th century," said Malayan.

Spanning three generations of women, Avetisyan's "The Stateless Diplomat" weaves Apcar's story into a larger reflection on identity, exile, and resilience. In a world increasingly challenged by fading humanitarian values, Apcar's voice reminds us that compassion and moral courage remain the truest forms of diplomacy.

from previous page

During her presentation, Narine Dellallian talked about Hayrik Mouradian's legacy and the importance of his contribution to record and save the Armenian folk songs from Western Armenia. Dellallian said, "Hayrik was a bridge between our past and present, guiding us toward a deeper recognition of our roots. Thanks to him, we are connected with the folk songs of the Vaspurakan region." She added, "Hayrik also elevated the performance of the Armenian folk songs to a scholarly level."

Later, Armen Adamian gave an in-depth presentation on the history of the revival movement in Soviet Armenia which brought Western Armenian musical heritage back to public recognition. Adamian is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at UCLA. His dissertation research focuses on the political implications of folk music in Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia.

Hayrik Mouradian was born in 1905 near Lake Van, growing up listening to traditional Armenian songs. His family was forced to flee due to the Armenian Genocide, moving to Iraq and later to Armenia in 1922. He was a historian and author who dedicated his life to documenting, preserving, and spreading Armenian folk songs. He founded many Armenian folk ensembles. His students followed his path. One student, Hasmik Harutyunyan, founded the Hayrik Mouradian Traditional Song and Dance Children's Ensemble to continue Mouradian's legacy.

The second part of the program included a performance by Levon Mouradian of a traditional song on cello. In addition, the VEM String Quartet accompanied him for two more Mouradian songs arranged by VEM member Niall Tarō Ferguson. The VEM String Quartet is the UCLA Armenian Music Program's resident ensemble



From left: singers Mary Sekayan, Hasmik Harutyunyan, and Nare Sargsyan. Vahan Avetisyan on blul, Petros Berberyan and Armen Adamian on duduk, Antranig Kzirian on oud, and Albert Ordinyan on dhol. (Karine Armen photo)

under the directorship of Prof. Movses Pogossian, a distinguished professor of violin, and the founder/advisor of the UCLA Armenian Music Program.

Levon Mouradian teaches at Portugal's Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa. He has performed with distinguished orchestras around the world.

After the quartet, UCLA Armenian Music Ensemble, under the directorship of

Armen Adamian, performed a medley of Hayrik Mouradian songs. The talented musicians were UCLA students who had been the recipients of the Armenian Music Program's fellowship to study Armenian folk music: Hayk Gargaloyan, duduk; Alisa Gukasian, kamancha; Mickey Hashim, shvi; and Lori Der Sahakian, voice.

Later, Harutyunyan and the ensemble performed a repertoire of folk songs

from Van-Shatakh transcribed by Hayrik Mouradian. Harutyunyan is a guest mentor at the UCLA Armenian Music Program's fellowship program.

This last set featured performers Harutyunyan, Mary Sekayan, and Nare Sargsyan, voice; Armen Adamian and Petros Berberyan, duduk; Vahan Avetisyan, shvi; Antranig Kzirian, oud; and Albert Ordinyan, dhol.



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



The Boyajian Family’s Rack of Lamb

CANTON, Mass. — “This elegant rack of lamb from Boyajian Inc. is the perfect recipe for your family parties, celebrations and at the holidays,” says John Boyajian, founder of Boyajian, Inc.

Founded in 1980, Boyajian Inc. is a company specializing in fine infused oils, vinegars, and other specialty food products. John Boyajian began selling his products to help pay for graduate school. Today the company offers a popular range of products for cooking and entertaining. With a focus on quality and authenticity, Boyajian Inc. provides its customers with unique flavors and ingredients to elevate their culinary experiences.

“I grew up in a large, close-knit Armenian family where good food always played a central role. Some of my earliest childhood memories are of my beloved grandmother’s kitchen, where each summer my grandparents would infuse olive oil and vinegar with fresh garlic and herbs from their garden. Using the same recipes today, we take the time and care to do it right,” says Boyajian. In 1987, drawing upon his heritage and family traditions, Boyajian made his first bottles of garlic-infused olive oil for customers at his new retail operation in Cambridge, MA. Not realizing that the public had never before seen herb-infused olive oils, the surprising response to Boyajian’s garlic-infused olive oil was overwhelming, and soon the company would outgrow its Cambridge storefront.

“The Boyajian line is made from 100% pure olive oil that is slowly infused with fresh herbs and spices to achieve remarkable aroma and flavor. These oils are wonderful for sautéing, on pastas and focaccia, in vinaigrettes and marinades, as bread dippers, as anointing oils, and for anything the creative cook or chef decides to do with them,” says Boyajian. “Today, the company resides in a 30,000 square foot state-of-the-art production facility and corporate headquarters in Canton, MA. Boyajian products are regarded as ‘essential tools’ by consumers and food professionals worldwide. Boyajian products have been featured in numerous food publications, regularly appear on television cooking shows, and are referenced in over 100 cookbooks.”

“This recipe has been served to three generations of our family. It is delicious every time, and tastes juicy and tender. It makes an elegant centerpiece on the dinner table. And thankfully, it is fairly easy to cook. Boyajian Garlic Oil in the Garlic Mustard Marinade makes all the difference,” adds Boyajian.

Simply Recipes recommends, “When choosing lamb at the butcher’s, look for meat that is pink or rosy red. Any meat that is a darker red is showing signs of age and won’t be as tender. Look for firm white fat and pink meat that is fine grained. You can buy a rack of lamb already ‘Frenched,’ which means that it’s cut so the rib bones are exposed. At a full-service butcher or even at the supermarket, you can ask the butcher to French them for you. For a less expensive option, you can also buy an untrimmed rack and trim them yourself.”

- INGREDIENTS:**
- 1 rack of lamb
 - 2 large garlic cloves
 - 1/2 teaspoon salt, to taste
 - 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, to taste
 - 2 tablespoons Grey Poupon Dijon Mustard
 - 1 tablespoon soy sauce
 - 1 tablespoon dry oregano or dry rosemary, freshly crushed (either with mortar and pestle or spice mill)
 - 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
 - 1/4 cup Boyajian Garlic Oil

PREPARATION:

GARLIC MUSTARD MARINADE

In a sturdy bowl mash the garlic and salt together until they make a paste. Combine all other ingredients, except the garlic oil, with the garlic/salt paste using a whisk. Then slowly drizzle the garlic oil into the bowl, whisking vigorously until mixture takes on the texture of a creamy mayonnaise. Cover the bowl and refrigerate for no more than 15-30 minutes.

PREPARING THE LAMB

With a sharp knife, make shallow diagonal cuts across the skin side of the lamb rack from left to right, then from right to left, making a diamond pattern on the surface of the lamb rack. Slice marks should be approximately 3/4 of an inch apart. Place the rack in a shallow baking dish or small baking sheet. With a pastry brush, “paint” the entire rack with the garlic mustard marinade. Cover rack with foil and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, up to 24 hours.

