

US, Armenia Hold  
Further Talks On  
‘Trump Route’

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — US Under Secretary of State Allison Hooker visited Yerevan on Monday, November 17, for further talks with Armenian leaders on practical modalities of a US-administered transit corridor for Azerbaijan which would pass through a key Armenian region.

In a short statement on her trip, the US Embassy in Armenia said Hooker will discuss with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and other Armenian officials “next steps in strengthening the US-Armenia strategic partnership” through what will be called the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP).

The Armenian government indicated that the TRIPP was a key focus of its talks with Pashinyan held later in the day. The two officials spoke about “upcoming plans” stemming from the controversial transport project, they said without elaborating. According to the official readout, Hooker also told Pashinyan that “bilateral working groups” led by Sonata Coulter, a US deputy assistant secretary of state, have begun their work.



US Under Secretary of State Allison Hooker at a meeting with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, November 17, 2025.

Pashinyan pledged to give the US exclusive rights to the transit railway, road and possibly energy supply lines during talks with Trump and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev held at the White House on August 8. A joint declaration signed by the three leaders said that Armenia will ensure “unhindered communication” between the Nakhichevan exclave and the rest of Azerbaijan through its Syunik province.

Key details of the transit arrangement remain unknown. Pashinyan said last week that they should be worked out in the first half of next year. He also effectively confirmed US media reports, previously denied by Yerevan, that the US government will likely secure a long-term lease on the transit routes passing through Syunik. He said an Armenian-American joint venture will be set up for that purpose.

Pashinyan has made ambiguous statements on the crucial question of the see TALKS, page 4

Ex-Karabakh Leaders Face  
Life Sentences, Lengthy  
Prison Terms In Baku Trial

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prosecutors in Azerbaijan have requested prison terms ranging from 16 years to life for former political and military leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as other Armenian detainees, during an ongoing trial in Baku.



Former political and military leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh during a trial in Baku, November 3, 2025.

Azerbaijani authorities captured a number of former Karabakh officials, including three former presidents of the unrecognized republic, whom Baku regards as separatists, following Azerbaijan’s 2023 recapture of the region. The military operation conducted by Azerbaijan forced all ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh to flee to Armenia, ending nearly three decades of their push for independence from Baku.

Defendants in the trial, which began in January, are accused of starting and conducting war, genocide, terrorism, the violent seizure of power and other serious crimes.

According to Azerbaijan’s state-run Azertac news agency, the prosecution on Thursday, November 13, asked the

court to sentence former Nagorno-Karabakh President Arayik Harutyunyan, former Defense Army commander Levon Mnatsakanyan, former Defense Army deputy commander Davit Manukyan, former Parliament Speaker Davit Ishkhanyan, and former Foreign

Minister Davit Babayan to life imprisonment.

Azertac reported that prosecutors sought 20-year sentences for former Artsakh presidents Arkady Ghukasyan and Bako Sahakyan, citing Azerbaijani law that bars life sentences for individuals aged 65 or older.

Prosecutors also asked for 20-year terms for Madat Babayan and Melikset Pashayan. They requested a 19-year sentence for Garik Martirosyan, an 18-year sentence for Davit Alaverdyan, a 17-year sentence for Levon Balayan, and 16-year sentences for Vasilii Beglaryan, Gurgen Stepanyan, and Erik Ghazaryan.

The next hearing in the trial is scheduled for November 27.

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Armenia Holds  
Inaugural Prayer  
Breakfast amid  
Church Arrests

By Ken Chitwood

YEREVAN (Christianity Today) — Armenia’s first national prayer breakfast Friday and Saturday, November 14 and 15, comes amid one of the most potent confrontations between church and state in the country’s modern history.

In recent months, tensions between the government and the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC), its independent national church, have escalated sharply. Authorities arrested top clergy accused of taking part in a plot to overthrow Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s government earlier this year.

Pashinyan, who delivered the keynote address at the prayer breakfast, has cast the event as part of his broader effort to “renew Armenia’s spiritual foundations” after years of political turbulence and conflict. The organizers invited



Dede Laugesen, president and CEO of Save the Persecuted Christians

to the gathering, and rumors surfaced that they also invited Donald Trump Jr. Charlie Kirk had agreed to speak at the event before his assassination, according to Dede Laugesen, president and CEO of Save the Persecuted Christians.

(Graham’s spokesperson told CT that though he was invited, his schedule did not permit him to attend. Trump Jr. see PRAYER, page 3

Armenia’s Regulator Moves to  
Strip Karapetyan’s Firm of  
Power Grid License

YEREVAN (OC-Media.org) — Armenia’s Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC) has voted to revoke the electricity distribution license of the country’s main power grid operator, the Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA), owned by jailed Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan’s Tashir Group.

After three days of tense hearings, the PSRC on Monday, November 17, approved the draft decision by four votes to one, clearing the way for the ENA to lose its monopoly license to distribute electricity across Armenia. Commissioner Ara Nranyan voted against and said he would publish a separate opinion.

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Yerevan Municipality removes a poster of Samvel Karapetyan that calls for his release from his Tashir shopping center in Yerevan. Photo via RFE/RL.

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MASSACHUSETTS  
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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Criminal Case against Catholicos's Relatives Sent to Court

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — On November 17, Armenia's Prosecutor General's Office approved the indictment and submitted the criminal case to court concerning obstruction of campaign activities by representatives of the Republic party during the Vaghharshapat municipal elections.

The case involves the brother and nephew of Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II — Gevorg Nersisyan and Hambardzum Nersisyan.

According to the Investigative Committee, the incident occurred on November 1, during the official pre-election period. Republic party candidate G.Gh., accompanied by a party supporter, had arrived in Voskehat, a settlement in the Vaghharshapat community, for campaign meetings and a vehicle rally.

At approximately 2:00 p.m., Voskehat resident H.N., upon learning that G.Gh. was distributing campaign materials, confronted him near his house. Upon hearing that another party candidate would also campaign in the area, H.N. allegedly used profanity and demanded G.Gh. leave, stating that "H.M. will not enter Voskehat."

Due to the confrontation, G.Gh. ended his campaign activity and left the area where posters were to be placed. However, H.N. and G.N. allegedly continued the interference by walking through the planned meeting site on Barekamutyun Street. G.N. reportedly spoke with residents there, after which they also left the location.

As a result of the investigation, the Prosecutor's Office on November 2 initiated public criminal prosecution for obstruction of campaign activities by a group of individuals.

Both G.N. and H.N. are currently under arrest.

### Yerevan Ranks among World's Top Nightlife Cities

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Yerevan has been named one of the world's top 10 cities for nightlife, thanks to its blend of wine-scented evenings, warm jazz tones, and glowing boulevards, according to Armenia's Tourism Committee.

