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## Armenian Opposition Condemns Defense Spending Cut Planned By Government

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Opposition lawmakers condemned on Friday, September 26, the Armenian government's plans to cut its defense expenditures by more than 15 percent next year, saying that they represent yet another unilateral concession to Azerbaijan.

The government's draft 2026 budget unveiled the previous day calls for 563 billion drams (\$1.47 billion) in funding for Armenia's armed forces, down from 665 billion drams allocated for this year. The proposed reduction contrasts with Azerbaijan's plans to continue boosting spending on defense and national security which is projected to total \$5 billion in 2025.

Tigran Abrahamyan, a parliament deputy from the opposition Pativ Unem bloc, described it as a "gift" to Baku and a message to the effect that "Armenia lacks the political will to resist and fight."

"Azerbaijani troops continue to remain in the sovereign territory of Armenia, a large number of issues in negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan have not yet been resolved in any way or are left in limbo without deadlines, and Azerbaijan clearly states that it relies primarily on force and acts from a position of force," Abrahamyan told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

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## Israeli Academics, Cultural Figures Voice Support For Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM (Public Radio of Armenia) — In an unprecedented show of solidarity, a group of 20 prominent Israeli academics, jurists, and cultural figures on September 25 issued a public statement backing the Armenian community of Jerusalem in its struggle to protect the historic Armenian Quarter from what they describe as "alarming developments," Jerusalemit Armenian journalist Kegham Balian reported.

The signatories, including some of Israel's most respected scholars and public intellectuals, expressed it was their "moral and civic duty" to speak out over a controversial 2021 lease agreement between the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the private company Xana Gardens. The deal, signed without consultation with the local Armenian community, grants the company 98-year exclusive rights over the "Cows' Garden," the last remaining open space in the Old City that has long served as a communal area for residents.

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Armenian Quarter and Tower of David, Jerusalem, Israel. Rooftop view of the Armenian Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem, Israel, featuring the Tower of David in the background

## Pashinyan Again Criticizes Aliyev's Use of 'Zangezur Corridor' Phrasing During United Nations Speech

By Xandie (Alexandra) Kuenning

During a speech at the 80th session of the UN General Assembly, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan hit back at Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's continued use of the term "Zangezur corridor," emphasizing that in Armenia, it is perceived as a territorial claim and is associated with "conflict narrative."

"I think it makes sense for my Azerbaijani counterpart to clarify what he means by using that expression, because in the Armenian reality it is perceived as a territorial claim on Armenia and is associated with conflict narrative," Pashinyan said during his Saturday speech, adding that "such narratives do not increase people's faith in peace; nor do they stem from the atmosphere of peace and the agreements reached at the highest level."

Pashinyan also addressed Aliyev's prior comments about the "alleged capitulation of Armenia."

"To be frank, I do not understand, in the presence of such a huge positive content, achieved through joint heavy efforts, why engage [in] aggressive subtexts that are not connected with objective reality. Doesn't peace bring enough joy and satisfaction? To me, for example, it does," Pashinyan said, adding that Armenia is "a democratic state that is developing at an impressive pace, independent, sovereign, and building its own future today, a state that does not harbor or spread hatred to-



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan speaking at the 80th session of the UN General Assembly (official photo)

wards its neighbors or towards anyone."

"I invite the attention of the international community to the fact that the so-called "Zangezur corridor" and similar narratives do not stem from the agreements reached, have no connection with the agreements, have an irritating and negative impact, and are perceived as a territorial claim against a sovereign country, despite the agreements reached and declared," Pashinyan emphasized.

"But this will certainly not divert us one millimeter from the practice of celebrating the peace achieved and implementing the agreements declared," he concluded, regarding Aliyev's comments.

Pashinyan spent the majority of his Saturday address speaking about the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process, noting the progress that had been made since his last UN speech in 2024.

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## Armenian Government Still Reluctant to Disclose Karabakh Peace Plans

By Astghik Bedevian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia's leadership remains reluctant to publicize past international proposals to end the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in response to calls by former President Levon Ter-Petrosian and other opposition leaders blaming it for the 2020 war with Azerbaijan.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan claimed last December that all of the peace plans drafted by the US, Russian and French co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group from 1994 onwards were about "returning Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan." Ter-Petrosian responded by challenging him to make them public along with Yerevan's official responses to them. Pashinyan said that he is ready to do that, but that his administration has still not managed to find those documents.

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Enthusiastic Crowd Enjoys Opening of "The Art of Disruption"

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## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Armenia to Host 2026 Eurovision Young Musicians

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Eurovision Young Musicians classical music competition will be held in Armenia on June 6, 2026. The decision was made by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and Armenia's Public Television and announced on September 3.

"This is a great honor for Armenia to host talented young performers from different countries. We are delighted to welcome gifted young musicians to our beautiful country and together celebrate classical music," noted the statement from the Public Television of Armenia.

### Karabakh Section Still Missing from MFA Website

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has confirmed that work on cataloguing negotiation documents related to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is still ongoing. It has now been more than nine months since Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan instructed the foreign minister to register all negotiation documents archived within the ministry.

In addition, the "Nagorno-Karabakh Issue" section of the MFA's official website remains inaccessible. Its title is visible, but there is no content.

In 2024, Elchin Amirbekov, Azerbaijan's special envoy, said Baku did not accept the MFA's wording describing "Artsakh as an inseparable part of historical Armenia."

Last year, MFA spokesperson Ani Badalyan told RFE/RL the section had not been removed and would become available "within a reasonable timeframe." She did not specify when. As of now, the content has been missing for over a year and a half.

### Mirzoyan Meets Ukrainian Foreign Minister in Warsaw

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha in Warsaw on September 30. Mirzoyan announced the meeting on social media.

"I had a substantive conversation with my counterpart Andriy Sybiha. We agreed to advance Armenia-Ukraine cooperation and broaden our bilateral agenda. I also briefed him on the peace efforts in the South Caucasus," the post reads.

Mirzoyan also emphasized the importance of peace in Ukraine.

"The sides exchanged views on the current situation," the post added.

Mirzoyan was attending the Warsaw Security Forum, where he has held several meetings with fellow foreign ministers.

# Two Years in a Baku Prison: Facts About Ruben Vardanyan's 'Case'

On September 27, 2023, during the forced displacement of thousands of Artsakh Armenians to Armenia, Ruben Vardanyan, a well-known philanthropist and humanitarian, was arrested near the Hakkari Bridge by Azerbaijani authorities and transferred to a prison in Baku. Vardanyan had briefly served as State Minister of the Republic of Artsakh from November 4, 2022 to February 23, 2023. After being dismissed from office, he chose to remain in Artsakh in order to stand by its people during the blockade.

Following Ruben Vardanyan's arrest in late September and early October 2023, several other prominent figures from Artsakh were also detained by Azerbaijani authorities, including Davit Babayan, former Foreign Minister of Artsakh; Levon Mnatsakanyan, former Defense Minister of Artsakh; Davit Manukyan, former Deputy Commander of the Artsakh Defense Army; former presidents Arkadi Ghukasyan, Bako Sahakyan, Arayik Harutyunyan; and Davit Ishkhanyan, Speaker of the Artsakh Parliament.

On April 5, 2024, Ruben Vardanyan declared a hunger strike in Baku prison, demanding his and other unlawfully detained Armenian prisoners' immediate and unconditional release. He continued the strike until April 24, Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. It was later revealed that he had been subjected to torture throughout the hunger strike.

On June 13, 2024, Ruben Vardanyan's international legal team submitted an urgent appeal to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, reporting acts of torture and inhumane treatment inflicted on him by the Azerbaijani government.

In November 2024, Ruben Vardanyan's international attorney Jared Genser announced that the Prosecutor General's Office of Azerbaijan had denied him entry to Baku, violating international legal norms.

On December 16, 2024, Ruben Vardanyan's legal team revealed that around 42 potential charges had been filed against him. If convicted, he could face life imprisonment. The charges are based on 20 different articles of Azerbaijan's Criminal Code. The fabricated "evidence" spans 422 volumes — more than 105,000 pages, all in Azerbaijani. No proper translation or reasonable time has been provided for review.

On December 28, 2024, Azerbaijan's Prosecutor General announced that the cases of 16 Armenian prisoners were being

transferred to court.

On January 16, 2025, Ruben Vardanyan managed to send a message through his family, declaring that, since the day of his arrest, he had never testified, that all documents bearing his signature were forged, and that both his lawyer and translator had been forced to sign those documents.

On January 17, 2025, Amnesty International responded to Ruben Vardanyan's statement, urging the Azerbaijani authorities to ensure his right to a fair trial.

On January 17, 2025, nearly one year and five months after his unlawful detention, a so-called "trial" began at the Baku Military Court. Although Azerbaijani authorities had promised "open trials," only the state-run AZERTAC media outlet was allowed access. All requests from independent international observers to attend were denied or ignored.

Ruben Vardanyan's case is being tried separately from the other Artsakh leaders. In the very first session, Vardanyan requested to merge his case with the others, but the court rejected this and all of his other motions.

On January 19, 2025, Ruben Vardanyan announced a second hunger strike in protest of the ongoing judicial farce. "This so-called 'trial' is not just against me. It is an attempt to criminalize all Armenians — all those who supported and demonstrated compassion toward Artsakh and its people, all those who showed compassion. This is an attack on an entire nation. I refuse to participate in this farce." The hunger strike lasted 23 days, severely weakening him, but it succeeded in drawing international attention to the sham trial being conducted in Azerbaijan.

On March 12, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning Azerbaijan's inhuman treatment of Armenian detainees and demanding their immediate and unconditional release.

On March 7, 2025, during a Red Cross-facilitated phone call, Vardanyan managed to send a lengthy and first-ever voice message to his family, making several key statements and emphasizing that

"this trial is not just about me and 15 others — all Armenians are on trial."

On June 5, 2025, Ruben Vardanyan's lawyer in Baku, Abraham Berman, issued a statement highlighting that criminal liability must be based on specific acts committed by an individual at a certain time and place, under conditions that made the act possible.

On July 11, 2025, lawyer Siranush Sahakyan, a representative of the interests of Armenian prisoners of war at the European Court of Human Rights, published a report detailing severe violations of Ruben Vardanyan's rights in the Baku court. She concluded that the result was a fundamentally unjust legal process, depriving the defense of any realistic opportunity to contest the charges or prove innocence.

As of September 3, 2025, at the request of Azerbaijani authorities, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) officially announced its withdrawal from Azerbaijan. The ICRC was the only international organization authorized to visit Armenian detainees in Baku.

Since the beginning of the trial on January 17, 2025, there have been 36 court sessions over more than eight months. Throughout this time, no evidence has been presented proving Ruben Vardanyan committed any crimes personally. Moreover, many of the actions he is accused of would have been impossible for him to commit during the alleged timeframes. All so-called "witnesses" testified that they had never seen or known Vardanyan and had only heard about him through the media.



Ruben Vardanyan

## Armenian Opposition Condemns Planned Defense Spending Cut

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Artur Khachatrian, a lawmaker representing the opposition Hayastan bloc, went further, saying that with the defense spending cut Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is "executing Azerbaijan's order." He cited Azerbaijani officials' earlier claims that Armenia's "militarization" is one of the obstacles to peace between the two countries.

"The reality is that [Azerbaijani President Ilham] Aliyev has ... threatened many times that he will not tolerate the growth of Armenia's military potential and alleged a 'militarization' of Armenia, even though there is no militarization and Armenia is just restoring its lost potential," said Khachatrian.

"Nobody [from Azerbaijan] has made such a demand which we have taken into account and based on that made such a

decision," countered Alen Simonian, the parliament speaker and a senior member of Pashinyan's Civil Contract party.

For his part, Deputy Defense Minister Arman Sargsyan downplayed the spending cut, saying that it will not affect ongoing defense "reforms" declared by the government. But he declined to say whether it will have an impact on further arms acquisitions for the Armenian military.

Armenia's defense spending has risen steadily and significantly since the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Pashinyan first signaled his intention to reverse this trend about two weeks after an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty was initiated during his talks with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev hosted by US President Donald Trump in Washington on August 8. Pashinyan has

since repeatedly claimed that that put an end to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

His domestic critics argue that Aliyev did not drop his preconditions for signing the treaty. They also say that even if the peace deal is signed, it will not preclude further Azerbaijani military attacks on Armenia.

In what the critics see as another blow to national defense, the Armenian Defense Ministry drafted legislation earlier this month that would shorten compulsory military service in the country from two years to 18 months. The measure, if approved by the parliament, will likely downsize Armenia's conscription-based army which is already grappling with recruitment problems. Pashinyan declared on September 15 that the army must be the least important tool for ensuring the country's security.

# Putin Praises Russian-Armenian Ties

MOSCOW (Azatutyun) — Russian-Armenian relations are growing “in all areas,” Russian President Vladimir Putin told Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during talks held in the Kremlin on Thursday night, September 25.

The two men met there following the World Atomic Week forum in Moscow hosted by Putin and attended by several other heads of state and government.

“Overall, the [Russian-Armenian] relationship is developing, developing progressively and well,” Putin said in his opening remarks at the meeting.

He pointed to Russia’s increased trade with Armenia which reached, according to Russian government data, a new record high of \$11.7 billion last year.

“Our relationship is developing in all other areas as well,” Putin went on. “We always have something to talk about, even though we only saw each other recently. But we are nevertheless very happy to see you in Moscow.”

Pashinyan also spoke of “systematically” deepening bilateral ties and said he has “a lot to discuss” with Putin. Neither the Kremlin nor the Armenian government reported any details of their ensuing conversation.

Putin and Pashinyan previously met on August 31 on the sidelines of a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in the Chinese city of Tianjin. It was their

allowed about 100 Armenians to demonstrate on Thursday outside the Armenian Embassy in Moscow in protest against Pashinyan’s visit. The protesters, among

Church.

The Tianjin talks came less than a month after Pashinyan pledged to let the United States administer a transit corridor for Azerbaijan during White House talks with US President Donald Trump and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. Although the deal is seen by analysts as another blow to Russian presence in Armenia, Russia’s public reaction to it has been cautious so far. The issue is believed to have been high on the agenda of Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk’s August 20 visit to Yerevan. Following that visit, Overchuk renewed Moscow’s warnings about severe economic consequences of Yerevan’s declared desire to eventually join the European Union. He reiterated that Armenian exporters would lose their tariff-free access to the Russian market in that case.

Pashinyan appeared to defy those warnings when he addressed on September 20 a congress of his Civil Contract party. He said his administration will step up “efforts aimed at Armenia’s accession to the European Union.”

According to official statistics, Russia accounted for over 35 percent of Armenia’s foreign trade in the first half of this year, compared with the EU’s 12 percent share.



Russian President Vladimir Putin meets Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in the Kremlin, Moscow, September 25, 2025

first face-to-face encounter in almost a year, a fact underscoring lingering tensions between Moscow and Yerevan. In another sign of those tensions, Russian authorities

them several priests, chanted “Nikol enemy!” and held up posters condemning Pashinyan’s controversial efforts to depose the top clergy of the Armenian Apostolic

## Armenian Government Still Reluctant to Disclose Karabakh Peace Plans

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His office told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service in January that he instructed the Armenian Foreign Ministry to “inventory the negotiation papers available at the ministry” for their possible publication. It said the prime minister will decide whether or not to publicize them after assessing the matter “from the standpoint of Armenia’s national security interests.”

The Foreign Ministry declined to clarify on Monday, September 29, whether it has

finally put together the peace plans. It said only that the “work” assigned to it by Pashinyan is still not over.