ROASTING THE RACK

Set your oven rack in the upper middle position. Set oven to 500°F.

Fold a piece of aluminum foil over the rib ends of the rack to prevent them from burning. Roast for 10 minutes, then remove from the oven. Reduce oven to 400°F. Baste with fat accumulated in the pan and return it to the oven. Roast for another 20 minutes, at which point thermometer will read 125°F. This will produce a rosy rare roast. Remove lamb from pan and place on cutting board to rest, covered with aluminum foil. Let the lamb rest for 10 minutes before slicing through. Resist the temptation to cut into the lamb immediately, allowing time for the juices to get reabsorbed into the meat makes for a more tender bite.

Note: The cooking time depends on how big your rack of lamb is, and how rare you want it cooked. Rack of lamb should be cooked rare, or at most, medium rare. Using a sharp knife, cut between the ribs, and serve with mashed, roasted, or baked potatoes, couscous, risotto or Armenian rice pilaf.

For this recipe, go to: <https://boyajianinc.com/recipe/boyajian-family-rack-of-lamb/>
For all Boyajian family recipes, go to: <https://boyajianinc.com/recipes/>

Boyajian is the only company in the United States that uses a true infusion process, placing fresh herbs and spices, into the olive oil, to capture the perfect balance of flavor and aroma.

Boyajian sources the finest quality pure and extra virgin olive oils from California and the Mediterranean. The infusion and bottling take place in the Boyajian manufacturing facility in Canton, MA.

Boyajian citrus oils are made by cold-pressing the oil from the rind of citrus fruit. A little citrus oil goes a long way. Start with a 1/4 teaspoon of oil per cup of ingredients called for in your recipe. You can always add more, according to your taste. Citrus oil is ideal for baking, but should be avoided for stovetop sautéing.

Boyajian products are found at retail stores and specialty grocers nationwide around the world and online. They can also be found and ordered directly via this site or by calling 1-800-965-0665.

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ARTS & CULTURE

For Serouj Kradjian, Mozart and Fairuz Go Hand in Hand

KRADJIAN. from page 12

invited to perform in many other shows, including being a regular guest on Lebanese TV. I even played in their Christmas show.

TMB: Did you always know you wanted to go into music?

SK: Yes, but it was a combination of things. When I won this competition, it convinced me even more that I had something to offer the world. I had the discipline to practice—and I needed that part. That was part pressure and part reminders from my parents, who would constantly offer gifts or other funny rewards when I practiced. For example, if you practice, we will give you chocolate.

One thing I used to do early on — and which I continued to develop — was to improvise and play by ear. So arranging music was always there for me from the beginning. I would arrange melodies I either created or heard. And all this happened with almost no lessons really.

It was after this performance and later when I appeared a lot on TV, that the famous composer and pianist Boghos Gelalian took me under his wings.

TMB: How were the lessons with Boghos Gelalian?

SK: What I loved about Bogh Gelalian was that he offered each student something individually, rather than one system of learning that applied across all his students. In me, he saw the improvisational talent, the readiness to explore different repertoire, and he really developed my technique in a very unique way. For other teachers, it would be customary to offer exercises, mostly related to technique. But the way he developed my technique was by giving me piano sonatas by Scarlatti. It was an unorthodox way to do this, and I know a lot of finger technique matured and grew stronger because of this.

He was strict but every time I deviated from the box in my interpretations, he would nod his head and say that's not the way it's usually done. But he would accept what I did. What I liked about him most was that he was proficient in many different styles. He was close to the Rahbani brothers and arranged a lot of Fairouz's music. At the same time, he was incredibly proficient in classical music — and of course, he was a classical composer. He was also proficient in jazz. He was a well-rounded musician who hadn't restricted himself to one style of music. That was my earliest inspiration when, later in my career, I became exactly that: a musician who didn't restrict himself.

TMB: A lot of your music intersects genres, styles, and cultures. What drives you to synthesize these worlds?

SK: For me, it's all in the idea of reimagining. I adopted that approach early on. As pianists, as classical pianists especially, we recycle music that has been written by masters. When I say recycle, each pianist brings in his or her own interpretation of a piece of music written hundreds of years ago and played by hundreds of pianists. I used to do this myself. But, then I thought to myself how about if we go a step further and we reimagine with the question: what if? What if Mozart or Chopin had lived a hundred or two hundred years? What would they have done? As if they were in a time machine and moved forward in time and then went back and composed their piece. Even as a child, I never saw myself in a box, in one category, constructed to one genre. And of course, I have a curious mind. Part of it is



also that you have to have a sense of humor and imagination when approaching music — and most of all that you are telling a story or offering a different experience with the piece you are playing or composing.

TMB: What lasting impact do you hope for when people walk away from your music?

SK: I think it depends on each piece. In some pieces, my original pieces, in four or five minutes I want to condense very diverse feelings, powerful sensations, moods and colors. I want it to be a very intense experience in a short amount of time. If they ask themselves the question, "I never thought this was possible in music," I have accomplished my mission. That's one way. I think also it's as if, you know how

TMB: Let's go back to your training. After establishing such a unique foundation with Gelalian, where did your musical training take you next?

My parents decided to immigrate to Canada. So I continued my studies there. I think that period in my life was more academic than creative. I had a great teacher at the Royal Conservatory of Music and then I went on to the University of Toronto. But here my knowledge was more theoretical and less about performance — who I wanted to be as a musician. I didn't give much thought to that during this time. But looking back, I think this might have been beneficial because it was meant to be part of the foundation I needed to know myself as an artist. And I didn't pursue an academic path in music. I knew I wanted more.

TMB: You mention wanting more. What kind of musician did you know you needed to become?

SK: I made a snap decision to go to Germany and that truly changed my life. That's where I found myself as a musician. From both the teacher I studied with (great Norwegian pianist Einar Steen-Nøkleberg) and all the fellow students studying there, we learned so much from each other. I think probably for the first time in my life, since my childhood, I fell in love with music again. And that made a big difference in convincing me yet again that this is the path I should choose and that I don't have

to take one direction in music—that I can be multifaceted and can explore different styles while perfecting my artistry.

TMB: What do you love about music?

SK: First and foremost, it's made me a better person. It's also made me love life because I can't imagine my life without music, and that goes hand in hand. I think music keeps me young. I think it gives me such happiness in that when music is present in my life — I'm not saying materialistic things don't matter — but it gives me an immense amount of satisfaction. The creative side offers me fulfillment; the connection with others that I can offer, the beauty I can present to my audience, and the bridge I can create between people. And I have always been a good mediator.

TMB: I know that you have lived in Spain. Tell me about those years and what they offered.