The ranking comes from Condé Nast Traveler, which placed Yerevan 7th in the world based on nightlife density, citing the presence of 33 bars and pubs within a 100-square-kilometer area.

Barcelona tops the list, followed by Paris, Tokyo, Prague, Tbilisi and Seoul. Yerevan ranks ahead of Bangkok (8th), Bali (9th), and Budapest (10th).

The committee highlighted Yerevan's atmosphere as "an irreplaceable night-time destination" shaped by its unique combination of lights, music, and local charm.

# Knights of Vartan's Tabibian Family Scholarship Empowers STEM Education in Armenia

By Gohar Palyan

YEREVAN —The Knights of Vartan's Tabibian Family Scholarship has supported a total of 16 students since 2023, providing full one-year scholarships to students at Yerevan State University and the National Polytechnic University of Armenia. The scholarships focus on students pursuing degrees in science, technology, and engineering, with recipients including youth from across Armenia and refugees from Artsakh.

Since the 1990s, Knights of Vartan Inc. has partnered with these universities to provide scholarships to talented students based on both academic excellence and financial need. Over the decades, more than 340 students have benefited from this partnership. Building on this legacy, the Tabibian family Scholarship was launched in 2023 to further expand educational opportunities for Armenia's next generation of innovators and engineers.

Dr. Tabibian's vision was not only to enable students to pursue higher education in science and technology but also to strengthen Armenia's future in these essential fields. His family has committed \$1 million over a five-year period, beginning in 2022, to the Knights of Vartan Inc. The annual yield from this fund provides scholarships to students in STEM fields at both univer-



Past Grand Commander Hunan Arshakian presents the certificate



Yerevan State University students with Past Grand Commander Hunan Arshakian and Professor Markarov from YSU

sities. Preference is given to students who demonstrate strong academic performance and a commitment to remain and work in Armenia after graduation.

Growing up in Lebanon, Dr. Tabibian developed a desire to help talented youth who might otherwise abandon their education in favor of early employment. His lifelong commitment has now become a meaningful

opportunity for many young Armenians to pursue their dreams.

Each spring, scholarship announcements are distributed, with selections finalized by September. During the "Back to the Homeland" annual trip, the Knights of Vartan delegation personally meets with scholarship recipients and presents their certificates. This year, all five Yerevan State University recipients expressed their gratitude in fluent English, highlighting their appreciation for the organization and the donor's generosity.

One recipient Gevorg Nersisyan, a student at the Yerevan State University, shared: "I express my profound gratitude to the Knights of Vardan organization and Dr. Tabibian and his family for their support. Your financial sponsorship enabled me to continue my master's studies and acquire new, deeper knowledge. Your support also represents a responsibility for me. I aspire to become a skilled professional so that I may contribute to the strengthening and prosperity of my country, especially the flourishing of my place of birth."

For more information about the Knights of Vartan, visit <http://kofv.org>.



Students from the National Polytechnic University

## Armenia's Regulator Moves to Strip Firm of Power Grid License

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The session, held in the hall of the Competition Protection Commission and repeatedly disrupted by technical issues and procedural disputes, ended without the regulator withdrawing for a closed door discussion before the vote.

Presenting the conclusions of the PSRC staff, official Meri Ghazaryan said the regulator had proposed the termination of the license based on several serious violations identified by the company's state-appointed temporary manager, ruling Civil Contract party member Romanos Petrosyan.

According to Petrosyan's reports, the ENA's automated metering system failed in January 2025, and data from the company's electricity metering systems dating back to 2018 were deleted. The regulator has said the ENA also engaged in under-collection and over-billing in a number of regional branches, including the Geghama, Araks, Ghars and Debed units, where local managers were allegedly instructed to 'ensure losses' at set percentage levels.

A third key claim concerns financial guarantees the ENA provided on loans taken out by other Tashir-linked companies from Armenian commercial banks. In one case, Tashir Capital reportedly received a \$7 million loan from Ardshinbank, backed

by the ENA as guarantor; another loan from the AMIO Bank to Armholding was again guaranteed by the grid operator.

Lawyers representing Tashir Capital rejected the accusations as unfounded and politically driven, repeatedly clashing with Petrosyan and PSRC chair Mesrop Mesropyan during the hearings.

Former acting ENA director Davit Ghazinyan admitted there had been management shortcomings, but insisted they did not justify stripping the company of its license, accusing the commission of following Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's political line rather than acting independently.

Tashir's legal team also challenged Mesropyan's participation in the process, pointing to his previous Civil Contract membership and arguing he was not impartial when he appointed Petrosyan as temporary manager in July, shortly after Pashinyan publicly floated the idea of "surgical measures" against the ENA, including nationalization. The commission unanimously rejected the recusal motion.

According to legal amendments rushed through parliament this summer, if the ENA loses its license, the grid must be recognized as a "publicly overriding interest," its value assessed, and compensation paid to the current owner. The PSRC's draft de-

cision also envisages that Petrosyan will remain as manager while these steps are carried out.

The government has outlined two possible scenarios: full nationalization with the grid remaining under state control, or transfer of a controlling stake to an "internationally reputable" energy operator, with the state retaining a strategic shareholding.

Tashir Group has already initiated international arbitration, seeking hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation over what it describes as unlawful interference in its investment in Armenia's power sector.

Karapetyan, one of the wealthiest Armenians in Russia, was detained earlier this year on separate charges of large-scale fraud. The Tashir Group founder, whose conglomerate spans construction, retail, real estate, and energy, acquired ENA in 2015 and has long been regarded as one of the most influential diaspora investors in Armenia.

Karapetyan was arrested after his public statements siding with the church leadership in its competition with Pashinyan. Following his arrest, Karapetyan's nephew Narek Karapetyan announced intentions to run in the upcoming 2026 parliamentary elections.





ARMENIA

# Armenia Holds Inaugural Prayer Breakfast amid Church Arrests

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allegedly canceled his planned trip to Armenia after hearing about the arrest of AAC leaders, according to Armenian media.)

But critics see the breakfast — said to be organized by a group called the Individual Believers Club — as an attempt to give religious legitimacy to a government that is persecuting the church as part of a broader effort to weaken challenges to its authority. Meanwhile, others say AAC is doing the bidding of Moscow due to its close ties with the Russian Orthodox Church, support for the Kremlin’s “traditional values,” and opposition to Armenia’s pursuit of a more democratic, European-oriented path.

“There’s always debate between church and state,” said John Eibner, international president of Christian Solidarity International. “But when you start imprisoning people to gain political control of the church, that’s persecution.”

To those who argue the government is within its rights to investigate clergy for corruption or involvement in a potential coup, Eibner said that is not what is happening here: “Church leaders are being imprisoned and thrown into jail without evidence or anything resembling due process.”