Ruben Rubinyan, an Armenian parliament vice-speaker and senior member of the ruling Civil Contract party, assured reporters that the authorities in Yerevan have no “political inhibitions” on that score. But he would not say why they have still not disclosed the full text of the Minsk Group documents.

Ter-Petrosian renewed his calls last week

following Pashinyan’s furious reaction to his September 22 statement blaming the premier for the six-week war and accusing him of “sacrificing” 5,000 Armenian lives. Other opposition leaders have their voice to the calls.

Most of the peace plans were based on so-called Madrid Principles originally put forward by the US, Russian and French mediators in 2007. This draft framework agreement, repeatedly modified in the following decade, upheld the Karabakh Armenians’ right to self-determination while calling for their withdrawal from seven Azerbaijani districts around Karabakh fully or partially occupied in the early 1990s. Karabakh’s internationally recognized status would be determined through a future referendum.

The Minsk Group co-chairs presented the conflicting sides with an updated version of the proposed peace deal in 2019, one year after Pashinyan came to power. The premier reluctantly acknowledged this fact in February after repeated denials.

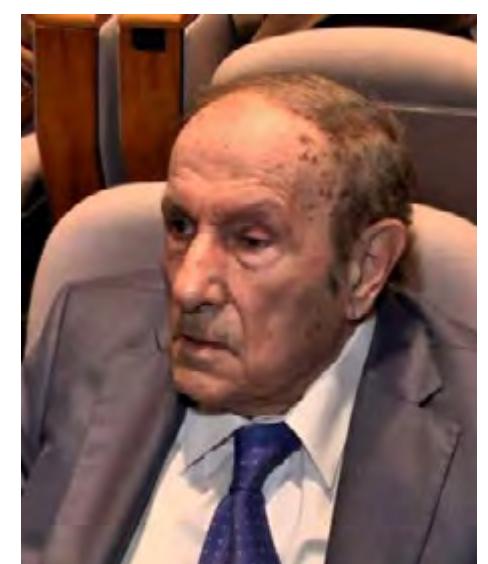
Pashinyan also admitted late last month that he rejected that plan. He claimed that its implementation would have led to the “loss of Armenia’s independence and statehood.”

Armenian opposition leaders maintain that Pashinyan’s failure to accept the plan paved the way for the disastrous 2020 war and Azerbaijan’s subsequent recapture of Karabakh. Some of them seized upon his admission to accuse him of deliberately provoking the six-week war that left at least 3,800 Armenian soldiers dead.

Speaking to Factor.am earlier this month, Arman Yeghoyan, another senior pro-government lawmaker, said that the 2019 plan did not meet “the expectations of our people at the time.” He said it only called for the Armenian withdrawal from five of the seven Azerbaijani districts and the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh.

“There would be Russian guarantees, not international guarantees [for Karabakh],” added Yeghoyan.

But Levon Zurabyan, the deputy chairman of Ter-Petrosian’s Armenian National Congress party, insisted that the



Former President Levon Ter-Petrosian attends a conference in Yerevan, September 24, 2025

plan rejected by Pashinyan was highly favorable for the Armenian side.

“Had it been implemented, we would ... have returned only five districts to Azerbaijan and a full-fledged peace would have been established with peacekeeping forces and so on,” said Zurabyan. “The question of determining Nagorno-Karabakh’s status was tied to the Kelbajar and Lachin districts. If Azerbaijan were to get Kelbajar back it, would have to make major concessions on the question of Karabakh’s status.”

Igor Popov, a former Russian mediator, made a similar point in 2021 in response to Pashinyan’s criticism of the Minsk Group proposals. Popov argued that under the 2019 plan, Karabakh would have an internationally recognized interim status and retain control of Lachin and Kelbajar pending the future referendum on the region’s status.

Later in 2021, another former Armenian president, Serzh Sargsyan, publicized the secretly recorded audio of a 2019 meeting during which Pashinyan said he opposes the plan because it would not immediately formalize Karabakh’s secession from Azerbaijan. Pashinyan also said he is ready to “play the fool or look a bit insane” in order to avoid such a settlement.

## Pashinyan Again Rules Out Seeking Return of Karabakh Refugees

By Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan again made it clear on Tuesday, September 30, that his government will not press Azerbaijan to enable Nagorno-Karabakh’s ethnic Armenian population displaced by the 2023 Azerbaijani offensive to return to its homeland.

Speaking at the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), Pashinyan said that discussing the repatriation of the Karabakh Armenians and other refugees from the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict would be “dangerous for the peace process.”

“As for our compatriots who are refugees from Karabakh, our understanding of this issue is that with our support and that of the international community, Karabakh refugees should settle down in Armenia ... and we envision the future of our compatriots from Karabakh in Armenia and with Armenian citizenship,” he said.

Answering a question from a non-Armenian member of the Strasbourg-based body, Pashinyan reiterated that he believes the return of the Karabakh refugees is “not realistic.”

“I consider the topic of the return of all refugees in this context to be danger-

ous for the peace process because the Karabakh conflict began with seemingly simple humanitarian issues and escalated into a long-term conflict,” he said.

Pashinyan already told the refugees to stop hoping to return to Karabakh ten days after his August 8 talks with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev hosted by US President Donald Trump. A draft Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty initiated at the White House says nothing about Karabakh and the rights of its displaced residents.

More than 100,000 Karabakh Armenians, the region’s virtually entire remaining population, fled to Armenia in the space of a week following Azerbaijan’s September 2023 assault condemned by the US and the European Union.

Azerbaijan denies forcing the Karabakh Armenians to flee their homes and says they can live there under Azerbaijani rule. Karabakh’s leaders and ordinary residents rejected such an option even before the exodus. Some of those leaders have said that only ‘international guarantees’ could convince the refugees to return home.

Yerevan has refused to seek such guarantees. Even before the Washington talks, Pashinyan made it clear that the Karabakh issue is closed for his administration.



The Hrant Dink Forest in Fioletovo

# ATP Writes a New Chapter for Forest Governance In Armenia at Fioletovo's Hrant Dink Forest

The Hrant Dink Memorial Forest was planted in 2007 by Armenia Tree Project (ATP), to honor the legacy of Hrant Dink, a Turkish-Armenian journalist known for his advocacy of justice, truth-telling, and reconciliation.

ATP, one of the earliest environmental NGOs founded in post-Soviet Armenia, has long worked at the intersection of environmental restoration and social healing. Its mission goes beyond tree planting; it supports environmental justice and stewardship while engaging communities in reforestation and afforestation efforts that reflect local needs and conditions.

Over the past two decades, the forest, composed of native species like *Pinus sylvestris*, has grown into a healthy ecosystem, delivering essential services such as erosion control, climate regulation, and biodiversity conservation. It stands as proof of what long-term environmental planning and community engagement can achieve.

Located near the village of Fioletovo, the forest's evolution highlights the power of aligning ecological goals with sustained community involvement. In 2027, nearly 20 years after planting, ATP will transfer the management of the 11-hectare forest to the municipality, marking the first case in Armenia where a community assumes long-term stewardship of a reforested area. This transition, from centralized oversight to local ownership, positions the village residents as the forest's future caretakers.

Hrant Dink (1954–2007) was a Turkish-Armenian journalist and human rights advocate known for his efforts to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual understanding between Armenians and Turks. His lifelong commitment to justice and human rights resonates deeply with the belief that access to a healthy environment, like forests, is a fundamental right essential to

dignity, peace, and a shared future.

The Hrant Dink Memorial Forest is not only an ecological achievement; it is a living symbol of that vision. Just as he envisioned healing historical wounds and building bridges between peoples, the forest embodies a commitment to remembrance, regeneration, and reconciliation.

## Why Fioletovo?

Fioletovo is a unique village in Lori Province, home to a community of Malakans, a Russian community that fled persecution in the 19th century. Known for their pacifism, simplicity, and deep respect for nature, the Malakans bring a distinctive ethic of stewardship that aligns closely with the principles of sustainable forest management.

Their values, self-reliance, communal decision-making, and harmony with the environment, make them natural stewards of the land. Fioletovo's role in this initiative also highlights the cultural diversity and capacity of Armenia's rural communities.

The mayor of the village expressed during recent consultations: "This forest is not just trees. It's a part of our village." He also expressed the municipality's hope to expand the forested area in the future, signaling a deeper, long-term commitment to environmental stewardship.

## Community Ownership and Stewardship: A first in Armenia

Community-led forest management is nonexistent in Armenia. Most forests are administered by national entities. This handover represents a structural shift: recognizing that those who live closest to the land are often best equipped to manage it. Moreover, because the land is already owned by the municipality, the transition is not only symbolic but also legally and administratively sound.

Between the years of 2025 and 2026, ATP will prepare the community of Fioletovo through capacity building and the development of a 10-year forest management plan. This collaborative approach will ensure that the village is equipped to care for the forest independently and sustainably.

To ensure a smooth transition, ATP in collaboration with the local community, will be developing a ten-year forest management plan tailored to the needs of Fioletovo. The plan will aim to keep the forest ecologically healthy, socially beneficial, and economically viable. It will include practical strategies for forest maintenance such as selective thinning, pruning, erosion control, and protection from pests and diseases. It will also address fire prevention, climate resilience, and soil conservation. Early detection of stressors and prompt response measures will be built into the management structure.

A key component of the transition will be building of the capacity of Fioletovo residents to manage the forest. ATP will implement a series of training and education activities to ensure local knowledge and skills are strengthened.

ATP Ohanian Training Center in the nearby village of Margahovit will serve as a hub for education. Training modules will cover sustainable forest management, fire prevention, forest governance principles and use of non-wood forest products. Other sessions will address topics such as alternative sources of energy and heating, forest-based entrepreneurship, rural tourism, and climate adaptation.

To promote inclusive participation, women, youth, and marginalized groups will be engaged in the training process. Forest management strategies will incorporate diverse perspectives to support equitable and practical outcomes. In addition, workers from the village involved in forest

activities within Dilijan National Park will also be encouraged to attend the training, ensuring their experience and insights contribute to the process.

## Looking Ahead

For ATP, tree planting has always represented more than land restoration, it is an act of healing. Just as Hrant Dink envisioned mending fractured relationships between peoples, ATP sees reforestation as a path to regenerate ecosystems and rebuild trust between communities and across borders. Since 2007, ATP has planted more than 35 new forests across Armenia, all of which are established on land owned by local communities. This approach ensures long-term protection and community engagement. In the coming years, the model adopted in Fioletovo will be applied in other villages as well, laying the groundwork for a national shift toward decentralized forest stewardship.

The memory of Hrant Dink lives on not only in the trees that bear his name but, in the people who tend them. As Fioletovo takes on this responsibility, it offers a hopeful model of participatory, local-led forest governance, and serves as a model that can be replicated. In the face of growing environmental challenges, decentralized and inclusive governance may prove increasingly essential. This transition marks a meaningful step forward in sustainable land management in Armenia and potentially beyond.

The handover of the Hrant Dink Memorial Forest represents more than a shift in responsibility. It is a new paradigm for conservation, rooted in justice, local agency, and community identity. It is a testament to the idea that forests, like peace, can be cultivated when people come together around a shared vision.

## INTERNATIONAL

# Pashinyan Again Criticizes Aliyev's Use of 'Zangezur Corridor' Phrasing During United Nations Speech

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Among the highlights listed, he named in particular the ratification of the joint activities of the demarcation commissions, which was the first bilateral international document signed and ratified between Armenia and Azerbaijan; the draft peace agreement agreed upon in March and initialed in August in Washington; and the Washington Declaration witnessed by US President Trump, which introduced the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP).

"What does all this mean? All this means, and I am happy to report to the entire international community, that peace has been established between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan," Pashinyan said.

He then went on to emphasise Trump's role in the peace negotiations.

"This is why we agreed with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev on our joint decision to nominate President Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, because we have seen through our own example that President Trump is truly committed to the idea of peace," Pashinyan added.

While stating that peace had been established, Pashinyan also stressed that work needed to continue in the same vein.

"Peace requires daily care, like a newborn baby, to be protected from infections, the cold and the heat, the indifference, and the pessimism," he said.

Pashinyan also spoke about the increased positive dialogue between Armenia and

Turkey, noting that his meetings with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan "are regular, with a continuously growing level of trust."

"This is an achievement that I highly value and am confident will bring positive results in the foreseeable future, namely the establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey and the full opening of the interstate border," he said.

He then discussed the newly-established diplomatic relations between Armenia and Pakistan, noting that dialogue was "taking place."

Pashinyan also touched upon relations with Iran and Georgia, claiming Armenia's dialogue and brotherhood with the two nations was "becoming more visible."

"These relations, along with our relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, are extremely important for seeing the South Caucasus region as a peaceful, stable, and developing environment," Pashinyan said.

"In this sense, I also value the 3+3 format, which is an important platform for us to engage in dialogue with the countries of our region and to develop our traditional dialogue with the Russian Federation, although we always have active contacts with Russia in a bilateral format," he added.

The 3+3 format meetings include Turkey, Iran, and Russia on one side, and Armenia, Azerbaijan, and, theoretically, Georgia on the other. However, Georgia has declined to join the format, citing Russia's participation. This format was put forward by the presidents of Azerbaijan and Turkey at

the end of 2020 following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Finally, Pashinyan noted the recent strategic partnership established with China, as well as Armenia's intentions to intensify relations with India, Japan, Mongolia, the Middle East, and Central Asian countries.

"A balanced and balancing foreign policy opens up new horizons for us," Pashinyan emphasized.

In this same vein, Pashinyan also spoke on Armenia's commitment to joining the EU, calling the law on starting the accession process "an incentive for us to consistently continue the democratic reforms."

"If they accept us, fine. If they do not, we will have accomplished a very important task set before us: Armenia will be a country that complies with the advanced modern standards," Pashinyan said.

"Our aspiration to comply with European Union standards is a matter of not geopolitical, but rather democratic choice," he continued.

Pashinyan also re-stated his government's plans to initiate a nationwide referendum to adopt a new constitution if his party won the upcoming 2026 parliamentary elections.

He concluded his speech by noting the upcoming international events being hosted by Armenia in the coming year, including the 8th Summit of the European Political Community and the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

(This article originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on September 27.)

## INTERNATIONAL

## Armenian, Turkish Ministers Meet

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — On September 30, Armenia's Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Arsen Torosyan met with Turkey's Minister of Family and Social Services Mahinur Özdemir Göktas, in Belgrade, within the framework of the RISE 2025 conference.

The two discussed several issues of mutual interest in the field of social protection. According to the report, "the parties spoke about sectoral priorities in both countries and the ongoing work in those areas. They emphasized the importance of expanding the scope and improving the quality of social services."

The meeting also addressed the Armenia-Turkey normalization process.

## Armenian FM, Top NATO Official Discuss 'Trump Route'

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan on Monday, September 29, had a meeting with NATO Deputy Secretary General Radmila Shekerinska. The meeting took place on the margins of the Warsaw Security Forum, the Foreign Ministry reported.

The officials discussed the possibilities for expanding the partnership between Armenia and NATO, emphasizing the mutual interest in shaping a more ambitious agenda.

Satisfaction was expressed with the recent visit of the ambassadors of NATO member states to Yerevan, as well as with Armenia's participation in NATO peacekeeping missions.

Touching upon the regional developments, Mirzoyan and Shekerinska exchanged views on the importance of the Washington agreements in the establishment of peace and on the implementation of the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" connectivity project.