SK: In Spain, I balanced a rigorous performance schedule with my busy academic career. I think I toured in every single small or big town in Spain. I played many concerts with my good friend, Ara Malikian. When I was there, I also taught a lot of students, whose accomplishments I am very proud of. I believe Spanish and South American music have always been in my blood, even though I am ethnically Armenian. Living in Spain offered daily inspiration. For musicians, for all artists, where you are, who you surround yourself with, and what you see, really shape your thoughts and creative output.

It's very interesting that it was during my years in Spain that I had the idea of orchestrating the songs by Gomidas. And all my work for that — twenty-five songs which were never before arranged for voice and orchestra — was done while I was in Spain. During this time, I also released an album of the complete transcendental studies by Franz Liszt. I joined a tango ensemble and all the other ensemble members were Argentinian. And of course, there is no better way to learn about tango or how to play tango from Argentinians. I was in constant contact with Flamingo music, almost on a daily basis. I realized it was the life I loved, the Mediterranean life, which I grew up in despite the war. These

years were very inspiring and formative years for me — not only as a pianist but also as an arranger and a composer.

TMB: Your new production, "Piano Rhapsody," is debuting soon. What can audiences expect, and what excites you most about sharing it?

SK: Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 was always one of my favorite power pieces, a public's favorite when I used to play, and I used to play a lot of crowd-pleaser pieces. But again, as usual, I thought, after playing the original version for so long and so many times, I should do something different. I created a rock/Latin music version. And I thought it is time to create a new show called "Piano Rhapsody" — giving classical pieces a new breath or reimagining them. Whether it's Hungarian Rhapsody with Mozart's Queen of the Night mixed with the Brazilian Tico-Tico, or Romeo and Juliet mixed with Jimi Hendrix's Purple Haze, this "Piano Rhapsody" show is kind of a tale of legends.

TMB: What is your advice for the next generation pursuing music?

SK: In the age that we are in, everything is expected to be fast — rapid results. And in this hectic world, slowing down to feel more, to hear more, to give more, and to appreciate more, is often forgotten. And of course, I should add, to love more. Following music of tradition, of good taste, of a story that belongs to a long history, that gives the chance for all these things to happen in life. For young people who want to choose this path, I would urge two things: The preparation is important, whether that is attending good schools, and learning from great teachers. But finding yourself is just as important, if not more.

(Kradjian performs his new production in Boston on December 20, 2025. Stay tuned for Boston ticket details. Dr. Tamar Marie Boyadjian is an internationally recognized, award-winning author, poet, and medievalist. She is the first U.S.-born author to publish a book of poetry and a fantasy series in the endangered Western Armenian language. An avid lover of music, she currently teaches Armenian Language courses at Stanford University.)

Books

One Meme Away from War

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

How can the reality of war and genocide be effectively expressed? Can human language provide us the means to “say the unspeakable”? A question debated among genocide researchers, this was an issue that arose during a round table hosted by the Armenian delegation at the recent Frankfurt Book Fair.

The publication presented was a graphic essay, also known as comics, titled, *Last Night on Earth: War through Women’s Gaze: Stories from Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine*, with three stories about war as experienced by women. The first two entries utilized the graphic format in a relatively conventional manner, relating stories in narrative sequence, graphically illustrated.

The Armenian entry, “One Meme Away from War,” diverges radically from this scheme, and in so doing, makes a profound statement about expressing the inexpressible. Written by Ani Asatryan, with editor Mikheil Tsikhelashvili, and illustrated by Astghik Harutyunyan, its subject is the Artsakh wars from 1988 to 2023, which “unfolded under the watch of Russia, Armenia’s so-called ally — whose betrayal allowed these events to occur.”

It opens with a letter dated December 25, addressed to “Dear stranger,” and signed by “Nobody – 070,” who asks the reader, “if you happen upon a dead ... body in the park ... under a fig tree, free me from the lungs of that lifeless shell.” Perhaps the two will be the only survivors, “sharing the burden of existence.”

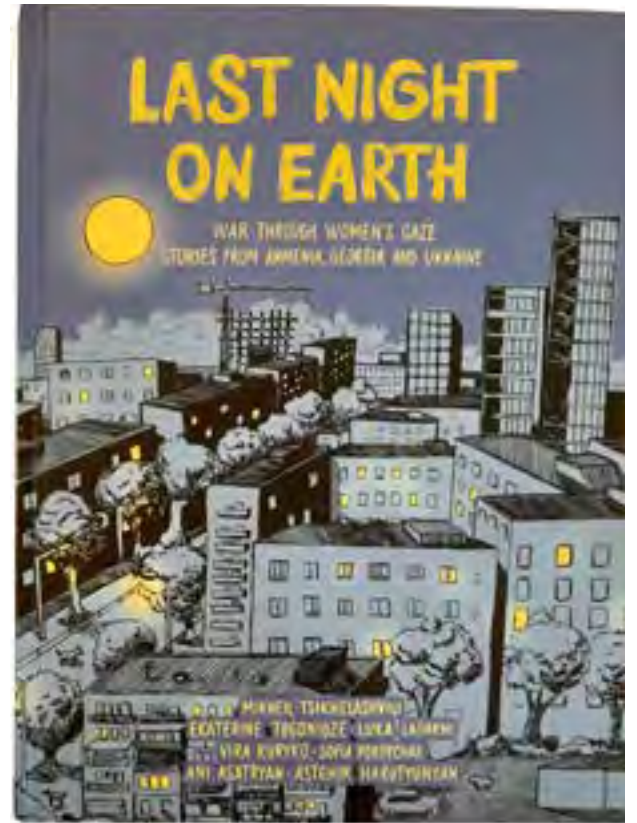
In rapid shifts, the scene moves to the Gray Zone, a “place off the maps,” where three groups coexist: Nobod-

ies, Somebodies, and Nomen. It is illustrated in black, with terse phrases in white, a candle, dim figures. A century ago, the Memeoids arrived, creatures who slavishly follow commands of a Scriptwriter. Ordered to eliminate the population because it had sought autonomy, they usher in a century of AUTONOMYCIDE. At that time with death marches, now today, with drones and social engineering, they turn the inhabitants into apathetic beings, Somebodies. Where this tactic fails, the Memeoids in 2023 use a blockade and starvation. The Nobodies, loved ones of the Nomen, live invisibly, to survive. They are memory-keepers, representing the stories and souls of “the other 99.”

The Nobody dressed in black, a ghostwriter who writes exposés and wages a battle for intellectual survival, is tasked with depicting the story of the Gray Zone in a graphic novel, and must interview Nobody-070. The task provokes illness and traumatic memories of the grandparents. En route, the ghostwriter passes through city-dwellers, strolling through shopping arcades and uttering banalities.

The scene shifts to 1915, newspaper clippings and photos depict the genocide, starvation, orphans feeding on slain dogs, then to Artsakh, the siege and expulsion — all this, despite conventions, international law, humanitarian appeals. Only the courageous few dare to protest and demonstrate. Bananciaga (sic!) sunglasses grab public attention.