Led by Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, the AAC has become a vocal critic of Pashinyan’s government, accusing it of jeopardizing national interests and encroaching on the church’s historic authority. Though Armenia’s Constitution mandates a separation of church and state, it also recognizes the church’s “exclusive historical mission” in Armenian culture and grants the AAC official status as the national church. About 90 percent of the Armenian population claims nominal membership in the church.

In the last few months, authorities arrested Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan, Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, and Bish-

op Mkrtich Proshyan, as well as Gevorg Nersisyan, the Catholicos’s brother, and his nephew, Hambardzum Nersisyan. Pashinyan also called for Karekin II to step down, alleging in a Facebook post that the leader broke his vow of celibacy and has a child.

Authorities allege that church leaders abused their influence to incite antigovernment protests, interfere in politics, and attempt a foiled coup. The church rejects these accusations, portraying the government’s actions as an assault on religious freedom and Armenia’s Christian heritage.

The standoff between church and state comes as Pashinyan pursues ongoing peace with Azerbaijan and warmer relations with Türkiye, which continues to deny the 1915 Armenian genocide. Many in the church regard such policies as betrayals of Armenia’s traditional alliances, its national identity, and the still-fresh wounds of losing the war with Azerbaijan over control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Organizations such as the influential Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) have denounced the prayer breakfast as an exercise in political image making. ANCA representatives warned American faith leaders and policymakers against joining what a human rights lawyer Robert Amsterdam called “a reputation-laundering breakfast” in an interview clip with Tucker Carlson reposted by the ANCA.

Eibner warned that Christians attending the prayer breakfast in Yerevan, Armenia’s capital, should do so “with eyes and ears open,” wary of the possibility that the event could serve as “a religious smokescreen for something unsavory.”

Pashinyan supporters, however, view the arrests of the church leaders differently. Giorgi Tumasyan, a representative of the Armenian community of Georgia and advocate for Georgia’s and Armenia’s integration into the European Union, sees the

confrontation as a long-overdue reckoning with the church’s entanglement in post-Soviet networks of power and overt Russian influence. “When it comes to political influence, the Armenian church should not be under any other state’s influence than Armenia’s,” Tumasyan said.

Tumasyan believes the arrests do not amount to persecution but “liberation” of AAC from outside influence and corruption.

Tumasyan, who describes himself as part of a movement within the Armenian church to restore its sovereignty, argued that people should see the government’s actions — even the prayer breakfast — through the lens of Armenia’s geopolitical struggle to assert independence from Moscow while pursuing peace with Azerbaijan and normalization with Turkey. “The Armenian state is trying to usher in peace,” he said. “Karekin II is trying to keep the confrontation with Azerbaijan under direction from Moscow. But peace is of existential importance to Armenia.”

Tumasyan said the arrests and pressure on the current AAC leadership are only “a temporary process” to liberate it from another state’s interference and maintain peace. After that, Tumasyan said, “the sovereignty of the church — which is in the constitution — will be restored.”

Several sources identified Stepan Sargsyan, former governor of Armenia’s Lachin district, as organizer of the prayer breakfast. While the event is presented as a faith-based initiative, Sargsyan’s work with the My Step Foundation — the nonprofit chaired by Pashinyan’s wife, journalist Anna Hakobyan — has raised questions about the event’s political dimensions. Critics note that the overlap between the prayer breakfast’s leadership and Pashinyan’s inner circle suggests the government may have staged the event to bolster the government’s image and influence public

perception at home and abroad.

Sargsyan previously lobbied in Washington, DC, on behalf of Christian Armenians in Azerbaijan, and Pashinyan attended the US National Prayer Breakfast in February 2025, a trip linked to the prime minister’s efforts to engage the Trump administration on the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process and further cultivate Western allies amid Yerevan’s shift away from Moscow.

While Graham said he would not attend the breakfast, he struck a note of solidarity with Armenian Christians, praising the country’s faith heritage and acknowledging its suffering.

“Christianity came to Armenia more than 1,700 years ago,” he wrote in an email to Christianity Today. “Throughout history, the people of Armenia have endured immense suffering, even in recent times. Let us continue to pray for Armenia.”

For Armenian evangelicals, who are a small minority in the Christian-majority nation, the debate has exposed both opportunity and tension.

Levon Bardakjian, founding pastor of the Evangelical Church of Armenia in Yerevan, plans to attend the breakfast. But he hopes the focus will remain on faith rather than factional politics.

“My wish is that this is not a political event but a sincere devotional one,” he said. Bardakjian, who was baptized in the AAC, is sympathetic to the church but also frustrated with its hierarchy.

“The church as an institution is often worshiped rather than Christ,” he said. “The church fails to make Christ personal to maintain influence and power.”

Still, he resists reading every development through the lens of geopolitics or persecution. “Even in America, politicians will politicize prayer,” he said. “But the truth is that whatever it is we are doing, as Paul says, the name of Jesus must be made known.”

## Armenian Opposition Activists Prosecuted after Local Election

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Five members of an Armenian opposition group were detained and indicted late on Monday the day after it finished second in a local election won by the ruling Civil Contract party.

The Anti-Corruption Committee (ACC) searched their homes in the town of Vagharshapat before accusing them of vote buying. The law-enforcement agency declined to immediately give any details of the accusations.

All five suspects were then set free pending investigation. The leader of their Victory alliance, Sevak Khachatryan, confirmed on Monday that three of them ran as candidates for the local council of a district comprising Vagharshapat and 17 nearby villages.

Khachatryan rejected the accusations as politically motivated, saying that Civil Contract cannot come to terms with the fact that its main local challenger garnered more than 10,000 votes.

“They are also worried that in five months, during the National Assembly elections, they will face in this community oppositionists with so many votes,” he told a news conference.

According to the official election results, Civil Contract won the weekend ballot with over 48 percent of the vote, giving it an absolute majority in the council empowered to appoint the district chief. Victory got about 32 percent, followed by another opposition group.

Civil Contract prevailed thanks to its strong showing in 16 villages that were

merged with Vagharshapat into a single community earlier this year. The party led by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Victory were essentially tied in the town itself. Nevertheless, Pashinyan portrayed the election outcome as a vote of confidence in his government.

“Can you imagine [what would happen] if we won? I think our whole team would be in prison,” Khachatryan said, clearly alluding to the recent arrests of Vartan Ghukasyan, the opposition mayor of Armenia’s second largest city of Gyumri, and over two dozen of his supporters.

Ghukasyan was arrested on corruption charges seven months after four opposition groups collectively defeated Pashinyan’s party in a municipal election. The mayor strongly denies the charges. Opposition leaders claim that Pashinyan ordered his prosecution in a bid to overturn the results of the Gyumri election. The premier has dismissed these claims.