## Baku Bashes Armenia at CIS Games Opening

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The official opening ceremony of the third Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) took place in the Azerbaijani city of Ganja on September 29, attended by President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva.

The event was used by Baku not only for sporting purposes but also for political messaging. The theatrical program included anti-Armenian elements, Factor.am reported.

According to Azerbaijani media, part of the show was dedicated to the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and Azerbaijan's victory. It featured the "Iron Fist" monument symbolizing Aliyev's "fist," along with the number "44" as a reference to the war's outcome.

Delegations from Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan participated in the CIS Games, along with athletes from Turkey, Pakistan, Oman, Cuba and Kuwait.

# Pashinyan Meets with PACE Head in Strasbourg

STRASBOURG (Panorama.am) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with Theodoros Rousopoulos, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), at the Palace of Europe in Strasbourg on Monday, September 29.

He was welcomed at the entrance by the PACE head and PACE Secretary General Despina Chatzivassiliou, after which Nikol Pashinyan made a note in the PACE President's Golden Book and took a short tour, the Armenian government reported.

During the meeting, the agenda of cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the Council of Europe was discussed, highlighting the reforms being

implemented to develop democratic institutions, protect human rights and strengthen the rule of law. Pashinyan emphasized the readiness of his government to continue effective cooperation with various bodies of the Council of Europe.

The parties also touched upon the working relations established with PACE, as well as cooperation in the sphere of monitoring. The interlocutors emphasized that the deepening of the Armenia-Council of Europe partnership is important for both institutional resilience and integration processes with the European legal area.

The agenda of the current PACE session was touched upon. Pashinyan thanked Rousopoulos for the high-level hospitality

and constant support, emphasizing that Armenia appreciates the role of the Council of Europe in promoting the peace agenda in the region, the protection of fundamental freedoms, and the improvement of the efficiency of the judicial system.

The parties reaffirmed their readiness to continue the dialogue and expand practical cooperation.

The parties highlighted the initialization of the peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan on August 8 in Washington and expressed confidence that the establishment of peace will give a significant impetus to the development of cooperation and ensuring stability in the region.



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, at right, meets with PACE President Theodoros Rousopoulos

# Azerbaijani Petrol Tycoon Adnan Ahmadzada Arrested For ‘Contaminating’ Crude from Different Sources

By Aytan Farhadova

Azerbaijan has arrested petrol tycoon Adnan Ahmadzada, a former SOCAR official. While the authorities have yet to reveal the charges pressed against him, pro-government media has claimed that he was detained for contaminating Azerbaijani petrol with other sources, in addition to highlighting his alleged ties to Russia.

Baku's Sabail District Court remanded Ahmadzada to four months of pre-trial detention on Saturday, September 27, reportedly for contaminating Azerbaijani petrol with crude from different sources.

Ahmadzada's lawyer, Shaig Mirzayev, has refused to reveal the charges pressed against his client.

“When a case is under investigation, the entire process must be kept confidential,” he said, adding that the trial was being held behind closed doors.

Mirzayev added that Ahmadzada was in good health, and had not been subjected to physical violence as of the date of publication.

However, despite the authorities not officially disclosing his charges, several Azerbaijani pro-government media outlets have covered his case and dealings extensively.

According to the pro-government media outlet Qafqazinfo, Ahmadzada is accused of undermining economic security and, specifically, embezzlement on an especially large scale. The criminal case is being handled by Azerbaijan's State Security Service (SSS).

Several other outlets have also reported that Ahmadzada might be implicated in mixing Azeri Light Oil with other products.

News of Azerbaijani Light Oil being contaminated surfaced in July, with Reuters reporting that Austrian energy group OMV has found organic chloride contamination in Azerbaijani products.

Azeri Light oil prices dropped, and its shipment from Turkey's BTC Ceyhan terminal was disrupted.

However, the pro-government media outlet APA cited BP as saying that crude products at Ceyhan meet accepted standards, with the head of BP Azerbaijan's press service telling the outlet that the issue had “already been resolved.”

Qafqazinfo reported that contamination affected the price of the Azeri Light crude oil fell from \$75 to \$68.31, a decrease of \$6.69 per barrel. As a result, Azerbaijan's export revenues for July fell by \$2.01 billion.

In the same article, entitled “How did Ahmadzada become Russified?”, Qafqaz-

info went into details about Ahmadzada's alleged connections with Russia, and how he had aided Russia and Iran in evading Western sanctions.

In response to pro-government media coverage of the case, Ahmadzada's lawyer, Mirzayev, told OC Media that ‘what was written in the media is their responsibility. I cannot say more about it’. He added that Ahmadzada was willing to cooperate with the investigative authorities.

## An Expansive Network

According to a variety of media sources from Azerbaijan and abroad, Ahmadzada appears to be deeply embedded in Azerbaijan's petrol business and was involved in transporting Russian petrol to the EU.

Caviar-diplomacy.net has suggested that Ahmadzada was in-the-know about SOCAR's inner dealings, having close connections with several high-ranking figures in the company, including former SOCAR

and sale of petroleum products, through the companies ABDA Invest Holding and Alkagesta. According to the Maltese news outlet, Alkagesta, which was registered in Malta in 2018, is the largest bunkering company supplying marine fuels in the country, and is currently being investigated by the EU and UK authorities for trading Russian oil in Europe.

According to the Azerbaijani independent media outlet Meydan TV, Alkagesta was founded by Kamran Aghayev, who is a “close relative” of Ahmadzada. The outlet wrote that Aghayev is the director of Caspian Oil and Gas, which “not only has offices in Azerbaijan and the UAE, but also in Moscow.” They have additionally cited the company's website as listing Russia's largest petrol company, Tatneft, and petrochemical company Sibur as its strategic partners.

Earlier in September, the EU's sanc-



SOCAR President Rovshan Najaf (first from right to left), Barcelona President Joan Laporta, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and arrested billionaire Adnan Ahmadzada during a visit in March 2025. Official photo.

head Rovnaq Abdullayev, through the latter's cousin, Anar Alizada (formerly Aliyev). According to the outlet, Ahmadzada and Alizada are co-founders of Socar Trading, SA, a subsidiary company of SOCAR, which is registered in Switzerland and exports crude products from Turkey's Ceyhan terminal.

While Adnan Ahmadzada had formally left SOCAR Trading, anti-corruption project Anticor has reported that his elder brother, Khayal Ahmadzada, is currently serving as the company's vice president of business development.

The Malta Herald has also claimed that although Ahmadzada was no longer a SOCAR employee, he continued to play a key role in its international transportation

tions against Russia quietly extended to the Azerbaijani state-owned STAR Refinery in Turkey, with Brussels telling OC Media that the refinery was subject to a ban for processing Russian crude oil.

Imports from the refinery are subject to a ban under the EU's 18th sanctions package, adopted in July 2025. The package bans the import of refined products made from Russian crude if processed in third countries as an anti-circumvention measure.

EU foreign affairs spokesperson Anita Hipper confirmed to OC Media that STAR, jointly owned by the Azerbaijani government and its state oil company SOCAR, was covered by the package. (This article originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on September 27.)

# Azerbaijan Complains about Spread of Fake News from Turkish Media

By Nate Ostiller

Azerbaijan has again complained about the spread of fake news about the country in Turkish media, much of which concerns relations with Israel. The prominent pro-government media outlet APA wrote a lengthy article on the issue on Tuesday, September 30, claiming that it is a “fake news campaign” which is “being carried out in a deliberate and targeted manner” across Turkish media.

The APA article follows denials issued earlier this month that Azerbaijan would withdraw from the Eurovision song contest if Israel was banned.

Another piece of “fake news” were reports that Baku had been supplying Ukraine with weapons via Sudan, Azerbaijan's Media Development Agency said on Septem-

ber 23, adding that the “misinformation” was being spread in Turkish media.

September 29's APA article went further, alleging that the Turkish fake news campaign had escalated beyond individual outlets and is continuing despite repeated official complaints by Azerbaijan.

APA went on to compare Turkish media to Iranian and Russian outlets, which were described as “unreliable sources.”

“Today, what is written in Russian and Iranian outlets holds no significance for us; they are hardly ever cited. Thus, the Turkish media is also losing its credibility, and the Azerbaijani public no longer has confidence in it. The question is: why does the Turkish media need this?,” APA wrote.

The article concluded by urging Turkish media to “respect red lines in both state and

media policy.”

Baku has developed a strong alliance with Tel Aviv in recent years, which includes military cooperation and overlapping regional interests, particularly concerning forming a bulwark against Iran — Israel's archenemy, and a country that Azerbaijan has always had a difficult relationship with.

At the same, Turkey has long been Azerbaijan's closest ally.

Even as Israel has become increasingly isolated due to the war in Gaza, relations with Azerbaijan have remained stable, and Baku has repeatedly acted as a mediator between Israel and other countries, including Syria and Turkey.

(This article originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on September 30.)

## Israeli Academics, Cultural Figures Voice Support For Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, from page 1

The group warned that the agreement — initially intended to transform the land into a parking lot and potentially pave the way for future development — poses a direct threat to the integrity of the Armenian Quarter and the survival of Jerusalem's centuries-old Armenian community.

“Such a compromise not only undermines the local Armenian community but threatens the future of the Armenian Quarter as a whole,” the statement reads. It highlights that the deal has sparked widespread opposition among Armenians in Jerusalem and the diaspora, as well as among Israeli citizens concerned about preserving the cultural fabric of the Old City.

The signatories also condemned recent incidents of violence and harassment targeting members of the Armenian community, as well as unfounded accusations of anti-Semitism. They emphasized that the Armenian presence in Jerusalem spans nearly 1,500 years and has been marked by respectful coexistence with Jewish and other local residents.

Calling for transparency and public participation, the group urged city planners and authorities to ensure that any development within the Old City includes meaningful consultation with affected communities. “In a city as sensitive as Jerusalem, and especially in the delicate fabric of the Old City, the principle of public participation must be foundational to any urban development,” the statement concluded.

Below is the full list of signatories:

- Prof. Itzhak Galnoor – Former Civil Service Commissioner, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- Dr. Laura Wharton – Member of the Jerusalem City Council
- Adv. Yossi Havilio – Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem
- Mr. Yoav Loeff – Hebrew University, Armenian Studies
- Mr. Yonathan Mizrachi – Archaeologist, founder of Emek Shaveh
- Mr. Giora Solar – Architect, conservation consultant, Israel Archaeological Institute
- Prof. Michael Stone – Hebrew University, Armenian Studies
- Prof. Reuven Amitai – Hebrew University, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies
- Dr. Yakir Paz – Hebrew University, Classical Studies and Talmud
- Dr. Eran Tzidkiyahu – Hebrew University, Political Science
- Prof. Arie Kacowicz – Hebrew University, International Relations
- Ms. Tzipi Ron – Jerusalem activist in shared society issues
- Prof. Julia Resnik – Hebrew University, Education
- Mr. Adir Schwarz – Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem
- Dr. Oded Steinberg – Hebrew University, European and International Studies
- Dr. Kfir Cohen-Kidron – Van Leer Institute Research Fellow
- Ms. Ziva Sternhell – Architect
- Mr. Nachman Shai – Former Member of Knesset and Government Minister
- Prof. Dana Shalev – Hebrew University, Classical Studies
- Dr. Hagai Agmon-Snir – Founder, Jerusalem Intercultural Center



## INTERNATIONAL

# Trump Hosts Erdogan as the US Considers Lifting a Ban on F-35 Sales to NATO Ally

By Aamer Madhani

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump held talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the White House on Thursday, September 25, and signaled that the United States might soon lift its hold on sales of advanced fighter jets to Ankara.

During Trump's first term, the US removed Turkey, a NATO ally, from its flagship F-35 fighter jet program after Turkey purchased an air defense system from Russia. US officials worried that Turkey's use of Russia's S-400 surface-to-air missile system could be used to gather data on the capabilities of the F-35 and that the information could end up in Russian hands.

Trump started his two-hour meeting with Erdogan by offering hope that a resolution to the matter could be found during the leaders' talks.

"He needs certain things, and we need certain things, and we're going to come to a conclusion. You'll know by the end of the day," Trump said. The president added to Erdogan, "And I think you'll be successful with buying the things" you would "like to buy."

The president, in a brief exchange with reporters as he bid farewell to Erdogan, called it a "good meeting" but did not offer further details. Trump later called the meeting "very conclusive on so many different things" and said announcements from both countries about the discussions would be coming out later.

It was Erdogan's first trip to the White House since 2019. The two leaders forged what Trump has described as a "very good relationship" during his first White House term.

Over the years, US officials have cited concerns about Turkey's human rights record under Erdogan and the country's ties with Russia. Tensions between Turkey and Israel, another important American ally, over Gaza and Syria have made relations

difficult with Turkey at times.

Trump, in remarks before reporters, focused his concerns on Turkey's continued economic relationship with Russia. Turkey has been one of the biggest buyers of Russian fossil fuel since the European Union announced in early 2023 it would boycott most Russian seaborne oil.

Since January 2023, Ankara has purchased more than \$90 billion in Russian oil, coal and natural gas. Only China and India have bought more from Russia in that period.

"The best thing he could do is not buy oil and gas from Russia," Trump said of Erdogan.

After their meeting, the US president said he believed that Erdogan would stop buying oil from Russia — not that Turkey's leader had directly committed to doing so during their discussion.

"I don't want to say that" Erdogan agreed to stop the purchases, "but if I want him to, he will," Trump said.

Tom Barrack, the US ambassador to Turkey and Trump's envoy to Syria, said the presidents discussed all the major issues in the US-Turkey relationship, including Russia and the F-35 program, "with paths forward."

Asked if Turkey is amenable to cutting off its substantial oil purchases from Russia, Barrack replied, "You have to ask them."

Trump added that Erdogan is respected by both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"I think he could have a big influence if he wants to," Trump said.

The push on Erdogan to become more engaged in pressuring Putin comes after Trump earlier this week said he believed Ukraine could win back all territory lost to Russia in the war. It was a dramatic shift from Trump's repeated calls for Kyiv to make concessions to end the war.

Erdogan has made clear he is eager to see the hold on F-35s lifted, telling Trump

that he came prepared to "thoroughly discuss" the issue.

The Turkish president was even blunter in a television interview this week. "I don't think it's very becoming of strategic partnership, and I don't think it's the right way to go," Erdogan said in an interview this week on Fox News Channel's "Special Report with Bret Baier."

## Past Reluctance to Engage with Turkey

Democratic President Joe Biden's administration kept Erdogan, who has served as president since 2014 and was prime minister for more than a decade before that, at an arm's length during Biden's four years in office.

The reluctance to engage deeply was borne out of Turkey's record of democratic backsliding as well as Ankara's close ties to Moscow.

Opposition parties and human rights organizations have accused Erdogan of undermining democracy and curbing freedom of expression during his more than two decades in power. International observers say that baseless investigations and prosecutions of human rights activists, journalists, opposition politicians and others remain a persistent problem in Turkey.

Trump sees Erdogan as a critical partner and credible intermediary in his effort to find ends to the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. The Republican's administration is also largely in sync with Turkey's approach to Syria as both nations piece together their posture toward the once isolated country after the fall of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad in December.

Trump and European leaders have followed Erdogan in embracing Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa, who once commanded a rebel group that was designated a foreign terrorist organization.

Trump also said that Erdogan deserves credit for backing the rebel forces that ousted Assad from Syria.

"I think President Erdogan is the one responsible for Syria, for the successful fight in ridding Syria of its past leader," Trump said. "He doesn't take the responsibility, but it's actually a great achievement."