Nobody, the black faceless figure, arrives for the interview, asks the young girl to share real war stories. She answers that she has many such stories, then makes the point: “But the weight of death, it’s beyond words. Can’t



capture that in a story, you know?”

Her response is the story that cannot be told: With our advanced civilization, progressive, scientific, and informed, where is the need to depict Hell? “Why should anyone document hell in the form of photographs?” She hands him a letter for his readers, with the words, “Include it or not, your choice.”

“One Meme Away from War” uses unconventional visual means, shifting from abstract images glimmering through a black expanse that portray the horror of war, to typical comic book frames depicting the banality of everyday life of an uncaring society. Its underlying implicit narrative is a courageous denunciation of cynical indifference and political complicity. The message in the method is as brutal as it is pertinent; and ironically, in ostensibly arguing the case that retelling the stories of war is pointless, it actually demonstrates the power of literature, in this case comics, to deliver a challenging message.

Virginia Mendoza on the Magic of Armenia

MUSIC, from page 12

show genuine interest in their culture. Many people couldn’t believe I was making the effort to speak Armenian instead of Russian.

I’ve always felt that if you live in a place, you should learn the language of its people. If I were in Russia, I’d be interested in Russian. In Armenia, it felt important to speak Armenian. Armenians are usually very grateful for any interest shown by foreigners. When they sense this, they become even more open and welcoming—they could feel that I felt like one of them, and there’s a special kind of mutual connection that grows from that.

When you first arrived in Armenia, beyond the clichés, what surprised you, what unsettled you, and what touched you most deeply?

People in the airplane. On the airplane, I was traveling alone late at night. The woman sitting next to me tried to talk with me. I pulled out a dictionary to communicate, but it wasn’t working, so she walked through the plane searching for someone who spoke English.

Soon after, several Armenians around me quietly slipped the snacks from the flight attendants into my backpack. At least three of them gave me their addresses and phone numbers. One of them even stayed with me when we landed in Armenia.

There was a problem: someone had accidentally switched my baggage in Madrid, so I couldn’t prove I wasn’t Mr. Petrosyan (laughs). Finally, I spotted a man who looked like the person I imagined. I pointed to his bag and asked, “Are you Miss Men-

doza?” He looked at me as if I were crazy—and yes, he was Petrosyan! The guard finally let me leave the airport.

To make matters worse, the person who was supposed to meet me had forgotten and gone to sleep. Through it all, the man who had stayed with me refused to go home until he was sure I was safe. Before that night, I had never felt so at home.

You dedicated your book to your grandfather Norberto, “who spoke to me about the Armenians in dreams, without knowing that he was sending me to find them by plane.” Could you tell us more about this very personal connection?

While visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau II in Poland, I received a call: my grandfather was dying. I didn’t have money for an urgent flight, but I had an Interrail global ticket, so I took several trains from Poland to Spain, hoping to reach him in time. I missed the chance to say goodbye by just one hour. After that, I dreamed of him every night.

One night, a friend mentioned that Armenia sounded like a place I would love. On a sudden impulse, I sent my CV late at night to an Armenian organization looking for a volunteer. That same night, I dreamt my grandfather told me he had been born on Calle de los Armenios — Armenians’ Street — in my village. I protested, saying that street didn’t exist. But he showed me his ID, and I could see he was right. I woke up with an unshakable feeling: Check your email—you’ve just found your path to Armenia. And indeed, there was an email waiting for me. I hadn’t realized it was the

very last night before the deadline.

Ever since, I’ve felt as though my grandfather was guiding me to Armenia. Perhaps, given the context of that phone call, my mind connected different histories of genocide — who knows. But I felt he was urging me to write the stories of the last Armenian genocide survivors, and that is what I set out to do. I stop dreaming about him the day Heridas del viento went to print.

You have traveled to rural Armenia and Artsakh, places many outsiders never see. You entered homes and shared the tables of Armenians, Yazidis and Russian Molokans; you met some of the last genocide survivors; you spoke with the widow of the man who built an underground temple to save humanity from fire. Which of these encounters still live most vividly in your memory, and why?

All of them. Probably, meeting Movses and Iskuhi and visiting Levon’s Divine Underground. Movses, Iskuhi and Levon (through his family and his temple) gave me back the genuine desire to live and to keep faith in human being.

For Armenians, oral history and memory are sacred. How do you decide which voices and stories deserve to be written down, knowing they may remain the only record for the future?

It was very intuitive. In this case, I believe all of them were included. For books like this, I follow just one rule: a person deserves a full chapter if I can at least see their kitchen and share something meaningful with them—not just food, but a

deeper, longer conversation or time spent together during their daily work.

If that’s not possible, they may become part of a chapter. And if I can’t speak with or even meet that person at all, I use documents and let their own words tell the story. For example, I never met the uncle who sent letters from the front to a friend’s family during World War II, but those letters are essential to the book.

There are a couple of exceptions in this book, simply because, in those cases, it made sense to do things differently.

Are you still in touch with some of the “heroes” and voices that appear in your book?

The protagonists were mostly around 90–100 years old back in 2013, so sadly, that’s no longer possible. But I’m still in touch with other important people connected to the book—friends who said, “You should meet...” or who even came with me and translated what was said.

It’s also wonderful how life keeps crossing our paths. In a few days, I’ll meet the friend who first told me I should write this story. And of course, there’s Hasmik Amiraghyan, my translator into Armenian — we’re always in touch and have even met not only in Armenia but also in Spain.

At one point, Nune — Levon’s granddaughter and the translator during the interview with her grandmother and others — was living just five kilometers from my parents’ house, and she was even able to meet my grandmother. This kind of magic always seems to happen when Armenia is involved.



ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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 Aron 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 1 — New England Couple's Ministry, supported by New England Armenian Clergy offers "Restored by Grace: Forgiveness that Renews Marriage." Speaker: Kevin Sanders, executive director and counselor, Boston Center for Biblical Counseling. 5 p.m. \$75 per person, includes catered buffet, First Armenian Church, 380 Concord Ave., Belmont.

NOVEMBER 3 — St. James Men's Club Monthly dinner and fellowship; Guest Speaker, Sportswriter Steve Buckley, a sportswriter for more than 45 years and has been a columnist with The Athletic since 2018. Prior to that he was the columnist with the Boston Herald for 23 years. He also covered baseball for the Hartford Courant, Tacoma News Tribune and Portland Press Herald. Monday, St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. Social hour 6:15 [mezza] Dinner 7:00pm Losh and Kheyma. \$25 per person.