Pashinyan had already been accused of resorting to politically motivated criminal cases and foul play to reverse Civil Contract’s defeats in local polls held in other major urban communities, including Armenia’s third largest city of Vanadzor. The leader of a local opposition bloc, Mamikon Aslanyan, was arrested in December 2021 just as he was poised to again become Vanadzor mayor. Aslanyan spent two and a half years in prison before being sentenced in January this year to four and a half years’ imprisonment on corruption charges denied by him.



US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Allison Hooker at the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan with Edita Gzoyan

## US Under Secretary of State Visits Armenian Genocide Memorial

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Allison Hooker visited the Armenian Genocide Memorial on November 17. She was welcomed by Edita Gzoyan, director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute.

Hooker and members of her delegation laid flowers at the Eternal Flame in memory of the victims of the Genocide, after which they toured the memorial grounds. At the Memorial Wall, the guests paused by the plaques dedicated to two historic American figures — Henry Morgenthau, US Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during the years of the Armenian Genocide, and Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross — both of whom played significant roles in humanitarian efforts to support Armenians.



## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL

## UAE, Armenia Officials Discuss Cooperation

ABU DHABI (Armenpress) — On November 17, on the sidelines of his working visit to the United Arab Emirates, the Minister of Defense of Armenia Suren Papikeyan met with the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Crown Prince of Dubai of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the defense ministry said.

Ambassador of Armenia to the UAE Karen Grigoryan also participated in the meeting.

A number of topics related to the prospects for Armenia-UAE defense cooperation were discussed.

## 17th-Century Hydraulic Well Built by Armenians Discovered in Ukraine

KIEV (Armenpress) — A unique 414-year-old Armenian monument has been discovered in Ukraine's Ternopil region, the Union of Armenians of Ukraine announced in a statement earlier in November.

Researchers in the village of Yazlovets discovered an Armenian well built in 1611.

Most of the structure lies underground. Beneath what appears to be a simple stone-lined spring is a complex hydraulic system created by Armenian craftsmen in the 17th century. Water from a powerful source first flows into an underground reservoir before emerging outside.

On the wall of the spring, a carved stone slab with inscriptions in Latin and Armenian has been preserved. It reads: "Armenian Hakob built this in 1611 for the welfare of society. This cross and the constructed spring are the work of Hakob and his brother Stepan. Abraham, the stonemason, performed his craft with devotion."

At the top of the slab, an eagle with outstretched wings is depicted, with a cross below it.

Researchers believe that the Armenian craftsmen of Yazlovets may also have created carved ornaments for the local church and the gates of the old fortress.

## Armenian, Georgian Justice Ministers Meet

TBILISI (Armenpress) — The Minister of Justice of Armenia, Srubhi Galyan, during working visit to Tbilisi, met with the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Kobakhidze, the Armenian Ministry of Justice said in a statement on November 17.

They emphasized the need to ensure long-term and stable peace in the South Caucasus.

The fundamental importance of the region's sustainable and long-term development was touched upon. The parties addressed the effective partnership between Georgia and Armenia in the field of justice and the opportunity to exchange experience in this direction.

Galyan touched upon the EU Visa Liberalization Action Plan and the work to be carried out by the Ministry within its framework in the near future.

## Turkey Blocks İmamoğlu's Campaign Account for Fourth Time

STOCKHOLM (Stockholm Center for Freedom) — Turkey on Monday, November 17, blocked the X (formerly known as Twitter) campaign account of Istanbul mayor and main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) presidential candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu, following the



Ekrem İmamoğlu

successive blockings of three previous accounts, the Freedom of Expression Association (İFÖD) reported.

After the Istanbul Public Prosecutor's Office filed an indictment against İmamoğlu on November 11, the account restrictions followed in quick succession, with previous campaign accounts blocked on November 13, 14 and 15, under court orders citing the protection of "national security" and "public order."

İmamoğlu has been using official campaign accounts to communicate with the public after his personal account was blocked in Turkey on April 24 for the same reasons. His international X account was subsequently restricted on May 9.

The nearly 4,000-page indictment accuses İmamoğlu of running what prosecutors call a "criminal organization" within the municipality and committing 142 offenses including bribery, fraud, bid rigging and money laundering. İmamoğlu has denied the accusations, calling the indictment "a pile of lies built through threats and coercion."

The indictment names İmamoğlu and 401 other suspects, with prosecutors seeking a sentence of up to 2,430 years in prison for him. The charges have been widely criticized as politically motivated.

İmamoğlu, a senior member of the CHP, was detained on March 19 and arrested days later on corruption charges. His arrest, generally seen as targeting the biggest

political rival to longtime President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the 2028 presidential election, sparked Turkey's worst protests in the last decade.

İmamoğlu won Istanbul's mayoral race in 2019 and defeated Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) again after the results of the first election were cancelled on the grounds of irregularities. He was named his party's presidential candidate in March for the next general election scheduled for 2028. But his political future has been clouded by court cases and legal rulings that could bar him from politics and that his party and supporters say are designed to sideline him.

The pressure on the CHP and its municipalities has intensified since the arrest of İmamoğlu. According to a CHP report released in late October, 16 mayors from the party are jailed and 13 municipalities have been put under government-appointed trustees since its sweeping victory in the March 2024 local elections.

Turkey was ranked the lowest-scoring country in Europe for online freedoms, according to a report from the Washington-based Freedom House last October. Turkey has a score of 31 in a 100-point index, with scores based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free) and is listed as "not free."

## Azerbaijan Summons Russian Ambassador over Missile Strike on Embassy in Ukraine

By Xandie (Alexandra) Kuening

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry has summoned Russian Ambassador Mikhail Yevdokimov after the Azerbaijani Embassy in Kyiv was severely damaged as a result of a Russian missile strike. The incident was at least the fourth time that the embassy has been damaged by Russian attacks on the city.



Russian Ambassador Mikhail Yevdokimov

On the night of November 14, during a large-scale, combined airstrike by Russian armed forces on Kyiv, a missile hit the embassy compound, creating a large crack in the building.

"The walls, including those of the embassy building, were seriously damaged. Part of the wall was blown off, the embassy's windows were shattered, and the diplomats' cars were also damaged," Azerbaijani state media reported.

No embassy staff were injured as a result of the strike.

This marks at least the fourth time the Azerbaijani embassy building in Kyiv has been damaged as a result of airstrikes.

However, Azerbaijani state media noted that "the extent of the damage this time was significantly greater and more serious."

In late August, a missile exploded near the embassy building shattering windows and creating cracks in the roof of the consular section. Earlier that same month, two separate Russian drone strikes damaged a facility in the Odesa region operated by the Azerbaijani oil company SOCAR.