Trump's chief diplomat, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, met with al-Sharaa on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly.

## Erdogan Sees a Key Role for Turkey

Erdogan has sought to position his country as a point of stability in a tumultuous moment. He believes Turkey can play an essential role for European security and is able to span geopolitical divisions over Ukraine and Syria as well as US tariffs, which have sparked a global trade war.

Turkey also believes it has emerged as a credible broker in the Black Sea region, preserving relations with both Ukraine and Russia.

Turkey is influential in neighboring Syria. The rebel groups it supported during the civil war took power in December. But the fall of Assad aggravated tense relations between Turkey and Israel.

Trump has urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to be "reasonable" in his dealings with Ankara.

Erdogan on Tuesday took part in a group meeting hosted by Trump on the sidelines of the General Assembly, when Trump gathered the leaders of eight Arab and Muslim countries to discuss the war in Gaza.

Erdogan has been critical of Israel's handling of the war, which was launched after Hamas militants attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and taking about 250 people captive. More than 65,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, and about 90 percent of homes in the territory have been destroyed or damaged.

Erdogan, in his U.N. address, alleged that Israeli forces have committed genocide, an allegation contested by Israel and United States.

# Son of Former Azerbaijani Regional Leader Buys Hotel And Land Worth Millions in Georgia

BAKU (JAM News) — Rza Talibov, the son of Vasif Talibov, former head of the Nakhchivan Supreme Assembly, and now an official at Azerbaijan's migration service, has purchased a luxury hotel and a new plot of land in Georgia.

The story was reported by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP).

According to the investigation, 43-year-old Rza Talibov bought the London 1889 hotel in Batumi in May this year for \$8.6m. The deal was carried out through the purchase of 100% of the shares in B-Pearl Turizm, the company that owns the hotel.

In July, using the same company, he acquired a 2,000 square meter seaside plot in the coastal settlement of Makhinjauri, near Batumi, for \$730,000.

The hotel had previously operated under the name Divan Suites and was owned by Talibov. But in 2023, amid his father's resignation and growing political pressure in Nakhchivan, he sold it.

In an email to OCCRP, Talibov said the purchases in Georgia were financed through loans from Azerbaijani and Georgian banks. He described the earlier sale and subsequent buyback as "an asset redistribution strategy."

Journalists have noted, however, that Talibov simultaneously holds a senior state post while running multimillion-dollar business operations in Georgia. Under Azerbaijani law, public officials may own shares in

companies but are required to file annual declarations of income and assets. It has not been made public whether Talibov submitted such a declaration.

Previous OCCRP investigations found that the Talibov family owns property in Georgia and the United Arab Emirates worth a total of \$63 million. The family also exercised full control over Nakhchivan Bank, which for many years was the region's main financial institution.

Vasif Talibov, who ruled the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic from 1995, has long been associated with authoritarian governance and repression. International media have frequently referred to Nakhchivan as "Azerbaijan's North Korea."

After Talibov's resignation, testimony from several former Nakhchivan officials in court revealed that the family had been receiving unofficial income for many years.

Former finance minister Rafael Aliyev admitted in court that he personally handed over 3 million manats (\$1.7 million) to Vasif Talibov's son, Seymour Talibov.

Former customs committee chairman Sahat Habibayli said bribes worth \$2.5–\$3 million were collected every month and passed on to the leadership, amounting to more than \$30 million a year.

Despite this, no member of the Talibov family has yet faced trial on charges of abuse of office.

Official Baku claims to be fighting corruption, but



Rza Talibov

international indicators tell a different story. In the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International, Azerbaijan scored just 22 out of 100, ranking 154th out of 180 countries.

At the same time, several independent journalists investigating corruption, including staff at Abzas Media, are currently in detention. They say the charges against them were brought in retaliation for their reporting on corruption cases.

# Community News

## K. Hovnanian Wins \$71M Bid for Prime Acreage Near JW Marriott in Phoenix

PHOENIX (TRF) — K. Hovnanian Homes acquired 52.9 acres of state land near Desert Ridge for \$71.1 million at an Arizona State Land Department Auction.

The company plans to build homes on the site, which is located next to the JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa.

K. Hovnanian is the seventh-largest homebuilder in the Phoenix region and has a history of winning state land auctions.

A New Jersey-based homebuilder submitted the winning bid for nearly 53 acres of state land near Desert Ridge, adding to its streak of public land auction victories.

K. Hovnanian Homes bid \$71.1 million for 52.9 acres at an Arizona State Land Department Auction, the Phoenix Business Journal reported. Bidding for the prime chunk of property, located next to the JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa, started at just under \$37.8 million.

The price amounts to \$1.3 million per acre.

The volume homebuilder beat out Phoenix-based Blandford Homes, as well as other national heavy-hitters like Toll Brothers, Lennar, Pulte, Taylor Morrison, Shea Homes and D.R. Horton.

Texas-based D.R. Horton was the original applicant for the land. It proposed a single-family residential development called Tallin West.

K. Hovnanian, a subsidiary of publicly traded Hovnanian Enterprises, hasn't said how many homes it plans to build on the site.

"The way that it's positioned against the JW Marriott Golf Resort is pretty unique," Vaughn Wright, vice president of finance at K. Hovnanian, told the outlet.

K. Hovnanian is the seventh-largest homebuilder operating in the Phoenix region. The firm was awarded 950 permits in the area last year, the outlet said.

The company's victory at the latest State Land Department auction adds to a list of wins at such bidding events. In February, K. Hovnanian outlasted Lennar in an auction for 72 acres in Peoria surrounding Lake Pleasant Crossing, beating out more than 50 other bids in the process.

The firm is part of a partnership that acquired 44 acres in Phoenix last October for \$20.9 million via a state land auction. It plans to build high-end homes on one part of the parcel, with Plaza Companies purchasing a portion in April for \$12 million and partnering with Fayth Hospitality Group to develop a Hilton dual-branded hotel on the site.

JW Marriott Desert Ridge is one of the region's highest valued properties, likely adding value to K. Hovnanian's planned project. Elliott Investment Management and Trinity Real Estate Investments sold the hotel to Ryman Hospitality Properties in May for \$865 million.

— Chris Malone Méndez



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan is flanked by Archbishop Haigazoun Najarian, the emeritus Primate of Australia, and Bishop Oshagan Gulgulian, the current Primate of Iraq.

## St. Sahag & St. Mesrob Church Marks its Centennial

WYNNEWOOD, Penn. — Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan visited St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Church from September 19 through 21, to join the community as it celebrated the centennial of its founding.

The festivities marked 100 years since the signing of the original charter that formally established an Armenian parish in West Philadelphia. The actual signing took place on October 8, 1924; but the centennial celebration went forward 101 years later to allow for the renovation of the sanctuary. That process was completed earlier this year.

The final act in the renovation—the reconsecration of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Church altar—was the inaugural event of the centennial weekend. On Friday afternoon, September 19, Bishop Mesrop led the ceremony.

"It was a truly moving and mystical way to begin this extraordinary centennial weekend," the Primate said.

The church's magnificent Italian marble altar, installed in the early 1970s, was anointed anew with holy muron. Bishop Mesrop anointed the top and front of the altar, while two distinguished former pastors of the parish — Archbishop Haigazoun Najarian, the emeritus Primate of Australia, and Bishop Oshagan Gulgulian, the current Primate of Iraq — anointed the right and left corners.



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan with young parishioners

At the parish's invitation, the two former pastors had returned to Wynnewood to take part in the reconsecration and subsequent centennial events.

To conclude the service, 13 candles — representing Jesus and His apostles — were lit atop the otherwise bare altar.

"There was a hush among the congregation as I lit the first candle on the altar," recalled Bishop Mesrop. "From that flame, we kindled the other 12 candles, filling the sanctuary with a warm light: the sign of Christ's presence dwelling among His people. It was a moment of deep gratitude, joy, and renewal for this faithful parish family."

Parish pastor Fr. Arash Bagdasarian assisted the Primate and bishops throughout the service. In addition, Diocesan Vicar Fr. Simeon Odabashian, and Fr. Voskan Hovhannisyan (the newly installed pastor of St. Mary Church in Livingston, NJ), had travelled to Wynnewood to honor the occasion. A festive dinner in the church hall followed the service.

*continued on next page*

## Dr. Sarah Wilson Brings Global Migration Lens to Armenian Identity, Displacement, and Belonging

TORONTO — The Zoryan Institute announced recently the publication of a special issue of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, edited by guest editor Dr. Sarah Wilson, head of Sociology, Social Policy, and Criminology at the University of Stirling.

The issue, titled "The Republic of Armenia: Migration and Diaspora in Times of Threat and Uncertainty," explores Armenia's unique position in global migration debates and raises pressing questions about displacement, belonging, and the future of the Armenian nation in parallel with global migration experiences, highlighting new perspectives on Armenian identity and belonging.



Dr. Sarah Wilson

Wilson explains that Armenian identity has always been profoundly transnational. "Being Armenian is a very transnational identity because of the history of the genocide and the huge diaspora, which is very much still linked together through notions of that history, language and religion," she reflects. Yet this identity is layered and complex.

The collection of articles situates Armenia within larger debates on migration, challenging narratives focused solely on South-to-North flows. The welcoming of Syrian-Armenian refugees, as well as the influx of Russians, Belarusians, and even non-Armenian migrants to Armenia, illustrates Armenia's changing place in the global migration landscape. Armenians arriving in the Republic from various regions of the globe often negotiate tensions between inherited images of homeland and the realities of contemporary Armenia.

In a brief interview with the Zoryan Institute, now available at the Zoryan Webinars on all major streaming services, Wilson emphasizes that Armenia and its diaspora remain critically understudied in international scholarship. "[Armenia] is a fascinating area of the globe, which is very little spoken about," Wilson notes. By centering Armenia within broader conversations about migration and post-colonial identity, this collection highlights how Armenians navigate wars, forced displacement and evolving transnational belonging.

see ZORYAN, page 12



## COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

**Episcopal Liturgy and Celebratory Banquet**

Saturday's events included a breakfast meeting of Bishop Mesrop and parish youth; a luncheon with the parish council; a trip into Philadelphia to view the latest progress on the ambitious Armenian Heritage Walk, currently under construction at the Philadelphia Art Museum; and a dinner gathering of parish leaders at the home of longtime church members Robert and Nannette Zakian.

On Sunday, the Episcopal Divine Liturgy united the three visiting bishops, Fr. Armash, and a large crowd of worshippers in grateful prayer to the Lord. On the altar, church's long-serving Deacon Steve Keytanjian was joined by visiting deacons Levon Altiparmakian and Armen Terjimanian.

Members of the Diocesan Gomidas Choir, under the direction of Kris Kalfyan, had travelled to Philadelphia for the weekend, and brought the sacred hymns to life, along with the singers of the parish's Tarkmanchats Choir.



Keynote speaker Christopher Zakian



The religious dignitaries at St. Sahag and Mesrob Church

As celebrant of the badarak, Bishop Mesrop's sermon reflected on the parish's centennial milestone, the liturgical season of the Holy Cross, as well as the 34th anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Armenia, which coincided with the day.

Afterwards, parishioners and guests adjourned to the church hall for a glorious centennial banquet. A rich and engaging program was led by Master of Ceremonies Vicken Bazarbashian, who introduced the speakers and performers of the day.

These included a toast offered by Alice Gurenlian Lachewitz (grand-

daughter of one of the original charter signers); Angela Kodokian and Kris Kalfayan leading the American and Armenian national anthems; words of welcome from parish council chair Julyet Degirmenci; music specially composed for the occasion by Centennial Committee co-chair George Kodokian; a soulful musical interlude by Maria Yacoubian on the qanon and Kevork Keshishian on the duduk; and reflections on distinct eras of parish history by Robert Zakian, Tamar Fumento (daughter of the late pastor Fr. Paree Metjian), and Alexis Dewees.

Keynote speaker Christopher Hagop Zakian — a Wynnewood native and the long-standing communications director of the Eastern Diocese — recalled his upbringing in the community and the people who had influenced him, and offered his perspective

on the durability of the Wynnewood church and the Armenian Christian heritage.

**Honors and Gratitude**

The program included the screening of a short documentary on the early history of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Church, prepared by Raffi Berberian and the parish Archives Committee. The Archives Committee also contributed historical research and photos to the lovely and informative commemorative booklet.

The Primate and Fr. Armash presented special certificates of commendation to longtime community leaders, including Laraine Kazanjian Ballard, Steve Barsamian, Robert Cannuscio, Julyet Degirmenci, Dr. Steve Keytanjian, George Kodokian, Lisa Manookian, Yn. Angel Metjian, Alex Topakbashian, Aris Topakbashian, Robin Williams, and Robert Zakian.

As the banquet drew to a close, Fr. Armash gave his own gracious remarks, thanking the parishioners, the centennial and renovation committees, and all who contributed to the weekend. Archbishop Haigazoun Najarian offered congratulations to his former congregation, and praised Fr. Armash's pastoral leadership.

Bishop Mesrop concluded the three-day celebration with his blessing. "I offer my heartfelt thanks to you all," he said, "for organizing this milestone event with such care and devotion. Your dedication and love have been visible in every detail. Even after 100 years, remember that this is only the beginning. Exciting days filled with faith, fellowship, and renewal lie ahead for the faithful of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Church — and for all of us."

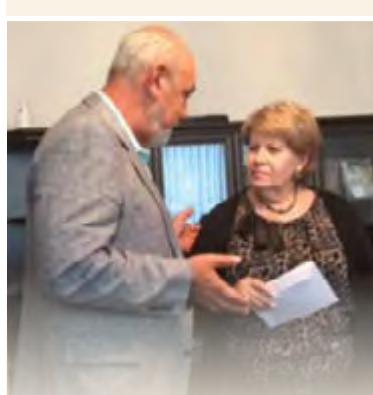
George Kodokian, Lisa Manookian, and Robin Williams jointly chaired the parish Centennial Committee under the leadership of pastor Fr. Armash Bagdasarian.



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# Armenian Assembly Celebrates Successful Summer Internship in Armenia

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America's (Assembly) Summer Internship Program in Armenia provided six students with the unique opportunity to work in the homeland, while immersing themselves in daily life in Yerevan, and exploring the country's rich history and cultural ties. These students gained valuable professional skills interning at a variety of offices. They also experienced Armenia in action by taking in cultural and educational opportunities through a full summer of programming.

"It was truly inspiring to meet with the Assembly Armenia interns, a vibrant group of young leaders eager to deepen their connection to their motherland while also learning the importance of advocacy," said Mariam Khaloyan, Congressional Relations Director of the Armenian Assembly of America. "Their passion and curiosity give us great confidence in the future of our community and the work ahead."

Participants in the Assembly's Yerevan Internship Program included Anna Shakhbazyan attending James Madison University; Edward Khatchatrian attending Boston University; Hovik Apinyan attending the University of Washington; Joseph Terzakian-Harris attending the University of California, Berkeley; Christine Bedrossian attending the University of California, Los Angeles; and Sophia Medzoyan attending Barnard College, Columbia University.

In addition to gaining professional work experience, interns explored Armenia with visits to Etchmiadzin, Zvartnots, Garni & Geghard Monasteries, Lake Sevan, Goris, Tatev Monastery, riding the world's longest aerial tramway, the Wings of Tatev and hiking from Dilijan National Park to the Jukhtak Monastery. They participated in various master classes, including lavash baking, ceramics and miniature painting. With refugees from Artsakh, they learned how to prepare and cook Jengyalov Hats, a dish typical to Artsakh and the Southern Armenian Regions.