NOVEMBER 7 — Showing of "There Was, There Was Not" documentary, Friday at 7 p.m. West Newton Cinema, 1296 Washington Street, West Newton. Following the screening, filmmaker Emily Mkrtichian will join a Q&A discussion moderated by Paul Boghosian, President of Harbor Side Films. Reception hosted by Anoush'ella follows. For tickets: \$20/person, westnewtoncinema.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 15 — Annual Fall Bazaar 12-6 PM. Holy Archangels Armenian Church, St. Michael & St. Gabriel. Delicious Armenian Food! Chicken Kebab, Losh Kebab and Kheyma Dinners; Delicacies & Pastries; Cuisine Table, Hayastan Table & Anoush Honey. Gift Baskets Raffle. 1280 Boston Rd., Haverhill, MA 01835 Phone (978) 372-9227 or email ArmenianChurchAtHy-Pointe@verizon.net for additional information.

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. (Individual Tickets will commence at a later date). For more info: <https://amaa.org/hyeminds-boston2025/>

NOVEMBER 22 — Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church Food Festival. 11 a.m. – 6 p.m., 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford, MA. Eat-in or Take-out. The Food Festival menu includes lamb, chicken, and losh kebab dinners, and a vegetarian platter; a country store with a variety of Armenian specialties and desserts. The festival also features a jewelry table and gift items from Armenia as well as a Tavloo Tournament at 1:30 p.m. For further information, see www.stsvartanantz.com or call the office at 978-256-7234.

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

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 served

NOVEMBER 15-16 — Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church Food Fair and Bazaar. Saturday, 12 p.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Delicious Armenian food and pastries, including lamb shish kebab, losh kebab, baked half chicken, kheyma, lahmajoon, boreg, yalanchi, choreg, cream khadaif and more. Lunch, dinner or takeout. \$1,000 raffle. Kids activities, Nazeli Dance Group, silent auction and vendors. 70 Jefferson St., Providence.

DECEMBER 12 — The Cultural Committee of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church presents a Christmas concert "Oh Holy Night" featuring Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island, soloists, Junior Choir. Refreshments follow concert in Egavian Hall; Art exhibition of the Arts Education Program. Special performance by Nazeli Dance Group.

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.

Filmmaker Tamara Stepanyan Leads Masterclass at UCLA

By Karine Armen

Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

GLENDAL — On Saturday, October 25, director and producer Tamara Stepanyan led a masterclass at the Armenian Film Society (AFS), where she shared her creative journey and explored her filmmaking process using her film "My Armenian Phantoms" as a case study.

Stepanyan, who now lives in Paris, was born in Yerevan and moved to Lebanon when she was 12. She studied film,

television and communication arts at the American University of Beirut. She started making documentaries in 2010. She made "The Ganants Gyughe" (Village of Women) in 2019.

"My Armenian Phantoms" is a feature documentary that premiered at the 75th Berlin International Film Festival. The film is poetic, a dialogue among her, her actor-father, and Soviet Armenian cinema. Stepanyan started the project to reflect on the history of Armenian film. When her father, noted actor Vigen Stepanyan, passed away, it changed into a personal communication and reflection.

The film was screened on October 24, at AFI FEST at the Chinese Theater in Hollywood, followed by a Q&A with Stepanyan. The Armenian Film Society was a community partner for the screening. The film is Armenia's official submission for Best International Feature Film at the 2026 Academy Awards.

The masterclass was informative and interactive. The



Filmmaker Tamara Stepanyan (Karine Armen photo)

audience included young filmmakers and writers as well as experienced directors/producers. Stepanyan discussed her films and her artistic journey over the years. She said, "It's essential to build a relationship and trust with your subjects. You become part of their lives to capture their routines. In fiction, you can direct the actors, but not in a documentary."

Inna Sahakyan, director and producer of "Aurora's Sunrise," asked Stepanyan about the challenges of finding funding

and said, "France and Armenia have public funding, but not in the U.S. We need to find private donors." Also present was Susanna Harutyunyan, the cofounder of the Golden Apricot Film Festival in Armenia.

Stepanyan is passionate about her projects. She said, "You need to love what you are doing and believe in your projects; otherwise, find something else to do. Cinema is your life partner. Work whatever works for you. You can't give up."



From left: Inna Sahakyan, director/producer of *Aurora's Sunrise*; Tamara Stepanyan, director/producer; Susanna Harutyunyan, cofounder of the Apricot Film Festival; and Armen Karaoghlanian, CEO of the Armenian Film Society. (Karine Armen photo)

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE
UNITED STATES

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

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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.

Azerbaijan Deliberately Worsened Relations with Russia to Realize the Washington Accords

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

As a result of the 44-day war, Russia's role in the region has significantly diminished. After Armenia lost Artsakh, Russia lost almost all levers of influence over both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Naturally, this was significant for Azerbaijan, and it freed its hands like never before, as Moscow no longer had instruments of pressure over it. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Azerbaijan began cooperating more closely with Turkey and sought to exert a more active influence in the South Caucasus, disregarding Russia's vital interests. This allowed Azerbaijan to present itself more actively as a regional power, a strong player, and a state conducting an independent foreign policy.

Bilateral relations between Baku and Moscow reached a nadir, experiencing a substantial negative intensification following the downing of an Azerbaijani civilian aircraft. In this incident, Russian air defense forces mistakenly targeted an Azerbaijani civilian aircraft, resulting in a catastrophic outcome.

Azerbaijan reacted in an extremely aggressive manner, directly blaming Russia without waiting for the official investigation to end. Moreover, Azerbaijan blamed Moscow stating that they deliberately did not allow the plane to land at a Russian airport — forcing it to return to its departure point — in the hope that it would be destroyed over the sea and that the evidence proving the plane had been bombed would be erased. Unwilling to ease tensions in any way, Azerbaijan, despite multiple apologies from Russia, refused to make concessions. Eventually, the situation reached a point where high-level contacts between the two sides simply ceased.

Throughout this period, Russia acted very cautiously, trying not to further escalate the situation. Following Russian political statements, it was evident that efforts at the highest levels aimed at avoiding provoking the situation. Simultaneously, Russia sought to exert pressure on Azerbaijani businessmen operating in Russia, demonstrating that these tensions could adversely impact Azerbaijani business interests within the Russian market. Monitoring Russian media made it clear that the Russian leadership endeavored to prevent any scenario that could exacerbate tensions between the two nations. It appeared that Russia adopted a “wait-and-see” approach, awaiting a slight stabilization of the situation.

Despite the Russian apology, which was issued at the highest level, Azerbaijan responded with aggressive language. What were the underlying reasons for this reaction? First of all, it is crucial to comprehend that Russia and Azerbaijan do not face strategic challenges in their relations. While certain issues may arise, they are not fundamental or insurmountable, as they may initially appear. Consequently, many mechanisms exist for their resolution.

What was critical during this phase of tense relations was that Azerbaijan deliberately escalated the situation to the point where Moscow could not exert strong pressure to prevent a joint Armenian-Azerbaijani statement from being issued in Washington in August under Trump's mediation. In other words, after the plane's destruction, Azerbaijan deliberately strained its relations with Russia, closed all dialogue platforms, and suspended high-level contacts until the statement in Washington was issued and until it secured for itself and Turkey the much-desired Zangezur route. This calculation was most likely orchestrated by Turkey and Azerbaijan, with the intent to shield Azerbaijan from Russian pressure for a period of time, so that the Zangezur route could be effectively implemented.