In July, a kamikaze drone exploded near the embassy causing some damage.

In their discussions with Yevdokimov, the Foreign Ministry also recalled a 2022 airstrike on the Honorary Consulate in Kharkiv — noting that "the administrative building was seriously damaged and the service car was rendered unusable" — as well as an airstrike in January 2024, as a result of which "a crater with a diameter of ap-

proximately 3 meters was formed about 35 steps away from the embassy's administrative building, and an unexploded ordnance due to detonation failure was discovered at a depth of 8 meters from the ground."

The ministry emphasized that all of these incidents "raise questions about the deliberate nature of the missile attacks."

They further noted that Russia had been informed of all these facts in the past through official notes, and that the coordinates of the buildings housing all diplomatic missions in Ukraine had been shared as early as April 2022.

"During the meeting, it was stressed that such attacks on our diplomatic missions

are unacceptable, and it was requested that the Russian side conduct an appropriate investigation into the issue and provide a detailed explanation," the ministry's statement concluded.

Separately, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to condemn the Russian missile strike, noting that "such attacks on diplomatic missions are unacceptable according to the norms and principles of international law."

He also "expressed gratitude" for Azerbaijan's humanitarian support to Ukraine.

The Azerbaijani Embassy is located in Kyiv's central Lukyanivka district, just a few blocks away from the Lukyanivska Metro Station and the Artem arms factory, which has been repeatedly targeted since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion.

(This article originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on November 17.)

## US, Armenia Hold Further Talks On 'Trump Route'

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Armenian border crossing procedures that could be put in place for Azerbaijani travelers and cargo. His domestic critics maintain that the TRIPP amounts to the kind of an extraterritorial "Zangezur corridor" that has been sought by Azerbaijan ever since the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Aliyev has repeatedly echoed the Armenian opposition claims.



# Archbishop Khajag Barsamian Welcomes Fr. Aram Tilikyan as Barcelona Pastor

BARCELONA, Spain — The Armenian community in Barcelona welcomed Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Pontifical Legate of the Armenian Church in Western Europe, as he introduced Fr. Aram Tilikyan as the new pastor serving Barcelona and its surrounding Armenian communities.

Armenians have a long and meaningful history in Spain, with roots dating back centuries through waves of migration and settlement. Today, the Armenian community in Spain numbers about 40,000, with approximately 10,000 living in and around Barcelona.

During the Divine Liturgy celebrated on Sunday, November 16, at the Catholic Church of Saint Mary the Queen, Archbishop Barsamian honored the service of previous pastors — Fathers Sassoun, Shnork, and, more recently, Father Ghevont — and praised the dedication of community members who have laid the groundwork for a thriving Armenian Church in Barcelona.

“With the appointment of Father Aram as your full-time pastor, a new opportunity emerges to further develop and strengthen your community — for the good of all Armenians in Barcelona, especially the younger generation,” said Archbishop Barsamian.

The archbishop emphasized integration,

highlighting Spain’s rich culture and traditions, and encouraged Armenians in Barcelona to be active participants in Spanish society while remaining steadfast in their foundation as Armenian Christians.



Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, left, and fr. Aram Tilikyan

Tilikyan will serve the growing Armenian community in Barcelona, supported by two other priests: Father Ghevont, who oversees communities in Madrid, Arnedo, Valencia, Alicante, and San Sebastian; and Father Toros, pastor for Malaga, Seville, Cadiz and Portugal.

# Armenia Presents National Climate Report at COP30

## Highlights Reforms, Ambitious Energy Targets

BELEM, Brazil (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenia’s Minister of Environment Hambarzum Matevosyan presented the country’s national report during the “Climate–Nature: Strengthening Synergies at COP30” held within the framework of the COP30 summit in Brazil on November 18. In his address, the minister outlined Armenia’s climate vulnerabilities, ongoing reforms, and the importance of international cooperation in addressing the global climate crisis.

Matevosyan noted that Armenia, as a mountainous and landlocked country, is significantly affected by the impacts of climate change, which directly influence agriculture, water resources, biodiversity, public health, and the living conditions of communities.

Despite these challenges, he stressed that Armenia’s climate response is guided by ambition as well as by principles of solidarity, fairness, and strong international cooperation.

The minister highlighted key reforms implemented in recent years, including the development of a Comprehensive Climate Law, ongoing national dialogues, and the preparation of strategic documents such as the country’s Long-Term Low Greenhouse Gas Emission Development Strategy. Armenia has also submitted an updated and more

ambitious third Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

According to Matevosyan, Armenia has made progress in renewable energy development. The country aims to increase the share of electricity generated from renewable sources to 50 percent by 2030 and approximately 60 percent by 2040. He emphasized that nuclear energy will continue to play a pivotal role in Armenia’s clean and sustainable energy system, contributing not only to climate goals but also to energy security.

The minister also underscored the importance of Armenia’s large-scale forest restoration and expansion programs, which aim to preserve ecosystems, protect biodiversity, and strengthen community resilience.

Matevosyan highlighted that Yerevan will host the 17th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP17) in 2026—an important milestone for the global review and assessment of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. In this context, he emphasized the need to deepen synergies among the three Rio Conventions, noting that climate change and biodiversity loss are interconnected crises that must be addressed through unified, systemic, and ambitious approaches.

The minister concluded his remarks by reaffirming Armenia’s commitment to continued progress, enhanced international cooperation, and joint global action toward sustainable development.

# Azerbaijan Becomes Member of Central Asian Consultative Meetings Format

By Xandie (Alexandra) Kuenning

Azerbaijan has become a full-fledged member of the Consultative Meetings of Heads of State of Central Asia. The announcement came on November 16 during the seventh such meeting, during which Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev highlighted that Azerbaijan and Central Asia today form “a single geopolitical and geo-economic region, whose importance in the world is steadily growing.”

The heads of state met on November 16 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where President Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized that the decision to admit Azerbaijan to the consultative meetings format as a full-fledged participant would help “build a solid bridge between Central Asia and the South Caucasus, paving the way for the formation of a unified space of cooperation, which

will undoubtedly strengthen the strategic interconnectedness and resilience of both regions.”

“Undoubtedly, with Azerbaijan’s accession to our format, the voice of our region in the global community will become even more significant,” he added.

The leaders of the other Central Asian states offered their own praise to the initiative and to Azerbaijani Ilham Aliyev himself, who was present in-person at the meeting.

During his own speech, Aliyev noted that he had attended the previous two summits in 2023 and 2024 at the invitation of Tajik President Emomali Sharipovich Rahmon and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Kemelevich Tokayev. He further noted that in the past three years, he had visited Central Asian countries 14 times, while his Central Asian counterparts had visited Azerbaijan

23 times.