"I had the greatest experience at the



Members of the 2025 Armenian Assembly Summer Internship Program in Armenia

Women's Support Center, where I was given the opportunity to connect with local Armenians as well as participate in beneficial work towards an important cause. I've always loved being in Armenia, but this internship allowed me to engage with the community on a much deeper level. It not only gave me valuable professional experience, but also strengthened my connection to my heritage and reaffirmed my passion for making a meaningful impact. My favorite weekend activity was the trip to Syunik, where we had the chance to stay overnight in Goris. I don't think I would have ever gotten this opportunity on my

own, so it was incredibly special to share the experience with my fellow interns. The locations we explored were truly beautiful and unforgettable," noted Christine Bedrossian from Burbank, California. Christine majors in political science and interned at the Women's Support Center this summer.

The Assembly Armenia interns with Armenia Director of Finance and Human Resources Ani Arshamian, Armenia Regional Analyst Alin Ozinian, and Armenia Internship Coordinator Anna Avagyan

While in Yerevan, Assembly Interns met with public figures, NGO leaders and

visited prominent institutions including: the Republic of Armenia Parliament, the American University of Armenia, the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, the Assistant to Human Rights Defender of Artsakh, Armenia Tree Project, the Women's Support Center, and met with Assembly Western Region Director David Ojakanian, Assembly Congressional Relations Director Mariam Khaloyan, and Assembly 2024 Terjenian-Thomas Alumna Susanna Kharatyan. Other notable activities included a photo shoot in traditional Armenian costumes, home building with Fuller Center for Housing and paying tribute to the fallen Armenian heroes in Yerablur Military Pantheon.

"The collaboration with the Armenian Assembly of America has had a significant impact on the History Museum of Armenia's efforts to preserve and promote cultural heritage. This partnership has provided the intern with a valuable opportunity to engage deeply with Armenian history, identity, and community through hands-on work and meaningful projects within the Museum," noted Naira Avanesyan, Head of the Department of Educational Programs and Guided Tours at the History Museum of Armenia.

"The internship program organized and facilitated by the Armenian Assembly of America at the Foreign Ministry of Armenia for young professionals from the United States was of great value as it offered an exceptional platform to gain firsthand experience in diplomacy and international relations. We were happy to have Anna Shakhbazyan as an intern during the past several weeks. Being a bright and smart person, Anna contributed greatly to the daily work of Department of the Americas. She demonstrated an outstanding dedication, professionalism, and a keen interest in global affairs throughout her time with us," stated Arthur Grigoryan, Head of the Department of the Americas, USA and Canada Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS



The Walkathon Organizing Committee.

## Bone Marrow Registry's 14th Annual Walkathon Draws Enthusiastic Support

WATERTOWN — Supporters from across New England gathered in Watertown on September 13, to participate in the 14th annual Walk of Life, organized by the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR). The event drew numerous students from area schools and colleges, and was supported by local organizations, businesses and community leaders.

Since its launch 14 years ago, Walk of Life New England has received support and sponsorship from several large and small businesses, including PROMETRIKA, LLC, of Cambridge; the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute; the Armenian Women's Welfare Association; Watertown Savings

Center, Tamar Melkonian of the Walkathon Organizing Committee welcomed the participants. "It's inspiring to see so many individuals and community organizations come together for this walkathon," she said. "Many of you have supported us since the very beginning, and we are deeply grateful. Thank you to everyone who helped spread the word among friends, families, and colleagues. Your support makes this event possible."

Melkonian also conveyed the Organizing Committee's gratitude to St. James Armenian Apostolic Church, Pastor Arakel Aljalian, and Yn. Natasha for generously hosting the commencement of this year's walkathon. Melkonian went on to acknowledge Artemis Minassian, one of ABMDR's earliest and most avid supporters, as the recipient of the ABMDR New England Volunteer of the Year Award.

The walk concluded at Saltonstall Park, where participants celebrated the day's achievements and enjoyed great music, dancing, and food, along with those attending the annual Faire on the Square festival.



Rev. Archpriest Antranig Baljian (center, in yellow T-shirt) and Rev. Fr. Arakel Aljalian blessing the walkers prior to the start of the walkathon.

As they conducted the closing ceremony, Manneh Gazarians and Narini Badalian of the Walkathon Organizing Committee extended its appreciation to the event's sponsors for their continued support year after year. Gazarians and Badalian also brought

the participants' attention to all the logos and sponsor names on their T-shirts, and went on to present the walkathon winners with their awards.

Subsequently, Telo Ghazarians, Alec Der Sirkian and Sossy Yogurtian of the Armenian-American Pharmacists' Association were awarded the Gold, Silver and Bronze top-fundraiser awards, respectively. For the 13th consecutive year, the Armenia Tree Project will plant commemorative trees in Armenia in honor of the walkathon winners, as part of the #LivingCentury Initiative.

In an interview with Watertown Local Access TV covering the Faire, Tamar Melkonian and Shant Der Torossian of the Walkathon Organizing Committee spoke of the vital importance of the event in raising public awareness of ABMDR's life-saving mission.

Established in 1999, ABMDR, a non-profit organization, helps Armenians and non-Armenians worldwide survive life-threatening blood-related illnesses by recruiting and matching donors to those requiring bone marrow stem cell transplants. To date, the registry has recruited over 33,500 donors in 32 countries across four continents, identified over 9,000 patients, and facilitated 44 bone marrow transplants. For more information, visit [abmdr.am](http://abmdr.am).



Telo Ghazarians accepting the Gold Award on her and her sister Rubina's behalf.

Bank; the Armenian-American Pharmacists' Association; ThermOil, Inc.; Suphi Furs; Anoush'ella; and the Varjabedian and Bedrosian families; as well as the Armenia Tree Project, Amaras Art Alliance, St. James Charles Mosesian Cultural and Youth Center, the Red Sox, the New England Revolution, Northeastern Hockey, the Waverly Oaks Athletic Club and the Armenian Museum of America.

During the walkathon's opening ceremony on the grounds of the Charles Mosesian



Dana-Farber Cancer Institute representative Kidest Mequanen (seated, far right) and ABMDR New England volunteers at the ABMDR booth at Watertown Faire on the Square.



# ANCA-WR to Honor Christian Solidarity International With 'Human Rights Champion' Award

GLENDALE — The Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region (ANCA-WR) announced recently that Christian Solidarity International (CSI) will receive its “Human Rights Champion” Award at the 2025 ANCA-WR Gala Banquet, which will take place at the Fairmont Century Plaza on October 26. This recognition honors CSI’s steadfast and courageous advocacy for the Armenian people of Artsakh, particularly in the face of Azerbaijan’s ongoing campaign of ethnic cleansing, cultural erasure, and anti-Christian agenda.

“Christian Solidarity International has stood firm when many looked away,” stated ANCA-WR Chairman Oshin Harootoonian. “Their principled commitment to human rights and religious freedom has given voice to the suffering of Artsakh’s Armenians and strengthened the global demand for justice. We are proud to honor them with our 2025 Human Rights Champion Award.”

Since the onset of Azerbaijan’s brutal blockade and military aggression, CSI has emerged as one of the most principled and consistent international voices defending the rights of Artsakh’s Armenians. Through a combination of humanitarian relief and high-level advocacy, CSI has worked tirelessly to bring global attention to Azerbaijan’s atrocities, and to secure justice for the victims of genocidal ethnic cleansing.

CSI has provided direct humanitarian assistance to displaced Armenians from Artsakh, including emergency shelter, medical care, income-generating aid, and psychological support. Their work has extended deep into refugee communities in Armenia, helping families recover from trauma and rebuild their lives with dignity.

Beyond its aid efforts, CSI has made international advocacy a cornerstone of its mission. The organization has issued multiple urgent calls for action at the United Nations, and among U.S. and European policymakers, emphasizing the legal and moral imperative of the right of return for Artsakh’s displaced population. CSI has also been instrumental in launching the



CSI President Dr. John Eibner

global “Stop the New Armenian Genocide” campaign, which warned the international community of the genocidal trajectory of Azerbaijan’s actions following its September 2023 military assault on Artsakh.

CSI President Dr. John Eibner has taken a leading role in elevating awareness about the crisis, including participating in the July 2025 Capitol Hill briefing spotlighting the Swiss Peace Initiative. This landmark effort, backed by partisan support in the Swiss Parliament, seeks to convene an international forum focused on securing the collective, dignified, and safe return of the displaced Artsakh Armenians. CSI’s support for the initiative reflects its broader commitment to durable and just solutions grounded in human rights and international law.

Speaker Emerita of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi will be honored with the 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award at its Annual Awards Banquet Gala. Rep. Pelosi is being recognized for her historic leadership as one of the most powerful voices in Congress to champion the Armenian Cause. From her earliest years in office, she worked closely

with San Francisco’s Armenian-American community, raising their concerns in Washington and ensuring their priorities were reflected on the national stage. She played a decisive role in advancing multiple Armenian Genocide resolutions, breaking through decades of resistance to secure historic recognition, while also leading efforts to support Armenia’s sovereignty, provide humanitarian aid to the refugees of Artsakh, and hold Azerbaijan accountable for its aggression. Her record stands as one of the most consequential legacies of advocacy for justice and human rights in the Armenian-American story.

This year, ANCA-WR honors Republican Congresswoman Young Kim, who represents California’s 40th Congressional District, with the “Legislator of the Year” award. The Representative has been a strong and principled voice for the Armenian-American community. As a member of the Congressional Armenian Caucus and the House of Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Kim has consistently taken a firm stance against Azerbaijani aggression. Her bipartisan leadership has earned her the trust and respect of Armenian-Americans throughout California and the entire country.

The 2025 ANCA-WR Gala will bring together hundreds of community leaders, public officials, and grassroots supporters for an evening celebrating advocacy and impact. For tickets, sponsorship opportunities, and additional event information, please visit [www.ancawr.org/gala2025](http://www.ancawr.org/gala2025).



Former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi

## Dr. Sarah Wilson Brings Global Migration Lens to Armenian Identity, Displacement, and Belonging

ZORYAN, from page 8

This issue addresses urgent developments, such as the September–October 2023 forced migration of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh). Dr. Wilson stresses: “This has really been quite invis-

information, please visit <https://utppublishing.com/toc/diaspora/24/2>.

Some articles from this Special Diaspora are:

“Identity and Return Migration among Young Adult Armenian Women from Russia in Times of War” by Vlada Baranova, Anna Ter-Saakova (Diaspora Vol. 24, p. 174–193)

“Indicators of Integration: Assessing the Impact of Perceptions about Rights and Security, Public Outcomes, and Social Connections on Intentions to Stay of Newcomers in Armenia” by Scot Hunter, Marina Shapira, Maria Fotopoulou, Sarah Wilson, Maria Zaslavskaya (Diaspora Vol. 24, p. 228–255)

“Memory Books: Mapping Histories of Ethnic Coexistence” by David Clarke, Nina Parish (Diaspora Vol. 24, p. 256–278)

“Ways out of the Void? Postcolonial and Decolonial Theories in Relation to Armenia and Armenianness” by Sarah Wilson, Peter Baker, Aram Vartikyan, Nona Shahnazarian (Diaspora Vol. 24, No. 2, pp304–329)



Armenian refugees fleeing Karabakh

ible in terms of international debate and concern. It is something we know the Armenians we spoke to felt very deeply.” She warns of the global silence surrounding these events, despite Armenia’s increasing geopolitical importance.

To purchase a physical copy of the special issue, contact the Zoryan Institute.

The full special issue is available online through all academic institutions. For more

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# Arts & Culture

## Two Armenian-Americans Make Waves in Boston's Classical Music Scene

BOSTON — Two of Boston's venerable institutions — the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the New England Conservatory of Music (NEC) — have recently announced the appointments of esteemed Armenian artists to their organizations.

Violinist Samuel "Sammy" Andonian, a graduate of the Juilliard School and the New England Conservatory of Music, will join the



Samuel Andonian



Ara Gregorian

violin section of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Born and raised in Boston, Sammy passed one of the most rigorous auditions of a major US orchestra, including blind auditions held behind a screen! His first appearance with the orchestra will be on September 25. Sammy is no stranger to the Boston Armenian community; he has appeared regularly in cultural and musical events, including a memorable performance as soloist with the Boston Pops Orchestra at the Armenian Night at the Pops concert in 2015.

Violinist/Violist Ara Gregorian was named Chair of String and Piano Chamber at NEC in March of 2024, officially joining the faculty earlier this year. Gregorian is the grandson of the late Rouben Gregorian, a composer, conductor, and violinist who taught at the Boston Conservatory in the 1980s and led the Boston Pops Orchestra in guest-conducting appearances. Gregorian's father, Leon Gregorian, is the retired professor of music at Michigan State University.



Michael A. Goorjian

## 'Amerikatsi' Filmmaker Goorjian Launches Filmmaking Course at AUA

YEREVAN — During the week of September 22, the American University of Armenia (AUA) welcomed Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Michael A. Goorjian for a screening of his film "Amerikatsi" (2022) and the launch of his exclusive, month-long filmmaking certificate course, jointly hosted with the AUA Media Lab and AUA Extension.

"We are pleased to welcome Michael to Armenia and to AUA for this very special course, which he will be leading for a month. This hands-on Extension course will prove transformative for all the participating students. We look forward to hosting Michael and hopefully turning this into a certificate program that is offered annually," said AUA Chief Communications Officer Narek Ghazaryan in his opening remarks.

Goorjian is an Emmy Award-winning actor, filmmaker, and writer born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. As an actor, he first gained national recognition as Neve Campbell's love interest, Justin, on the Golden Globe-winning series "Party of Five." Also well-loved for his iconic portrayal of Heroin Bob in the cult classic "SLC PUNK!," Goorjian went on to win an

see GOORJIAN, page 14



Actor, writer and director Michael A. Goorjian at the American University of Armenia



Michael A. Goorjian, second from right, talks to students, accompanied by Artsvi Bakhchinyan, who had a small role in "Amerikatsi" and is the Mirror-Spectator's arts correspondent in Armenia.

## Theatrical Adaptation Of 'Leili & Majnun' Returns to Central Stage

RICHMOND, Calif. — Following last year's successful limited run, sweeping romance returns to the Bay Area with "Leili & Majnun," written and directed by acclaimed Bay Area artist Torange Yeghiazarian.

Arguably the most popular love story in the Middle East and Central Asia, this timeless tale of star-crossed lovers is often cited as source inspiration for Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet. The production will play October 31 to November 23, at Central Stage (5221 Central Avenue, Richmond).

Opening is Sunday, November 2 at 3 p.m.

"During this particularly violent and inhuman era, 'Leili & Majnun' serves as a means of self-preservation by centering women, the arts and the triumph of love," said Yeghiazarian, who founded the renowned Golden Thread Productions celebrating its 30th-anniversary next year. "It's been a joy to uplift this beloved story from the Middle East with some of the best SWANA artistic talent in the Bay Area in a space like Central Stage that has deep community roots."

As told in the 12th-century in Persian by master poet, Nizami Ganjavi, this ancient Arab fable revolves around the title characters who meet as children in school and fall in love. Leili's family will not allow their union, which drives Majnun mad (Majnun literally means "mad" in Arabic). Unexpected from a woman at that time, Leili resists her family and society's expectations, and finds a way to be with Majnun — albeit briefly and with tragic results. Leili & Majnun might be known as a tragedy and Majnun as the ultimate tragic hero, yet in Leili, Nizami has created a female Arab character that is educated, smart, a skilled poet, and an articulate adult that exercises agency and stands her ground. Yeghiazarian centers Leili as the leading character, attempts to shed more light on Leili's dramatic point of view.