Naturally, Moscow reacted negatively, and to prevent Azerbaijan from moving closer to the West and Turkey, Russia took a rather unexpected step. Azerbaijan's president was informed of intelligence indicating that the head of his administration while in Russia was planning a coup against him, including a scenario to physically eliminate Aliyev. This was, of course, an extraordinary measure taken to facilitate improved relations between Azerbaijan and Russia. Subsequently, days later a meeting was held between the presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia, which reportedly transpired in a cordial atmosphere.

Certainly, relations improved, but Azerbaijan had already achieved the objective of securing the Zangezur route, effectively diminishing Russia's influence in the region and bolstering its own and Turkey's position and authority in the South Caucasus.

(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.)



LETTERS

Diaspora Armenians Have no Place in Armenia's Future, Per Foreign Minister

To the Editor:

In doing my normal search of the YouTube channel on TV last week, I found on the Deutsche Welle (German) channel an interview with Ararat Mirzoyan, Armenia's Foreign Minister.

The German interviewer asked him about the recently signed Memorandum of Peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the political situation in Armenia and the role of the Diaspora in Armenia.

Mr. Mirzoyan responded in measured English using the usual governmental gobbledegook but something he said about Diaspora Armenians participating in Armenia's future sounded very wrong.

“Well,” said Mr. Mirzoyan, “we do not believe that any Armenian from the Diaspora who has not served in the Armenian Army should have a say in Armenian politics and the future of the country”!

Let us ponder on this official statement for a minute.

First if all, it confirms Mr. Pashinyan's philosophy that “how can an Armenian in,

let's say, Australia, have a right to interfere in Armenian politics” which is what he stated in yet another of his famous interviews while in Brussels for EU meetings several months ago.

Secondly, we know that the Armenian Parliament has been debating a law whether to allow young Armenians purchase their military service for \$40,000 or \$60,000.

And this after the country lost 4,000 young Armenian boys during the last war with Azerbaijan.

So, the impression one clearly gets from such statements coming from the Armenian government to the Diaspora Armenians is, “stay out of our business, you do not belong here!”

This attitude is, of course, consistent with Mr. Pashinyan having Diaspora-phobia for his own personal and political reasons which have permeated relations between the Diaspora and Armenia on many fronts. One of his first act as Prime Minister was to abolish the Ministry of Diaspora and making that office an insignificant part of

the Foreign Ministry while appointing an equally insignificant person at its head.

Therefore, there comes a question as follows: The Diaspora Armenians are good for Armenia as long as they send money but cannot possibly feel part of the comings and goings in the country because they are not there and have not served in the Army?

There is a growing feeling of distaste, boredom, and rejection carried by Armenians around the world of what is happening in Armenia today. They are quickly concluding they have been taken advantage of over the years, that they can only be tourists in the land of their ancestors and that they are degraded as non-citizens not only because they do not carry Armenian passports but because Mr. Pashinyan and his government want to direct the less than three million indigenous Armenians to the direction, they consider ideal.

The question is: Ideal for whom?

Miran P. Sarkissian
Athens, Greece



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Prime Minister Pashinyan Should be Excommunicated And Arrested

With each passing day, the situation in Armenia becomes more disastrous. The country is under attack from enemies both outside and within.

Instead of addressing the multiple existential problems facing the country, Pashinyan has gone to great lengths trying to replace the Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II. No matter what problems there may be within the Church, none of them should be the Prime Minister's concern, since he is constitutionally barred from meddling in the Church's internal affairs, thus violating the provision of separation of Church and State.

I will not repeat here all of Pashinyan's illegal actions and the damage he has caused to Armenia and Artsakh, for which he should have been removed from office long ago. His pornographic Facebook posts and his backing of a defrocked priest should be sufficient reasons to excommunicate him from the Armenian Church membership. The government leader's behavior shows utter disrespect for the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The former priest was defrocked for "conduct unbecoming of a clergyman." Nevertheless, he refused to accept that decision and illegally celebrated Mass last Sunday, thus desecrating the Hovhannavank monastery. Creating a tense atmosphere, Pashinyan attended that impermissible Mass held by defrocked priest (Aram) Stepan Asatryan. Joining the Prime Minister were the Ministers of Defense and Economy, various governors, members of parliament, mayors, and city councilmen, all affiliated with Pashinyan's political party. The Prime Minister's circle had arranged to have a large number of policemen and members of the public present at the monastery to show their support for the defrocked priest. The Prime Minister received Holy Communion from the hands of the defrocked priest during the Mass, which can be considered a sacrilegious act. "Today's Mass at Hovhannavank symbolizes the start of the practical phase of the process of the liberation of Holy See of Etchmiadzin," declared Pashinyan on his Facebook page. He also announced that he will be at the same monastery next Sunday. Such provocative statements could lead to massive clashes and bloodshed, which would be entirely the Prime Minister's responsibility.

There were two unexpected incidents inside the monastery during the Mass last Sunday. One man yelled during the ceremony, saying the defrocked priest had no right to celebrate Mass. Someone rushed to cover his mouth and forcefully escort him out. Another man grabbed the Bible from the hands of the defrocked priest.

Last week, the government sent policemen to the Hovhannavank monastery to protect the defrocked priest and kick out the legitimate clergy, a violation of Armenian law. This is an abuse of power and an illegal interference in internal

church matters. The police should have done the exact opposite; they should have prevented the defrocked priest from entering the church since he is no longer a member of the clergy.

To make matters worse, the Investigative Committee, at Pashinyan's direction, demanded in writing last Saturday night that all 21 members of the clergy living in the Aragatsotn region report to the Committee's offices in Yerevan early Sunday morning. The clergy issued a joint statement refusing to comply with this order because they needed to be present at their churches on Sunday morning to celebrate mass for the worshipping public. The government is, once again, illegally interfering in church issues and preventing the clergy from carrying out their religious duties. The clergy stated that they do not wish to go to the Investigative Committee's offices without the presence of their attorneys, who are not available on Sundays.

After damaging the interests of Artsakh and Armenia, Pashinyan is now trying to destabilize the Armenian Apostolic Church, which has existed for more than 1,700 years. After announcing that he is creating the fake fourth Republic of Armenia, he may now be planning to restructure the Armenian Church.

The illegal arrests of several archbishops and dozens of other clergymen in the past months will surely be appealed to the European Court of Human Rights, which has repeatedly ruled in other countries' cases that a Church is within its rights to expel any member of the clergy who violates its internal procedures.

By refusing to accept the religious authority of the Catholicos, Pashinyan is in fact rejecting the legitimacy of all the baptisms and weddings the Catholicos has performed and all the clergymen he has ordained, effectively declaring them null and void.