“The relations between Azerbaijan and Central Asian states are quite unique. We are bound together by centuries-old history, spiritual and cultural heritage, brotherhood, friendship, and solidarity. We have not only maintained these ties but also infused them with new momentum, which has the nature of a strategic partnership,” Aliyev said.

In particular, he thanked the “fraternal support” Central Asian countries have extended to Azerbaijan in its “large-scale efforts to revive the liberated territories.” He cited in particular the Mirzo Ulugbek School and the Kurmangazy Children’s Creativity Centre in Fuzuli — a “gift from our Uzbek, Kazakh and Kyrgyz brothers” — and Turkmen’s support of a mosque, also in Fuzuli.

“All of this will remain in the cherished memory of the Azerbaijani people as a last-

ing testament to our brotherhood and solidarity,” Aliyev said.

He then went on to discuss the development of the Middle Corridor, noting that over the past three years, cargo transportation along the Middle Corridor via Azerbaijan has increased by 90%.

“Today, Azerbaijan and Central Asia serve as a vital link and bridge between East and West, North and South,” he said.

He added that he was confident the August 8 agreements with Armenia in Washington would also contribute to “expanding transit opportunities.”

“The construction of the Zangezur Corridor [the term used by Azerbaijan for the Trump Route] on the territory of Azerbaijan is nearing completion. With an initial throughput capacity of 15 million tons, this railway will become an important artery of the Middle Corridor. Construction of the highway that will form part of the Zangezur Corridor is also nearing completion,” Aliyev said.

In addition to attending the summit, Aliyev also held a one-on-one meeting with Uzbek President Mirziyoyev. The two heads have noticeably close ties — in July, the second Azerbaijan–Uzbekistan Supreme Interstate Council was held. During the discussions, a number of new agreements were signed increasing bilateral cooperation on the 30th anniversary of the establishment of relations between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

(This article originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on November 17.)

# Ex-Karabakh Leaders Face Life Sentences, Lengthy Prison Terms in Baku Trial

PRISONERS, from page 1

Following Azerbaijan’s 2023 assault on Nagorno-Karabakh and the subsequent mass displacement of its population, Azerbaijani authorities captured 16 Armenians. Eight of them are former political and military leaders — including former State Minister Ruben Vardanyan, who faces dozens of charges, some of which carry a life sentence, in a separately held trial. The remaining eight individuals were captured during the military operations.

Seven other Armenians taken prisoner during the 2020 war and the subsequent blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh have already been convicted and sentenced to various prison terms.

In total, Azerbaijan is holding 23 confirmed Armenian detainees.

Many human rights activists in Armenia and abroad describe the Baku proceedings as a show trial in which Armenians are denied due process. Azerbaijan dismisses these assertions.

Official Yerevan does not comment on

the course of the trial. But speaking to reporters in parliament earlier this week, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said his government works “on a daily basis” on the issue of Armenian detainees held in Azerbaijan. He said the matter could be resolved through broader rapprochement between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

“The more auspicious the environment between Armenia and Azerbaijan is, the easier will be the solution to this issue as well,” he said. “Peace will solve many remaining issues as well.”



# Community News

## SAS Awards Best Conference Paper Prizes

The Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) announces the recipients of its 2024-2025 “Best Conference Paper Award.” Aram Ghoogasian was awarded a prize for his conference paper “Blood, Sweat, and Tears: Learning to Read at Midcentury,” and Arthur Ipek received an award for his conference paper on “Ecce philomela obispoensis (Tenny Arlen and her contribution to contemporary Armenian poetry).” The SAS awarded each of the winning recipients a \$1,000 grant.

Ghoogasian’s conference paper draws from the memoirs of primary school students from locales across the Armenian heartland – including the Caucasus, Istanbul, the eastern Ottoman provinces, and the eastern Mediterranean – to provide a window into the harsh reality of the classroom in the nineteenth-century.



Arthur Ipek

“I’m honored to be recognized by the prize committee for this paper, which grew out of bits and pieces of a dissertation chapter draft,” said Ghoogasian. “I hope the essay’s eventual publication will challenge us to take children and their experiences seriously as we continue to try to understand the cultural history of the Armenian nineteenth century.”

Aram Ghoogasian is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Promise Armenian Institute and the Department of History at the University of California, Los Angeles. His current research project is a history of Armenian print culture in the nineteenth century. His academic writing has appeared in *Kritika*, *Middle Eastern Literatures*, the *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, and *Études arméniennes contemporaines*. Ghoogasian earned his PhD from Princeton University in 2025.

Ipek’s conference paper focuses on the literary output of the late poet Tenny Arlen. Arlen moved to Los Angeles for her undergraduate studies, and decided to assiduously master the Armenian language, and upon the encouragement of her teacher/mentor Hagop Gulludjian, to meld a newly discovered appreciation of the language with her long – held love for poetry. In honor of her work and legacy as a poet, a posthumous poetry collection entitled “To Say with Passion: Why Am I Here?” was published in 2021. Marking the first American-born Armenian-language poet to receive widespread acclaim from the literary and non-literary communities alike, this publication proved to be a watershed moment for the Armenian literary tradition. Ipek’s paper is an analysis of Arlen’s

see SAS, page 7



(l-r) Armenian Assembly Board Member Valina Agbabian, Katherine Sarafian, and Lori Agbabian

## Assembly Intern Alumna Katherine Sarafian and Husband Meher Gourjian Host Bay Area Membership Reception

PASADENA, Calif.— Armenian Assembly of America Terjenian-Thomas Washington, D.C. Intern Alumna Katherine Sarafian, an Academy Award-winning producer and Pixar Senior Vice President of Production, along with her husband, Meher Gourjian, hosted a special afternoon membership reception at their home. The event welcomed new and current Bay Area Assembly Members, generations of intern alumni, and national Board Members, as well as participants from the Assembly’s Advocacy Scholars Program from the University of California, Berkeley.

Celebrating over five decades of commitment to advocacy, public service, and Armenian community leadership, attendee participation spanned the Assembly’s history, from its founding in 1972 and first internship class in 1977 to its most recent classes and newest Advocacy Summit Scholars program, founded in 2024.

“Witnessing the legacy of the Assembly’s Internship Program come full circle is truly inspiring,” said Bryan Ardouny, Executive Director of the Armenian Assembly of America. “From D.C. to Yerevan to right here in the Bay Area, our programs continue to foster lifelong advocates for Armenia and the Armenian-American community. We’re deeply grateful to Katherine and Meher for graciously opening their home and bringing our community together for such a meaningful afternoon.”