Yeghiazarian, who has translated and adapted numerous Middle Eastern fables and legends both for adult and young audiences, borrows from the Naqqali storytelling tradition. Originally performed by a solo and transformative male storyteller in a public space, Yeghiazarian's adaptation of "Leili & Majnun" casts a female Naqqal supported by an ensemble that breaks the fourth wall with contemporary commentary to engage present-day audiences. This "luminous tribute to the Nizami epic" features ensemble movement and live music, as well as selections from the original Persian poetry to expose audiences to the beauty and musicality of the Persian language.

Yeghiazarian is creating this production in community: The celebrated creative team of Iranian-American talent include scenic designer and award-winning visual artist Mokhtar Paki, whose minimal and elegant scenic design made of canvas and

see THEATER, page 15

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



## Mary Markarian's Tabbouleh

"Tabbouleh, also spelled tabouleh, tabbouli, tabouli, or taboulah, is a Levantine salad made mostly of finely chopped parsley, with tomatoes, mint, onion, soaked uncooked bulgur, and seasoned with olive oil, lemon juice, salt and sweet pepper. Some variations add lettuce, or use semolina instead of bulgur." This recipe from Mary Markarian, a mother of three and a sourdough baker, is featured at "The Art of Armenian & Middle Eastern Cooking" Facebook website.



Mary Markarian

Tabbouleh is thought to have originated in Lebanon, where it is the national dish. As the dish traveled, it adapted to the tastes and ingredients of new regions while retaining its core elements. According to the Manoosh Pizzeria website, "The name tabbouleh comes from the Arabic word 'taabil' which means to season or spice and tabbouleh is thought to have first been eaten in the mountains of Lebanon and Syria more than 4000 years ago. Ancient scholars believe that herbs known as 'qadb' formed a crucial part of the Arab diet throughout the Middle Ages, and were used as the basis of many popular dishes, including tabbouleh. Variations of tabbouleh can be found throughout the Middle East and beyond,

to his homeland.

Held in Manoogian Hall, the film screening, which was open to the public, was followed by a Q&A session with Goorjian. Students and guests reflected on the film's themes and its significance for Armenian identity and culture, inquiring about a vast variety of topics, such as Goorjian's Armenian heritage and the inspiration behind writing the film; how the outbreak of the pandemic, soon after filming began, affected his creative process; the challenges he faced during filming; and how he was able to authentically capture the historical period portrayed in his movie. In response to questions about a new film, Goorjian explained that part of his reason for being

from the Armenian 'eetch' to the Turkish 'kisir' right through to the Cypriot 'tabbouli'. Lebanese immigrants even introduced a version of tabbouleh to the Dominican Republic known as 'tipile'."

Mary adds: "I think this is one of the best tabbouleh recipes. It's a famous Mediterranean/Middle Eastern salad that is made with cracked wheat (bulgur), tons of fresh parsley, fresh mint, onions, tomatoes, and spices, and in my recipe, I add finely chopped cucumbers (my family is from Aleppo and that's how it's made there). If you don't add cucumbers, leave them out, but trust me, it's amazing."

### INGREDIENTS:

1/4 cup #1 fine bulgur  
2/3 cup fresh lemon juice, to taste  
3 bunches Italian flat-leaf parsley  
1 bunch curly parsley (for bulk)  
1 bunch fresh mint  
1/2 medium yellow onion, finely chopped  
5 medium green onions, finely chopped  
3 medium tomatoes, finely chopped  
5 Persian cucumbers, finely chopped  
1 teaspoon Aleppo pepper  
1 teaspoon dried mint  
1-2 teaspoons Kosher salt, to taste  
4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, to taste

### PREPARATION:

Combine the bulgur and the juice of one lemon in a large bowl. Toss a few times, and let the bulgur soak and plump.

Meanwhile, wash, dry, and chop all the herbs. Chop by hand or use a food processor. Add the herbs to the bowl with the bulgur. Add the remaining ingredients to the bowl and toss well. Taste and adjust salt, olive oil and lemon juice for seasoning. This salad is perfect for parties, or as a simple brunch or lunch served with crisp Romaine lettuce or other mezze.

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For this recipe, go to:

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<https://www.facebook.com/armenianandmiddleeasterncooking/posts/10158797438300794/?rdr>

For Mary's Lahmajun recipe she and her mother make with flour tortillas, see: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CvIt5WAq-7p/?igshid=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng%3D%3D>

Also: <https://www.munchery.com/blog/tabbouleh-wonderful-tabbouleh/#:~:text=Tabbouleh%20is%20a%20traditional%20salad,available%20resources%20in%20these%20regions.>

For Mary's Gata recipe, go to: [https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyUX7Z\\_P6JL/](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyUX7Z_P6JL/)

For namourah: <https://mirrorspectator.com/2025/02/20/mary-markarians-namourah-dessert-infused-with-rose-water/>

For eetch: [https://www.facebook.com/armenianandmiddleeasterncooking/photos/a.301637150793/10159065345270794/?type=3&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/armenianandmiddleeasterncooking/photos/a.301637150793/10159065345270794/?type=3&_rdr)

For baklava: <https://www.facebook.com/armenianandmiddleeasterncooking/photos/a.301637150793/10159083669470794/?type=3>

For kufteh soup: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C3gqeAxWEo/>

For Armenian Urfa kebab: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10158964467600794&id=284103605793&set=a.301637150793>

For videos: <https://www.facebook.com/maryandshalini/about>

Also:

[https://www.picuki.com/profile/mimosas\\_and\\_samosas](https://www.picuki.com/profile/mimosas_and_samosas)

<https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/mammaryskitchen>

[https://www.threads.net/@mimosas\\_and\\_samosas?xmt=AQGzaK2l1MORpP4ZCGaN-TAtuOK-ZbexjG2S9GExKhtmlzs](https://www.threads.net/@mimosas_and_samosas?xmt=AQGzaK2l1MORpP4ZCGaN-TAtuOK-ZbexjG2S9GExKhtmlzs)

## 'Amerikatsi' Filmmaker Goorjian Launches Filmmaking Course at AUA

GOORJIAN. from page 13

Emmy Award for the role of David in "David's Mother," alongside Kirstie Alley. Other important film and television credits include "Newsies," "Leaving Las Vegas," "Hard Rain," "House," "Monk," "Lie to Me," "Wizard of Lies" with Robert DeNiro and "Lucifer." Currently, he can be seen as Alex Gazarian on the Netflix show, "The Lincoln Lawyer."

He wrote, starred in and directed the film "Amerikatsi." The story is set in Soviet Armenia, where Armenian-American repatriate Charlie Bakhchinyan is unjustly imprisoned upon his repatriation to the country. However, on the other side of his cell's window, Charlie discovers why he returned

to his homeland.

Held in Manoogian Hall, the film screening, which was open to the public, was followed by a Q&A session with Goorjian. Students and guests reflected on the film's themes and its significance for Armenian identity and culture, inquiring about a vast variety of topics, such as Goorjian's Armenian heritage and the inspiration behind writing the film; how the outbreak of the pandemic, soon after filming began, affected his creative process; the challenges he faced during filming; and how he was able to authentically capture the historical period portrayed in his movie. In response to questions about a new film, Goorjian explained that part of his reason for being

in Armenia was to seek inspiration for his next major project.

The next day, on September 23, Goorjian kicked off the first session in his Filmmaking Certificate With Michael Goorjian at AUA! course, which is designed to ignite the creativity and deepen the craft of individuals with a passion for storytelling and independent cinema. The hands-on training, held in the English language, will run three sessions per week and conclude on October 16. The dynamic lessons aim to provide a comprehensive introduction to the world of independent cinema, as well as offer participants practical experience in story development, screenplay writing, acting, directing, producing independent film,

and more.

Twenty participants — half of whom are non-AUA students — from various backgrounds and regions of Armenia were chosen out of more than 80 applicants, following a competitive selection process that evaluated applicants' writing style, proposed story ideas, and overall creativity. Applicants also underwent two weeks of interviews with Goorjian, Ghazaryan, and other organizers of the course. Demand was high, with applications pouring in even after the deadline. Those who were not selected will still be offered the chance to participate in the production process, when students of the course begin working on their final film projects.

# Books

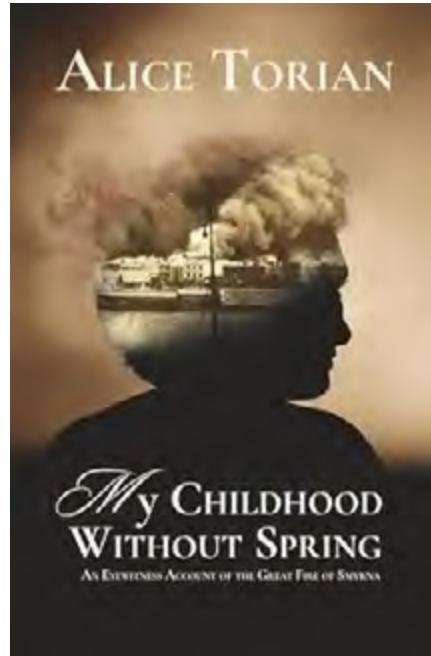
# Smyrna Fire Eyewitness Account by Alice Torian Is Published in English

The memoir by Alice Torian, *My Childhood Without Spring: An Eyewitness Account of the Great Fire of Smyrna*, was recently published in English. Her grandson, Peter Tourian, independently published the book in English, as a tribute to her grandmother.

Available for the first time in English, this 50th anniversary edition recounts the trials and tribulations of Hiarpi "Alice" Torian, an eyewitness survivor of the Armenian Genocide and the Great Fire of Smyrna. Through vivid storytelling, the author weaves a tale of unconscionable suffering and anguish, but also of resilience and fortitude. Her memoir serves as a rarely captured firsthand account of these two infamous historical events. It is a must-read for all Armenians, genocide scholars, and anyone with an interest in more deeply appreciating the inhuman suffering of the Armenian people living in Turkey at that time.

Torian was born in Turkey in the early 1900s. A daughter of a priest and life-long educator, Dr. Hovhannes Nazarian, she bore eyewitness to the unspeakable pogroms and persecutions perpetrated upon the Armenian people during the Armenian Genocide and the Great Fire of Smyrna. Including this memoir, she authored four books in Armenian: *Dapnepsak*, *Mankutwins Arants Garuni*, *Tag Metsn Kiwrosi* and *Vaghnjian Nuagner Ew Nergaghte*. Immigrating to the United States in the mid-1970s, she passed

*Metsn Kiwrosi and Vaghnjan Nuagner Ew Nergaghte.* Immigrating to the United States in the mid-1970s, she passed



away in 2001.

"To read Alice Torian's memoir is to enter the brutal world of the Armenian Genocide, with all its savagery and heart-breaking injustice.... With every twist and turn of her family's catastrophic story, we discover that somehow love can endure through the most inhumane chapters of history," said Dr. Carla Garapelian of the Armenian Film Foundation.

To purchase the book, visit <https://www.amazon.com/My-Childhood-Without-Spring-Eyewitness/dp/B0F9TK3J6Z>

# Theatrical Adaptation Of 'Leili & Majnun' Returns to Central Stage

## THEATER, from page 13

bamboo, will evoke Bedouin tents; and composer Sirvan Manhoobi who brings a mix of ancient Arabic magham and traditional Persian and Kurdish melodies. Music director, Sara Saberi contributes to the score and will accompany the performance live on the oud and tanbur, together with Josh Mellinger on Percussion. Costume design by Maggie Whittaker, Lighting design by Alejandro Acosta. The nearly all Middle Eastern-American ensemble cast features, Sofia Ahmad\*, Yasaman Asgari, Behzad Golemohammadi, Brandon Di-Paula, Zaya Kolia\*, Roeen Nooran, and Dina Zarif.

Central stage, a multi-faceted performance space and community arts hub founded and operated by Iranian artists of different ethnicities and cultural heritage, creates the perfect venue for this production. Central Stage fosters a thriving community by providing the space and the support to enable open un-curated artistic expression, experimentation, and development. Their mission is to facilitate dialogue through the arts, promote camaraderie and community-building, and enable unbridled creative expression. The Central Stage community believes that the arts are a vivid reflection of Iranian diasporic lives and history, and the best way to celebrate community to gain a deeper understanding of our differences. [CentralStage.org](http://CentralStage.org)

Torange Yeghiazarian is an award-winning playwright and director passionate about building community through theater. Her artistic practice reflects her values of radical hospitality and inclusiveness aimed

East both within the community and outside of it. As a director, her focus has been on new plays, experimenting with Middle Eastern performance traditions, and adaptation of classics. Her theatre work is propelled by the need to build, inspire, and empower community. Yeghiazarian founded Golden Thread Productions, the first American theatre company devoted to the Middle East and its global diaspora,



Torange Yeghiazarian

and served as its executive artistic director for 25 years. There she launched visionary programs such as ReOrient Festival, New Threads, and Fairytale Players, and helped launch the careers of countless artists. She is a founding board member of Middle Eastern North African Theater Makers Alliance (MENATMA), and a board member of the Consortium of Asian American Theaters and Artists (CAATA). Her latest play, “The Tutor,” commissioned by the New Conservatory Theatre premiered in 2024 to excellent reviews.

Tickets are available at CentralStage.org starting October 1.



## ADVERTISE IN THE MIRROR



# Enthusiastic Crowd Enjoys Opening of “The Art of Disruption” Featuring Paintings by Serj Tankian

WATERTOWN — “The Art of Disruption: The Art and Impact of Serj Tankian” opened at the Armenian Museum of America on September 6 with the participation of a lively crowd of more than 150 members, museum trustees and fans of this hugely talented artist, musician and activist.

The evening included a panel discussion with Curator Ryann Casey, Assistant Curator Amanda Cantillon, and Executive Director Jason Sohigian as well as an impromptu performance by classical guitarist Raffi Danoian. (Tankian was forced to miss the event because of a flight delay.)



The Arloopa app, designed in Armenia, recognizes each painting and plays a music score composed by Serj Tankian. (Natalie Nijito photo)

This immersive exhibition highlights the intersections of music, painting, and protest that define Tankian. Best known as the frontman of the Grammy Award-winning rock band System Of A Down, Tankian has emerged as a powerful visual artist and outspoken advocate for social justice, genocide recognition, environmental protection.

Speaking at the panel, Casey expressed her thoughts on the exhibition and the artist: “What I hope you experience with this show is that this is as much about visual art as it is about music, as it is about poetry, and about Serj as a person. One of the things that I really respect about him is that everything he feels and everything that he believes in, especially in terms of his activism, is built into his visual arts and into his music.”

The exhibition is accompanied by a video of the artist streaming in the museum’s Rose and Gregory Ar-



From left, Nareg Kalaydjian, Ryann Casey, Amanda Cantillon, Sarah Hayes, Caprice Erickson, Anahit Gasparyan and Jason Sohigian (Natalie Nijito photo)



Armenian Museum of America team including staff, trustees, benefactors, and musicians celebrate the opening of “The Art of Disruption.” (Natalie Nijito photo)



Memorabilia related to Tankian’s music and activism are on display, along with a playlist of his band and solo projects. (Natalie Nijito photo)

chie Kolligian Media Room. All of the works in the show are available for purchase, with proceeds of the sales benefitting the mission of the Armenian Museum of America. Several of the pieces were sold at the opening event.