Ironically, Pashinyan is openly meddling in Church affairs by misrepresenting himself as a devout member of the Armenian Apostolic Church. He has confessed that he was married neither by the Church nor by secular authorities. In other words, he has been living in sin for several decades. His partner, Anna Hakopyan, mistakenly referred to as "First Lady," uses government resources to travel with her entourage to various countries and to hold official meetings. It is not known if Pashinyan was even baptized in the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Pashinyan has so far managed to divide Armenians worldwide into several antagonistic groups: pro-Pashinyan and anti-Pashinyan clergymen, the ruling regime vs. the opposition, current vs. former leaders, Artsakhtsis vs. Hayastantsis, and Diaspora Armenians vs. natives, etc. A small nation with multiple serious problems cannot be split into so many factions. Soon, there will be nothing left. Using a divide-and-conquer tactic, Pashinyan's sinister reason for pitting everyone against each other is to ensure that his political party remains in power.

In his zeal to minimize the Church's role in Armenian society, Pashinyan's majority in parliament voted last week to close the Shoghakat TV channel controlled by the Armenian Apostolic Church. Shoghakat TV, co-financed by the Church and the government, has operated for two decades. It airs religious and educational programs and does not deal with political issues.

It appears that Stalinism is alive and well to Armenia!

Power and Legitimacy

By K. M. Greg Sarkissian

For over six centuries — between the fall of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia in 1387 and the brief independence of 1918 — the Armenian people lived without a state. Under Ottoman, Persian and later Russian rule, Armenians preserved their identity not through political power but through the Church. The Armenian Apostolic Church became not only a spiritual authority but also a guardian of culture, language and education, sustaining a sense of nationhood when no state existed.

Yet what preserves a people in captivity cannot, by itself, sustain a modern state. With the Republic of Armenia's independence in 1991, a new principle emerged: legitimacy now rests with the people. Power derives not from divine sanction or imperial appointment but from the consent of citizens, expressed through elections, laws and accountable institutions.

Today, Armenia faces the ongoing challenge of consolidating this principle. Its society is shaped by overlapping power centers — political, military, economic, cultural and religious. Each derives legitimacy from different sources. But in a democratic state, only constitutional institutions accountable to citizens should coordinate national life. When other centers of influence overstep, they threaten the balance essential to democracy.

Power and legitimacy are not the same. Power is the ability to act; legitimacy is the right to act. The Armenian Church possesses immense moral legitimacy, earned over centuries of faith and survival. But historical legitimacy does not automatically grant authority over a modern state.

The Historical Role of the Church

Armenia's modern challenges cannot be understood without its past. Under the Ottoman millet system and in Persia, Church leaders were de facto political representatives of Armenians. Independence restored political sovereignty, but Armenians inherited a tradition of ecclesiastical guardianship, not civic governance.

This history shapes both domestic and diasporan Armenian consciousness. The Church remains a central moral and cultural authority, with vast influence and resources, much of it outside the Republic's jurisdiction. Tensions emerge when this transnational religious authority seeks to shape Armenia's politics. The key question is governance: who decides the nation's priorities — the democratically elected representatives of the people or a hierarchy accountable to no electorate?

Faith itself is not the issue; the question is institutional boundaries. In a democracy, the Church's moral voice must be respected, but its political authority must be limited.

The Church in a Democratic Republic

The Armenian Apostolic Church continues to provide spiritual guidance, moral education and support to communities. Its influence strengthens national identity and civic values. But in a democracy, its authority rests on moral and social contributions — not on political intervention.

Separation of Church and state protects both institutions. The Church thrives when it acts as conscience, not government. By inspiring virtue, civic duty and compassion, it reinforces the republic without compromising independence or accountability.

When clerical authority intrudes into politics, both faith and governance suffer. Political legitimacy comes from citizen consent and accountability; religious legitimacy comes from belief and tradition. These can coexist, but only if each respects the other's boundaries.

If the Church observes governmental corruption, its role is moral advocacy, not political arbitration. It can highlight injustice, encourage transparency and promote

ethical governance — but it cannot remove officials or dictate policy. By respecting democratic processes, the Church strengthens both public trust and civic morality.

The State and the Rule of Law

A sovereign, democratic Armenia depends on the consistent application of law. Its survival rests not only on security but also on political maturity, institutional transparency and civic trust. The Republic's legitimacy requires that all citizens — clerics and laypeople alike — are equal before the law.

Recent controversies underscore this principle. Allegations of financial irregularities involving high-ranking Church figures, or clergy pressuring elected leaders to resign, highlight the dangers of blending spiritual authority with political power. Such actions undermine both faith and the democratic process. A constitutional state must reaffirm that civic responsibility applies to all, without exception.

Balancing Institutions

Armenia's endurance depends on equilibrium among its institutions. The Church must be a moral compass, not a political driver. The military must defend sovereignty, not dictate policy. Business must create prosperity, not monopolize influence. Government must coordinate among these sectors without yielding to any.

Civic education is essential. Citizens must understand that devotion to faith, culture or nation does not exempt anyone from accountability. True patriotism in a constitutional republic is expressed through law, participation and respect for the rights of others.

The Diaspora and Dual Legitimacies

The Armenian diaspora wields significant moral and material influence. Its institutions, shaped by host societies, often maintain Church-centered structures that predate modern statehood. While vital to identity, they can inadvertently perpetuate clerical authority incompatible with republican governance.

Diasporan support — financial or moral — is welcome, but political direction must come from citizens
see POWER, page 20

New Charge Brought against Jailed Opposition Mayor

By **Satenik Kaghzvantsyan**

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenian law-enforcement authorities on October 27 filed another criminal charge against the jailed opposition mayor of Gyumri stemming from his recent statement condemned by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Mayor Vartan Ghukasyan told reporters last month that Armenia should not only repair relations with Russia but also form a “union” with it similar to the European Union while preserving its “independent statehood.”

Pashinyan decried Ghukasyan’s “statement against the sovereignty of Armenia” when he spoke in the parliament on October 1. He pledged to “throw out” the mayor of the country’s second largest city from “the political and public arena.”

Pashinyan’s political allies confirmed afterwards that the premier intends to oust Ghukasyan, who became mayor in April after four opposition groups collectively defeated the ruling Civil Contract party in a local election. Their leaders accused Pashinyan of seeking to overturn the election results.

Three weeks later, Ghukasyan was arrested along with a senior local official

and six other individuals on corruption charges rejected by him as politically motivated. It emerged at the weekend that he has also been indicted under a legal clause that makes it a crime to call for a violent overthrow of the constitutional order or violation of the country’s territorial integrity.

One of Ghukasyan’s lawyers, Zaruhi Postanjyan, dismissed the new accusation, saying that the authorities should have charged Pashinyan instead of executing his order. Postanjyan claimed that they filed it also because of failing to corroborate their bribery charges leveled against her client. None of the other suspects in the bribery case has given incriminating testimony against him, she told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service.