Guests appreciated the opportunity to hear updates on key Armenian issues and current events from Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny and immediate past Co-Chair Anthony Barsamian. Attendees engaged in meaningful conversation and exchanged ideas while reconnecting with fellow alumni, Assembly leaders, and members in an intimate setting. They also enjoyed a wine tasting experience, generously provided by winemakers Greg Nemet and Rose Nemet of California-based Kareen Wine.

“It’s exciting to see the Assembly community grow,” said Board Member Valina Agbabian. “Bringing together program alumni and new Armenian Assembly members, every connection made here deepens our ability to advocate, educate, and celebrate who we are as Armenians.”

The gathering also featured remarks from Raffi Barsamian, a 2018 alumnus of the Armenian Assembly’s Yerevan Internship Program, who shared reflections on

see RECEPTION, page 9



(l-r) Armenian Assembly Immediate Past Co-Chair Anthony Barsamian, Marta Grigoryan, Mark Sloodsky, Assembly Yerevan Internship Alumnus

## AMAA Child Care Event Features Guest Speaker Dr. Sylvie Khorenian

By Gilda Buchakjian

NEW MILFORD, N.J. — The AMAA NY/NJ Child Care Committee sponsored a successful fundraiser at Sanzari’s New Bridge Inn in New Milford on October 28. This event was dedicated to supporting the AMAA Child Care Program, which is committed to enriching the lives of Armenian children who come from vulnerable backgrounds.

The Child Care Committee Chair, Seta Nalbandian, welcomed the guests and expressed her gratitude to the committee and to all who were instrumental in organizing this charitable event, recognizing everyone’s continued dedication & generosity. Following Mrs. Nalbandian, Jennifer Telfayan-LaRoe gave the opening prayer inviting God’s presence & purpose into the evening’s events.

Committee member Anita Buchak-



Dr. Celeste Helvacian



Anita Buchakjian

jian delivered the opening message. Her emphasis on “celebrating the spirit of friendship, the strength of community, and the power of giving” set the focus for the evening and gave promise of “raising hope, creating opportunities, and changing lives” for our children.

A short video, titled “Living with Purpose,” highlighted the AMAA’s mission of Evangelism, Education and Humanitarian Outreach, all carried out under “God’s loving guidance.”

Throughout the evening, the

see AMAA, page 7



COMMUNITY NEWS

# SAS Awards Best Conference Paper Prizes

SAS, from page 6

work, interpreting and contextualizing her poetry.

“As I continue to expand my knowledge through research, it is encouraging to see that other scholars in Armenian studies share an interest in contemporary Western Armenian literature and its significance within the global literary landscape,” said Ipek. “By receiving the SAS prize, I will only be more motivated to deepen my knowledge and continue to write, all while bringing the voice of other writers to the forefront.”

Ipek is a graduate student in the Department of Psychology at New York University. He received a B.A. in Psychology and Linguistics from the University of Michigan. Apart from his professional career, he studies twentieth-century Western Armenian literature, and in particular, Armenian and World literature. He has published articles and poems in the Armenian-language press such as the Istanbul-based newspapers Marmar and Jamanak and the Beirut-based

Hamazgayin Pakine literary journal.

“The SAS is pleased to recognize such excellent graduate students,” said SAS President Barlow Der Mugrdechian. “The scope of their work demonstrates the multi-disciplinary aspect of Armenian Studies. The SAS encourages young scholars to become more active in the field.”

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

SAS would like to thank the Best Conference Paper Committee for reviewing all the submissions and selecting the winning papers.

The SAS Best Conference Paper Award was made possible through the generous

institutional support of the Armenian Studies Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; the Meghrouni Family Presidential Chair in Armenian Studies, University of California, Irvine; the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR); the Armenian Communities Department, Gulbenkian Foundation; the Armenian Studies Program, California State University, Fresno; the Institute of Armenian Studies, University of Southern California; the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center, New York; the Mashtots Chair, Harvard University; the Robert Aram and Marianne Kaloosdian and Stephen and Marian Mugar Chair in Modern Armenian History and Armenian Genocide Studies, Clark University; the Armenian Studies Program, University of California, Berkeley; and the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA.

To support the SAS award and grant funds, contact SAS President Barlow Der Mugrdechian: [barlowd@csufresno.edu](mailto:barlowd@csufresno.edu)

## AMAA Child Care Event Features Guest Speaker Dr. Sylvie Khorenian

AMAA, from page 6

committee members were fully engaged in ensuring the event’s success.

Dr. Celeste Helvacian introduced the guest speaker, Dr. Sylvie Khorenian, who gave an informative presentation tailored to women of all ages, and mindful of their sensibilities, offering useful strategies for skin health and rejuvenation. She introduced the portmanteau term “dermathrapy” to describe a gentle, patient-centered approach for those hesitant about trying new treatments. She answered numerous questions from the audience and contributed thoughtful gifts to the auction.

A joyful atmosphere pervaded the elegant Sanzari’s restaurant in welcoming a full house. It was especially heartwarming to reconnect with friends not seen in a while, sharing laughter, and savoring a gourmet meal served at tables decorated with fall flower centerpieces and charming favors for all the guests.

A silent auction to benefit the children of the AMAA Children Care program sparked an animated, friendly bidding competition over numerous exciting items.

The guests were also offered the meaningful opportunity to sponsor a child from the AMAA Child Care program —further extending the evening’s spirit of giving and hope.

The members of the AMAA NY/NJ Child Care Committee who took turns



Lucienne Aynillian and Dr. Sylvie Khorenian

at the podium to deliver remarks and closing words included: Seta Nalbandian (Chair), Lucienne Aynilian, Anita Buchakjian, Dr. Celeste Telfeyan Helvacian, Jennifer Telfeyan-LaRoe, Kathy Voskian, and Vicki Hovanesian (cultural advisor).

The event ran smoothly throughout the evening thanks to the efficiency and dedication of AMAA staff members Christine Kutlu, Magda Poulos, and Anita Terjanian.



### To Our Readers:

**The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* is the first English-language Armenian weekly published in the US from 1932. Readers can learn of the most important developments in Armenia, as well as international politics, art and culture throughout the world in a convenient and concise format.**

**The *Mirror-Spectator* has covered the violence and political uncertainty affecting Armenia and Artsakh, supported efforts at humanitarian fundraising, and continued to provide periodic video reports online. Send us your email if you wish to receive our weekly updates.**

**We continue with our annual tradition of publishing your Christmas and New Year’s wishes, and greetings to relatives and friends in the final issue of the year. In case you wish to give gift subscriptions of the *Mirror-Spectator* for Christmas, for your convenience, we are placing a gift subscription form in the newspaper as well as one below. Your support is what keeps us going and we always enjoy hearing from you.**

Sincerely,

**Alin K. Gregorian**  
Editor

**Aram Arkun**  
Managing Editor

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

## St. John's Anniversary Pays Tribute to Past, Prepares for Future

By David Lührssen

MILWAUKEE — On Sunday, November 9, Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese, visited Milwaukee to celebrate the 83rd anniversary of St. John the Baptist Armenian Orthodox Church. During the Divine Liturgy (Badarak), Bishop Mesrop — assisted by Rev. Fr. Guregh Hambardzumyan, pastor; Fr. Nareg, former pastor; and Deacon Sarkis Ginosyan, a seminarian from St. Nersess Seminary — ordained Arek Kashian, Michael Kashian, and David Lührssen to the diaconate, and conferred the rank of t'bir (Acolyte) upon Eric Kashian — a milestone in the parish's ongoing efforts to prepare and strengthen its future leaders.