All of the works are accompanied by music scores created by Tankian. Arloopa created an app in Armenia, which uses augmented reality to recognize each piece using a smartphone.

The exhibition is curated by Casey and sponsored by Carolyn Mugar and the Alan and Isabelle DerKazarian Foundation. It runs through Feb. 28, 2026



Armenian Museum of America Trustees Ed Keljik, Jr., Sandra Missakian and Executive Director, Jason Sohigian (Natalie Nijito photo)



# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

**SEPTEMBER 7-FEBRUARY 28** — Armenian Museum of America, through February 28, 2026 Adele & Haig Der Manuelian Galleries "The Art of Disruption: The Art & Impact of Serj Tankian" World renowned musician Serj Tankian is the lead singer and songwriter for the band, System Of A Down, a visionary poet, visual artist, and outspoken advocate for human rights. Inspired by his 2024 memoir, *Down with the System*, the exhibition immerses visitors in the dynamic intersections of music, painting, and protest that define Tankian's work. This exhibition is curated by Ryann Casey. Sponsored by Carolyn Mugar and the Alan K. & Isabelle DerKazarian Foundation. Hours: Thursday-Sunday 12pm-6pm 65 Main St., Watertown. (617) 926-2562 or [armenianmuseum.org](http://armenianmuseum.org)

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

**OCTOBER 6** — St. James Men's Club & Trinity Men's Union Joint Meeting, with special guest and speaker Ernie Boch, Jr. Boch serves as President and CEO of Subaru of New England. In 2006, Boch established Music Drives, which funds musical opportunities for the underserved throughout New England. Boch invested in the future of Boston's culture and performing arts in 2016 with the Boch Center, housing the city's landmark Wang and Shubert Theatres and sits on the organization's Board of Directors. Boch opened the Boch Medical Center in the rural village of Wajinja, Uganda. Losh Kebab & Kheyma Dinner \$25 per person. 6:15 mezza & social hour, & 7 p.m. dinner, 7:30 speaker St. James Armenian church Cultural and Youth Center, 465 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown. For info contact Robert Berberian 339-293-2514.

**OCTOBER 17-18** — Friday and Saturday, St. James Armenian Church 78th Annual Bazaar — Fri. 12-8 p.m., Sat. 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Delicious Armenian Food, Mezze, Pastries, and Baked Goods. Silent Auction, Raffle, Children's Activities, Booths and Local Vendors. 465 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown. For more information visit [www.stjameswatertown.org/bazaar](http://www.stjameswatertown.org/bazaar).

**OCTOBER 18** — The Music for Future Foundation's visiting fellows from Armenia will present a special concert, showcasing their artistic talents while raising awareness and financial support for the Foundation's impactful work. Musicians aged 10 to 18 will perform works by Babadjanyan, Beethoven, Chopin, Dvorak, Khachaturian, Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Saint-Saens and Boston premieres by composers Yuri Gevorkyan and Arno Melkonyan. International violinist/violist Ara Gregorian, Chair of String and Piano Chamber Music at the New England Conservatory of Music will also be on hand to discuss music education opportunities in the United States. For tickets and information, visit [www.FACSBoston.org](http://www.FACSBoston.org)

**OCTOBER 19** — "Alan Hovhaness: Unveiling the Life of a Musical Genius" Book Launch and Concert. Sunday. Sylvie Zakarian (marimba), Daniela Tošić (vocals), Karineh Bagdasarian (piano). Sunday, 4 p.m., 441 Mystic Street, Arlington. Organized by Armenian Cultural Foundation (ACF) and co-sponsored by Amaras Art Alliance (AAA), National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR).

**OCTOBER 19** — Annual Reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture, creating a New Sculptural Shape. Sunday, 9 a.m. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Rain date: October 26.

**OCTOBER 19** — CELEBRATING WHAT UNITES US! Highlighting Ireland. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Wednesday, 4 p.m. Monthly series in collaboration with the City of Boston Office of Immigrant Advancement and Age Friendly Boston RSVP appreciated, [hello@armenianheritagepark.org](mailto:hello@armenianheritagepark.org)

**OCTOBER 23** — The Armenia Tree Project is celebrating its 30th anniversary with a reception. Meet new executive director Ara Barsam and bid farewell to retiring executive director Jeanmarie Papelian and support ATP's work toward a greener Armenia. Thursday, 6 to 8 p.m. Food and drinks, photo exhibition. Sheraton Commander Hotel, 16 Garden St., Cambridge. Valet parking is available. Registration required by October 6. 617-926-8733.

**OCTOBER 24** — 20th Anniversary Celebration of Father Khachatur Kesabyan's Ordination to Priesthood. Presentation of Floral (Dzaghga) Pilon by His Eminence, Bishop Mesrob Parsamyan, Primate. Dinner and Program to follow. Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church, 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. 6 p.m. For tickets and further information, contact Dara Hagopian, [djuke@comcast.net](mailto:djuke@comcast.net), 508-364-9729, or go to [www.stsvartanantz.com](http://www.stsvartanantz.com). Tickets must be purchased by October 17. No tickets will be sold at the door.

**OCTOBER 25** — Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church 85th Anniversary Gala Fundraising Dinner, Saturday, 6:00 PM Cocktail, 7 p.m. Dinner & Program, Sheraton Boston Hotel. Celebrate 85 years of Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in New England. Details and tickets: [www.holycrossarmenian.com](http://www.holycrossarmenian.com)

**OCTOBER 25** — FallFest at first Armenian Church, 380 Concord Ave., Belmont, noon to 7 pm. All the kebabs, plus homemade pastries, string cheese, and eetch.

**OCTOBER 25-26** — Save the dates! First Anniversary Celebration of Holy Archangels Armenian Church Sanctuary Consecration presided by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan. Saturday, October 25, at 4 p.m.: Worship and acknowledgment of Godfathers of the Church; 5 p.m. Mezza and Wine Reception. Sunday, October 26, 10 a.m.: Holy Badarak; 2 p.m. Banquet & Program including St. Vartan Award Recipients. Ordinations throughout the weekend

**OCTOBER 26** — TCA Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group presents Chekhov's "The Marriage Proposal" in Western Armenian at St. James Armenian Church, a cosponsor along with Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter and the Society of Istanbul Armenians, 4 p.m. Tickets \$75/person at [themarriageproposal.eventbrite.com](http://themarriageproposal.eventbrite.com)

**NOVEMBER 1** — Debut performance of the Massachusetts Chamber Music Artists. Program. Music by Frank Bridge, Komitas, Mendelssohn. Haig Hovsepian and Michael Fisher on violin, Yeh-Chun Lin on viola, Edward Arron on cello and Dina Vainshtein on piano. First Parish in Bedford, 75 Great Road, Bedford. 6 to 7:30 p.m. Tickets \$24 to \$30. Visit [www.mcmartists.org](http://www.mcmartists.org).

**NOVEMBER 9** — GIVING THANKS: COMING TOGETHER. ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK ON THE GREENWAY, Boston. 2pm. View the new Reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture. Meet & Greet. Cider & Sweets. Refreshments. RSVP appreciated [hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)

**NOVEMBER 21** — AMAA's Boston Child Care Committee presents an evening supporting the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan, Armenia, FEATURING COMEDIAN KEV ORKIAN. COCKTAILS, DINNER & LIVE AUCTION. Wellesley Country Club, Wellesley Hills. (Individual Tickets will commence at a later date). For more info visit: <https://amaa.org/hyeminds-boston2025/>

**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](mailto: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](http://www.stnersess.edu).

### RHODE ISLAND

**OCTOBER 18** — Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church presents "GALA KEF Dinner Dance" dedicated to 30th Anniversary of Cultural Committee featuring Ken Kalajian - guitar, Charles Kalajian - percussions, Leon Janikian - clarinet, Harry Bedrossian - oud & vocal. Egavian Cultural Center - 70 Jefferson Street, Providence, 6 - 7 pm Cocktail Hour, 7 pm - Dinner, 8 pm - 11 Band. General Admission : \$60 (\$75 after October 12) Call for tickets: Zara Vartanian: 401-439-5971, Elvira Hovagimian: 860-462-3610.

**NOVEMBER 1** — The Cultural Committee of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church presents a "Spiritual Music Festival", dedicated to the memory of Maestro Khoren Mekhanejian featuring the Choirs & Soloists of Rhode Island Orthodox Churches. Special guests: Hasmik Mekhanejian, mezzo-soprano (NY), Anahit Zakarian, soprano (NY). In the Sanctuary of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church at 3 p.m. 70 Jefferson Street, Providence. Donations Gratefully Appreciated. Refreshments will be served

To send Calendar items to the *Mirror-Spectator* email [alin@mirrorspectator.com](mailto:alin@mirrorspectator.com) or [alin.gregorian@gmail.com](mailto:alin.gregorian@gmail.com). You can also visit our website, [www.mirrorspectator.com](http://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.

## Prof. David Zakarian Offers Brief History of Chess in Armenia at Fresno State Talk

**FRESNO** — Dr. David Zakarian, Haig and Isabel Berberian Professor of Armenian Studies at Fresno State, will present a talk titled "The Cleverest Nation? A Brief History of Chess in Armenia" at 12:30 p.m. on Sunday, October 12, at the St. Paul Armenian Church, Berberian Social Hall, 3767 N. First St. in Fresno.

Zakarian's presentation is sponsored by the Armenian General Benevolent Union

Greater Fresno Chapter. A light lunch will be served before the presentation and a \$10 donation is requested.

Armenians have long been recognized for their remarkable achievements in the world of chess, producing world champions during the Soviet era and leading national teams to victory in international chess Olympiads following Armenia's independence. This talk offers a concise historical

overview of chess in Armenia, exploring the origins of this tradition, the factors that shaped its success, and the milestones that have defined its legacy.

Following the presentation, Zakarian will hold a chess exhibition. Those interested in playing against him may bring their chess boards.

Zakarian received his DPhil in Oriental Studies from St. Antony's College, Univer-

sity of Oxford. His dissertation was titled "The Representation of Women in Early Christian Literature: Armenian Texts of the Fifth Century." He has extensive experience teaching classical and modern Armenian and the focus of his research is on the representation of women in early Christian Armenian sources, as well as the colophons of medieval Armenian manuscripts.



## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR**  
**SPECTATOR**  
SINCE 1932



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# Armenia–China Strategic Partnership: *Another Step in Foreign-Policy Diversification*

By **Benyamin Poghosyan**  
Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

Armenia and China established a strategic partnership on August 31, 2025, at the margins of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit held in Tianjin, China. The establishment of a strategic partnership with China can be seen as another step within the Armenian government's "balanced and balancing foreign policy" or "pivot to the world," as first articulated by the Armenia's Secretary of the Security Council during the 2024 Applied Policy Research Institute (APRI) Armenia Forum. As part of its "pivot to the world," a few weeks prior to the SCO summit Armenia applied for full membership of the organization (currently Yerevan is a dialogue partner) and in spring 2025, the Armenian Parliament adopted a law on launching the process of accession of the Republic of Armenia to the European Union.

"The pivot to the world" policy is a measured approach to the changing regional and global order. In recent years the South Caucasus has become an arena of overlapping and contradicting interests of regional and global powers, such as the US, Russia, China, India, Israel, France, Turkey and Iran. In this fractured geopolitical landscape, decisive moves towards one or another camp may jeopardize the already volatile situation of Armenia, especially as Yerevan navigates the complex process of normalization with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Establishment of a strategic partnership with China will broaden Armenia's outreach to the Global South and expand diplomatic flexibility beyond the relations with the US and the EU. This is especially important given the growing Chinese global influence and interest in the South Caucasus as one of the land routes to connect it with Europe through the Middle Corridor. Absence of strategic partnership with China could have resulted in Armenia being excluded from Chinese investments in regional infrastructure. As Armenia puts significant emphasis on infrastructure development, seeking to become a transit and transport hub within its Crossroads of Peace initiative, Chinese investments may complement the funding from multilateral institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and accelerate the development of the Armenian infrastructure.

The establishment of a strategic partnership with China and Armenia's application for full SCO membership should be assessed from several perspectives. Until August, Armenia was the only South Caucasian state holding back in its relations with China. China established a strategic partnership with Georgia in 2023 and with Azerbaijan in 2024 and elevated its relations with Baku to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership earlier in 2025. The low level of Armenia–China relations might have created a perception in Beijing that Armenia had no interest in deepening ties with China, which might create obstacles for Armenia to attract Chinese investments in infrastructure and other areas of the Armenian economy.

The US decision to start the process of establishing a strategic partnership with Azerbaijan in August 2025, a few months after Azerbaijan launched a comprehensive strategic partnership with China, decreased the potential concerns that establishing a strategic partnership with China might irritate the Trump Administration and negatively impact Armenia–US relations.

Together with an intensive defense partnership with India, the Armenia–China strategic partnership can be interpreted by Russia and other countries as signals that Armenia is not only looking at the West but also the Global South and thus undertaking a "pivot to the world." This perception is important as it

runs counter to Russia's concerns that Armenia seeks to become the footprint for the US and the EU to further weaken Russia's influence in the South Caucasus. This concern has become clear based on Russian officials' statements after the Washington Summit of August 2025.

The establishment of an Armenia–China strategic partnership should also be viewed from an economic perspective. According to official data for the January–June 2025 period, China is Armenia's second-largest economic partner. Bilateral trade reached nearly \$1.2 billion in this period, around 12.4 percent of Armenia's overall trade turnover. Armenia has quite diversified imports from China, ranging from smartphones to electric vehicles, while it exports mostly copper and gold.

However, there are no major Chinese investments in Armenia, especially compared to Georgia and Azerbaijan. Chinese foreign direct investments in Georgia for the period of 2013–2024 reached USD 600 million, and Chinese citizens registered 1,893 companies in Georgia for the same time. In December 2016, the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank provided USD 600 million loan for the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline, a part of Southern gas corridor which brings Azerbaijani gas to the European markets, and in April 2025, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Energy has signed several contracts with Chinese companies for the development of renewable energy and battery storage projects in Azerbaijan, totaling nearly 2.4 GW in capacity.

The establishment of a strategic partnership with China might change this situation. The Armenian minister of territorial administration and infrastructure has already stated that Armenia looks forward to Chinese investments in different sectors and that the strategic partnership will facilitate that process.

Another element in support of the Armenia–China strategic partnership is Armenia's desire to acquire additional diplomatic deterrence tools to minimize the risk of escalation in the stand-off with Azerbaijan. The emphasis on China's firm support for Armenia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and for the inviolability of its borders, is significant. Respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of borders is among the founding principles of the SCO, and by applying for full membership Armenia hopes to add the SCO as an additional layer in its efforts to secure its borders and deter Azerbaijan from escalation.

APRI Armenia has been calling on the Armenian government to expand partnership with the Global South and make this an important part of its foreign policy strategy since 2024 to further cement its diversification efforts. The establishment of the Armenia–China strategic partnership and the growing attention of Armenia toward the development of cooperation with the Global South is in line with "foreign policy diversification" and "pivot to the world" concepts and will make Armenia more stable and secure.

One of the areas for Armenia–China economic cooperation can be the attraction of Chinese investments in infrastructure development — in particular the modernization of existing highways and railroads — which may contribute to the realization of Armenia's Crossroads of Peace project. Another area for potential cooperation could be the establishment of assembly lines in Armenia for Chinese consumer products, with some Middle Eastern markets, such as Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, serving as the primary export destinations.