Ghukasyan’s October 20 arrest sparked angry protests by his supporters, some of whom clashed with security forces sent from Yerevan. At least 41 of them were prosecuted for participating in “mass disturbances” and obstructing justice in a clampdown strongly condemned by the Armenian opposition. The Investigative Committee said on Saturday that 24 suspects, including two senior municipal officials, have been remanded in pre-trial custody and 15 others placed under arrest pending investigation.



Anahit Marutyan Receives 2025 TCA Dr. Nubar Berberian Trust Fund Award

WATERTOWN — The management of Tekeyan Cultural Association’s Dr. Nubar Berberian Trust Fund this week announced the Armenian student awarded in 2025 for her academic studies is Anahit Marutyan. The Armenia-born Marutyan is a student at Clark University, majoring in political science. She will graduate in 2029.

Noted journalist and Armenian activist Dr. Nubar Berberian passed away on November 23, 2016. His entire estate was bequeathed to the Tekeyan Cultural Association. The Board of Directors of the TCA decided to establish the irrevocable Dr. Nubar Berberian Trust Fund and respect his wishes students of Armenian descent who major in either international law or political science.

This is the seventh year the award has been handed out. To apply for 2026 awards, email your request to: tcadirector@aol.com.

Power and Legitimacy

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accountable to Armenia’s laws. Only those within the constitutional framework can legitimately set national priorities.

Toward a Mature Republic

A resilient Armenia rests on four pillars: the rule of law, security, political maturity and economic vitality. These allow secular and spiritual institutions to coexist with mutual respect and independence. The Church nurtures moral conscience and cultural continuity; the state ensures justice, order and prosperity.

History shows that faith can preserve a people; the future demands that reason and law preserve a state. The Church and the Republic are not adversaries — they are complementary. But their harmony requires clear boundaries, mutual respect and commitment to the public good.

Armenia must embrace the principle that power derives from legitimacy — grounded in consent, law and accountability. Only then can the promise of independence achieved in 1991 be fully realized. A state rooted in civic sovereignty, governed by law and supported by moral integrity will stand as a beacon for Armenians everywhere — a model of how an ancient people, tempered by centuries of struggle, can unite faith and freedom to secure national endurance.

(K.M. Greg Sarkissian, is a founding member of the Zoryan Institute, in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1982 and in Canada in 1984. He is the chief strategist of the Institute since 1990 and has been President since 1995. Along with his colleagues and Board Members, he has established the Genocide and Human Rights University Program in partnership with the University of Toronto. The views expressed here are solely my own and do not represent the official position of the Zoryan Institute.)

Former Azerbaijani ‘Gray Cardinal’ Accused of Plotting to kill Aliyev

By **Nate Ostiller**

In a significant escalation of the allegations against Ramiz Mehdiyev, a longtime ally of former President Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijani media has claimed that Mehdiyev planned to assassinate President Ilham Aliyev as part of a failed coup plot.

On October 14, 87-year-old Mehdiyev was arrested and charged with actions aimed at seizing state power, high treason, and the legalization of property obtained by criminal means, and remanded into pre-trial detention.

The following day, the prominent pro-government media outlet APA published a lengthy article describing how Mehdiyev, “with the support of Russia, prepared a plan for a coup d’état and proposed it to Russia through his own channels”.

The details of the alleged plan further came into focus in an article by Vesti Baku on Friday, which cited unnamed sources as saying that the plot had been almost a year in the making, and that Russian President Vladimir Putin revealed the plans to Aliyev during their meeting in Dushanbe earlier in October.

Mehdiyev’s career spanned from the Soviet era up until 2019, when Aliyev dismissed him, ostensibly to make way for the

next generation. He served as presidential aide under both Ilham Aliyev and his father Heydar, and is widely believed to have been a key figure in escalating the crack-down on independent media and civil society in Azerbaijan.

At the time of his dismissal, Mehdiyev initially appeared to stay in the good graces of the government, receiving state awards and taking on largely symbolic roles like the president of Azerbaijan’s National Academy of Sciences.

A key moment in his downfall was in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when videos of the extravagant wedding of Mehdiyev’s granddaughter went viral.

There were angry reactions at the time, with many noting the dissonance between Mehdiyev’s wealthy family blatantly violating social distancing regulations while the rest of the country was stuck at home.

Several members of Mehdiyev’s family were fined or received short jail sentences, and Mehdiyev himself was openly mocked and humiliated on state-run television. Members of his clique were then one-by-one removed from power.

The process reflected a sense of “vengeance” that the new elite was determined to inflict on the outgoing intelligentsia, an

Azerbaijani analyst told OC Media on condition of anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the subject.

Mehdiyev both likely felt disrespected by Aliyev and craved some of the power he had lost, but the notion he may have gone as far as plotting to assassinate Aliyev is probably a bit far-fetched, the analyst added.

The alleged coup plan fits neatly into an unprecedented collapse of Azerbaijan’s relations with Russia, which appear to have been mended at the same Dushanbe meeting where Putin supposedly warned Aliyev about Mehdiyev’s scheming.

The main initiator of the tension was the deadly Azerbaijan Airlines (AZAL) crash in December 2024, which killed 38 people after crash-landing in Kazakhstan. The plane, which was flying from Baku to Grozny, experienced difficulty with its radar and was then struck by fragments of Russian air-defense missiles after operators mistook the plane for a Ukrainian drone — a thesis that both Azerbaijan and much of the rest of the world accepted shortly after the crash. Putin, however, only explicitly acknowledged Russia’s responsibility during the Dushanbe meeting.

The plane crash figures into different versions of the coup plot.

In Vesti Baku’s more sensational version, Mehdiyev, along with General Najmeddin Sadikov, planned to take out Aliyev as he was flying to a meeting in Saint Petersburg, a trip that coincided almost exactly with the doomed AZAL flight. According to the official version of the events, Aliyev learned about the AZAL crash on his way to Russia and abruptly went back to Azerbaijan.

However, the anonymous source cited by Baku Vesti claimed that the coup plotters mistook the AZAL jet for Aliyev’s plane and targeted it with air-defense missiles.

The source did not specify exactly what happened over the following ten months as Aliyev and other Azerbaijani officials re-

Aida Aznavour-Garvarentz Dies at 102

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remained close throughout their lives, with Charles often referring to Aida as one of his life’s steady anchors and his family’s memory.

Aida’s life was a bridge between generations - a witness to a century of change, creativity, and resilience. She carried forward the values that defined the Aznavour family: kindness, loyalty, humility, and a strong belief in the power of art and humanity.

The Aznavour Family shares the following statement: “Our hearts are heavy with grief, yet full of gratitude for the years we had with Aida. Her love and warmth will remain with us always. In her passing, we honour not only a beloved sister and aunt but a life lived with dignity and devotion.”

She was laid to rest in the family’s burial place in Montfort-l’Amaury, beside her family members and husband.