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## As Azerbaijan and Armenia Reset Relations, Baku Looks to the Middle East

By **Nicholas Castillo**

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's recent interview, in which he described the Bolshevik takeover of Azerbaijan in 1920 as a "Russian occupation," has garnered much attention as relations with Moscow further deteriorate. Yet, less noted in coverage of the interview has been the outlet with which Aliyev spoke — Saudi Arabia's Al Arabiya television station.

The high profile interview, over an hour

in length, was Aliyev's first with Al Arabiya since 2020 and points to a broader trend in Azerbaijani foreign relations: Baku is now making a concerted effort at raising its profile and influence in the Middle East.

With the Aliyev regime's attention long dominated by the conflict with neighboring Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, the Middle East has rarely been a focal point of Baku's foreign policy. This remained true even as Azerbaijan solidified and strengthened its central alliance with Turkey and

built up its defense and energy partnership with Israel. Yet, the last year has seen a marked expansion in Baku's growing physical presence across the Levant and relations with the Arab world.

### Azerbaijan and the New Syria

Seemingly the sharpest pivot in this regard has been the transformation of Azerbaijan's relationship with Syria — under the regime of Bashar al-Assad, Syria had long been viewed by Baku as having backed

*continued on next page*

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Jerusalem Patriarchate's General Assembly Rejects Signed Lease to Israeli Investor

This is the latest episode in the controversy over leasing the "Cows Garden" — about 25% of the Patriarchate's Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem — to an Israeli investor.

In 2021, Armenian Patriarch Nourhan Manouelian signed a contract with an Israeli businessman to lease to him 123,785 square feet (11,500 square meters) of the Patriarchate's land for 98 years to construct a luxury hotel.

Despite numerous requests, neither I nor the Armenian public has been able to see a copy of the contract. Nor have we seen copies of the two lawsuits filed by the Patriarchate and the Armenian community of Jerusalem contesting the validity of the lease. Furthermore, the lawyers for the Armenian community prepared a 184-page fact-finding report that has not been made public. We also do not have a copy of the countersuit filed by the Israeli investor against the local Armenian community.

It is essential to know the contract's terms. What exactly did the Patriarch agree to give to the Israeli investor? What compensation did the Israeli investor promise the Patriarchate in return for the lease? Did the contract permit unilateral annulment by one side, or did termination require mutual agreement? Regarding the lawsuits, what violations were the Israeli investor and the Armenian Patriarchate accused of committing?

The most troubling aspect of withholding these key documents is that the parties are treating this controversy as a private matter. The Patriarchate's properties are of interest to the entire Armenian nation, not just to the Patriarchate or the local community. For centuries, Armenian pilgrims from around the world have made generous donations that enabled the Patriarchate to acquire many of these properties.

Keeping the content of these lawsuits confidential makes no sense. When a lawsuit is filed in court, the defendant receives a copy. Therefore, both the Armenian accusers and the Israeli defendant know the lawsuits' contents. The only ones left in the dark are Armenians worldwide.

Moreover, because of the disputed political status of East Jerusalem, this lease is of major importance to the international community, including Palestinians, Arab governments, the State of Israel, and all Armenians, especially the dwindling Armenian community in Jerusalem. It is not surprising that the Palestinian Authority sent a strong letter of protest to the Armenian Patriarchate over its decision to place a large portion of the Patriarchate's property under an Israeli investor's control.

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Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh, leading to minimal ties between the two countries. Azerbaijan closed down its consulate in Syria following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2012 and did not re-open it until February 2025, after the notably Turkish aligned forces of Ahmed al Sharaa toppled Assad in December 2024.

The post-Assad period has seen a steady picking up of Syria–Azerbaijan relations. Azerbaijan's government sent a high-level delegation to Syria this past May, with Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister Samir Sharifov visiting Damascus. That visit featured talks with Sharaa and other top Syrian officials aimed at exploring "avenues for cooperation with the country's transitional government in the fields of economy, energy, culture, and education." This was followed by Sharaa's own visit to Baku in July, where the Syrian leader met with Aliyev and Syria's Energy Ministry signed a memorandum of understanding with Baku's state-run energy company SOCAR. The Azerbaijani readout produced by Aliyev–Sharaa talks stated that a "project of exporting Azerbaijani gas to Syria from Turkey will be implemented in the near future," the first ever initiative to bring Azerbaijani gas to an Arab country.

Indeed, less than a month on from the presidential meeting in Baku, the Turkish region of Kilis hosted an opening ceremony for a Turkish–Syrian pipeline, where Turkish, Azerbaijani, Syrian, and Qatari officials jointly announced the start of Azerbaijani natural gas deliveries to Syria. Officials have since stated that 1.2 billion cubic meters of Azerbaijani gas have been allocated for Syria this year, with more to likely come.

Beyond energy, the traditional route of Azerbaijani outreach, the last year has seen a growth in Baku's influence around Syrian issues writ large. Since December's ouster of Assad, Baku has increasingly become the go-between for Israel and Turkey, the two regional powers most invested in Syria, both of which have strong ties with Azerbaijan. In April, Baku hosted behind-closed-doors talks between Israeli and Turkish policymakers seeking to avert direct conflict between the two Middle Eastern powers as they vied for influence in Syria.

Hikmet Hajiev, one of Aliyev's top foreign policy advisors, later stated in June that Baku had hosted more than three rounds of such deconfliction talks.

Speaking at a forum in April, Aliyev noted "both countries are close friends of Azerbaijan," going on to say that "despite legitimate concerns and despite quite a high level of mistrust, still, there can be found the grounds for normalization [...] Azerbaijan is doing everything in its power to facilitate the process."

Aliyev has continued to make public pro-Israel comments, even as such positions spur anger from Turkey, where pro-Palestinian sentiment is much higher.

**Baku Doubles Down on Israel**

Ties between Israel and Azerbaijan are nothing new. Both states have long nurtured a relationship, marked by mutual concerns around Iranian influence, Azerbaijani oil flowing toward Israel, and Israeli weapons making their way to Azerbaijan.

Turkey's strong opposition to Israel amid Jerusalem's destructive campaign in Gaza has complicated Azerbaijan's relationship with Israel, but by no means deterred it. In fact, as Syrian ties have grown over the

The King of Jordan, the historical custodian of Jerusalem, and Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian National Authority, issued a joint statement blaming the Patriarch, while suspending recognition of Archbishop Manouelian as Patriarch of the Armenian Church in Jerusalem, the Holy Land and Jordan. A representative of the Palestinian Authority even pledged to pay the penalty for canceling the lease.

The 2021 contract bears the signatures of the Patriarch, the Grand Sacristan of the Patriarchate Archbishop Sevan Gharibian, and Father Baret Yeretzian, director of the Patriarchate's Real Estate Department. When the controversy erupted, the Patriarch made Fr. Yeretzian a scapegoat and defrocked him, after accusing him of deception. Incredibly, the Patriarch claimed he had signed the contract without reading it. If he had not signed it, the other two signatures would not have had any significance. How can the Patriarch sign a 98-year lease for 25% of the Patriarchate's territory without first reading it or obtaining the legal opinion of his attorneys who were reportedly present? Moreover, signing such a long-term lease without the General Assembly's approval violates the Patriarchate's by-laws. In 2021, 17 members of the Patriarchate's Brotherhood, a majority of its supreme body, issued two statements opposing the lease and asserting that the Patriarch lacked the authority to sign it.

In recent months, the Israeli investor and the Armenian Patriarchate have met several times to revise the 2021 contract, proposing to reduce the lease terms, such as decreasing the area from 11,500 square meters to 7,200 square meters. The local community opposed the suggested revision, fearing that agreeing to it would validate the original 2021 lease.

Last week, 20 prominent Israeli academics, jurists, and cultural figures issued an urgent statement supporting the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem and rejecting the Cows' Garden lease.

Finally, 28 members of the Patriarchate's General Assembly from around the world met in Jerusalem on September 24, to adopt a formal position on the proposed revised lease.

After lengthy discussions, the overwhelming majority of the General Assembly members decided:

1) The declarations made by Brotherhood members on October 27, 2021, and November 15, 2021, condemning the transaction, remain valid and binding.

2) The 2021 Lease Agreement for the "Cows' Garden," signed July 8, 2021, is deemed illegal, uncanonical, and null and void, because it was executed without the General Assembly's approval.

3) The General Assembly formally rejects both the Addendum and the Settlement Agreement produced through mediation.

4) A committee of five clergymen was appointed, along with the Patriarchate's legal counsel, to continue pursuing the annulment lawsuit filed against "Xana Gardens" Ltd, the Israeli investor.

It remains to be seen what the Israeli Court will decide regarding the validity of the lease signed by the Patriarch in 2021.

course of the last year, so too have Israeli relations taken on new and ambitious forms.

In terms of energy, February 2025 saw SOCAR's first purchases in Israel's Mediterranean gas fields, placing physical SOCAR assets within Israeli maritime territory for the first time.

Turkish pressure did drive Azerbaijan to remove Israel from customs records of energy shipments in 2025. But Israeli government sources reported to Haaretz that they had "received a promise from the Azerbaijanis that the strategic relations will continue, including in the energy sector." Azerbaijani oil has continued to reach Israel by way of intermediary parties — including other state-owned Azerbaijani firms.

On a political level, this year has seen a concerted effort by Azerbaijan, Israel and advocates for both countries in the US, in promoting the concept of a trilateral security partnership between Baku, Jerusalem and Donald Trump's Washington. The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed speculation around such efforts in March, saying it is in discussions "to establish a strong foundation for trilateral cooperation between Israel, Azerbaijan, and the US."

Articles across American and Israeli media, often written by pro-Israel or pro-Azerbaijan commentators, now regularly advocate for the inclusion of Azerbaijan in an expanded Abraham Accords — despite Azerbaijan having recognized Israel since independence.

"Azerbaijan has been involved in the Middle East for some time," Joseph Epstein, head of the Turan Research Centre, told OC Media.

From Epstein's view, Azerbaijan's interest in the Middle East has grown substan-

tially since 2020, saying that "Baku has increased cooperation with the Gulf and has been particularly active in Syria."

Speaking of Azerbaijan's regional approach, Epstein argued that while "the motivations differ by country, there is a clear overall trend: Baku is positioning itself as a trusted regional mediator."

Yet, this year's events have likewise demonstrated the apparent limits of the Azerbaijan–Israel partnership. This was most clear in June, when Israel engaged in a 12 day air campaign against Iranian nuclear, military, and government targets — a period of time that saw Azerbaijan urge de-escalation and caution, especially in Iran's ethnically Azerbaijani region of Tabriz, which saw substantial Israeli bombardment.

**Promising Partners in the Gulf**

Yet a third axis of Azerbaijani relations with the Middle East is between Baku and the energy-rich monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). These countries, which have seen an explosion of wealth in recent decades due to energy exports, are now actively partnering with Baku in numerous sectors. Qatar, alongside Turkey, financially backed the pipeline now bringing Azerbaijan's gas to Syria. With Baku developing domestic renewable energy, the UAE's Masdar and Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power firms have built out major roles in Azerbaijan, building the country's largest solar and wind energy farms respectively.

Ties appear particularly strong with the UAE. This summer, Aliyev struck a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Emirati leader Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on the sidelines of Emirati-hosted peace talks

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# As Azerbaijan and Armenia Reset Relations, Baku Looks to the Middle East

RESET, from page 19 with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in the run up to this summer's Washington summit. Authorities touted the CEPA as opening opportunities for more direct Emirati investment in Azerbaijani energy and logistics, building on the reported 36-percent growth in bilateral trade in 2024.

While it may seem that the core of the relationship between the GCC countries and Azerbaijan is economic, Aliyev and Sheikh Mohamed have made little secret of hopes for broader political cooperation. Sheikh Mohamed made an official visit to Baku in 2024, the first ever visit of a UAE head of state to Azerbaijan, with the two signing a strategic cooperation agreement. Following the signing of that agreement, Aliyev addressed Sheikh Mohamed, saying "under your leadership, your country has attained remarkable success, establishing itself as one of the most developed and successful nations in the world. I know that your successful experience serves as an example for many countries."

This comment from Aliyev illustrates a broader idea potentially undergirding Azerbaijani-Gulf ties. For Azerbaijan, a hydrocarbon-rich and highly authoritarian state, the GCC countries likely offer a highly appealing development model. These small states have become incredibly prosperous, internationally influential, and open to global businesses, and have done so without compromising closed political systems or socially conservative values. Such a program likely strikes a chord with Baku, where the authorities have worked in recent decades to build hyper-modern buildings and attractions in Baku reminiscent of Dubai or Abu Dhabi.

Sheikh Mohamed made a second visit to Azerbaijan just this September, where both he and Aliyev underscored their interest in

upgraded relations. Perhaps alluding to a more politically inflected relationship, the trip brought Sheikh Mohamed not only to Baku, but to the symbolically central city of Shusha (Sushi), recaptured by Azerbaijani forces in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020. In the ensuing lavish coverage in Azerbaijani government media, one commentator described Azerbaijan as "the new magnet of the Persian Gulf" and wrote of the "personal and trusting communica-

"The resolution of the [Nagorno-Karabakh] conflict has freed political and diplomatic bandwidth for Baku," Epstein said. "Azerbaijan is now seeking to shift from a singular focus on territorial recovery to a broader foreign-policy agenda."

Fuad Shahbazov, a Baku-based analyst, roughly concurred with Epstein's appraisal.

"Azerbaijan is moving beyond its traditional reliance on Turkey and Israel by positioning itself as an energy and connectiv-

even granted new diplomatic influence as a broker between the two. In the Gulf, the dramatic growth in wealth and political influence has granted greater potential to any and all cooperation between the GCC and Baku while providing a seemingly appealing model for political and economic organization.

Baku's diplomatic advances are the most novel in the Arab world, but are not limited to it. Azerbaijan, traditionally embroiled in

## AZERBAIJAN IS ROUGHLY TWO YEARS ON FROM A TOTAL VICTORY IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH, AN EVENT THAT LIKELY RESULTED IN FREEING UP POLITICAL IMAGINATIONS AND SIMULTANEOUSLY CREATED THE SENSE IN BAKU OF HAVING ARRIVED AS A RISING REGIONAL POWER IN ITS OWN RIGHT.

tion between President Ilham Aliyev and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed" and "the special spiritual closeness of the two leaders."

During his recent Al Arabiya interview, Aliyev remarked that "for 17 years since I assumed office, until we liberated [Nagorno-Karabakh], that issue was number one, number two, and number ten." The statement, perhaps somewhat overstated, nevertheless does communicate the dominating nature the conflict with Armenia had over Baku's policy.

Now, however, Azerbaijan is roughly two years on from a total victory in Nagorno-Karabakh, an event that likely resulted in freeing up political imaginations and simultaneously created the sense in Baku of having arrived as a rising regional power in its own right.

ity hub," Shahbazov told OC Media. "With Russian peacekeepers gone and a peace treaty with Armenia within reach, Baku can shift its focus outward" and is an "increasingly relevant partner for the Middle East even without projecting military power."

At the same time, the Middle East itself has drastically changed in a manner that is conducive to Azerbaijani influence. The steadfast alliance with Turkey now opens doors to participation in Syria with a newly pro-Turkish government in Damascus. To the south of Syria, Israeli relations have deepened in regards to energy and international political coordination. Even as Turkish-Israeli relations have disintegrated in the wake of Gaza's destruction, Azerbaijan appears to risk neither relationship by maintaining ties with both states and is

its own direct neighborhood of the South Caucasus, is now a player in the Middle East in terms of energy, economy, and politics.

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