In his sermon, Bishop Mesrop reflected on the vital importance of community, contrasting the biblical model of shared faith and the common good with the self-focused, often unfulfilling "spirituality" of contemporary society. He drew an analogy to the redwood trees of California, noting that these towering giants have endured for centuries not because they stand alone, but because their roots are deeply intertwined, supporting and sustaining one another. Similarly, he emphasized, the Church thrives when its members are united in faith, love, and service.

The celebration continued in the church's Cultural Hall, beautifully redesigned for the occasion by Sandy and Jim Densmore. The program began with the singing of Mer Hairenik, the Armenian national anthem, and God Bless America, followed by the Primate's invocation. Parish Council Chairman Lyle Dadian emceed a program featuring a rich array of presentations and performances. Highlights included a slide show (featuring photos by Don Rask) capturing memorable moments from the parish's past five years, a video presentation of St. John and Milwaukee that premiered at the 2025 Diocesan Assembly, and a spirited performance by the Hamazkayin Sardarabad Dance Ensemble of Chicago.

The newly ordained deacon David Lührssen offered a heartfelt toast during the anniversary luncheon, wishing the St. John community continued success for many years to come. When asked what first brought him to the parish and what inspired him to remain active — serving at the altar, on the parish council, as a parish delegate, and in many other leadership roles — he shared his story with the nearly 150 guests attending the program.

He recalled that it was after the 1988 earthquake in Armenia that he first attended a service at St. John — just two years after the consecration of the new sanctuary in 1986. Having never been to an Armenian church before, he was deeply moved by the service led by Father Tateos Abdalian, with Father Nareg (then a deacon) and the late Deacon Samuel Avakian serving at the altar, accompanied by a full and beautiful choir and an accomplished organist, Jan Avakian Kopatich. Most importantly, he emphasized that it was the genuine warmth, welcome, and friendship of the St. John community that inspired him to return, get involved, and ultimately become an integral part of the parish family.

This year's Diane Blinka Service Award for devoted service to the St. John community was presented to Gail Gabrelian and Deann Kokott. The late Diane Blinka exemplified true selflessness, devotion, commitment, and many years of dedicated service to the parish. The day's most joyful surprise came with the reading of an encyclical from Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, awarding the St. Nersess the Graceful Medal to Nancy and Dr. Gary Seabrook in recognition of their outstanding devotion and faithful service to the Church.

St. John's parish priest, Rev. Guregh Hambardzumyan, likened the parish to the "good heart" of Milwaukee's Armenian community — kept beating and strong through the dedication and contributions of all its members. Bishop Mesrop also shared reflections from his childhood in Soviet Armenia, recalling his first encounter with the Badarak at the historic Khor Virap Monastery at age 13. "The beauty of the service caught my spirit," he said. "Understanding the theology came later. The beauty is what stayed with me." He honored the parish's founders — survivors of the Armenian Genocide — who established St. John as a new home for their legacy in the New World. Looking ahead, Bishop Mesrop expressed his anticipation of returning when the parish hosts the Diocesan Assembly in May 2026.

Many honored guests attended the anniversary, including Oscar Tatossian, honorary consul of the Republic of Armenia, as well as the former pastor and other Armenian clergymen. The program concluded with the audience joining in the singing of the Der Getso, led by Fr. Nareg and accompanied on the piano throughout the program by Jan Avakian Kopatich, followed by the Primate's benediction.

The 83rd anniversary of St. John the Baptist Armenian Orthodox Church was not only a celebration of its rich history and enduring faith, but also a testament to the vibrant, close-knit community that has sustained it through generations. With a renewed commitment to service, fellowship, and Armenian heritage, the parish looks forward to many more years of spiritual growth, shared joy, and continued contributions to the life of Milwaukee's Armenian community.

The St. John the Baptist Armenian Orthodox Church of Milwaukee traces its beginnings to October 27, 1940, when it was first established as a mission parish — marking 85 years of faith and service. On July 1, 1941, the original parish council was formed and received the blessing and approval of the late Archbishop Karekin Hovsepian, who at the time served as the Primate of the Armenian Church of America.

A year later, on Sunday, May 10, 1942, the first church building was completed and solemnly consecrated by Archbishop Karekin Hovsepian, who would later ascend to the throne of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia. This momentous occasion marked the beginning of a lasting spiritual home for the Armenian faithful of Milwaukee and the surrounding region.

## OBITUARY

### Dr. Mihran Simonian

Respected Dentist, Armenian Community Leader

LOS ANGELES — Dr. Mihran Simonian, the son of genocide survivors, was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1933. A gifted student, he was admitted to the French Lycée, where he completed his secondary education. He continued his studies at the Faculté Française of Lebanon, earning his Doctor of Dental Surgery in 1958. He became one of the more prominent and respected dentists in Lebanon.

Dr. Simonian's involvement in Armenian public life began during his student years. He became a leading member of both the Veradznount Cultural Association and the Evereg-Fenese Compatriotic Association. During his university years, at the request of the exemplary principal Peniamin Jamgochian, he volunteered as a science teacher at the Sahagian National School, supporting an Armenian institution with limited resources. During this period, he joined the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), serving his nation through AGBU with unwavering dedication for more than fifty years, first in Lebanon and later in the United States.

In 1961, he married Sona Yardemian. Together they built a loving home and were blessed with three children: Silva, Krikor, and Seta.

For Dr. Simonian, the Armenian nation, the homeland, and Holy Echmiadzin were sacred — unshakable pillars of his identity. Guided by a steadfast vision for their flourishing, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to national service.

His tenure as chairman of the Central Board of the AGBU-Armenian Youth Association (1972-1984) coincided with the Association's golden era, during which his leadership left a lasting imprint. After immigrating to the United States, he continued his dedicated service to the commu-



nity, first as chairman of the AGBU Los Angeles Chapter and later for many productive years as chairman of the Pasadena-Glendale Chapter of the Tekeyan Cultural Association.

In recognition of his steadfast commitment and "in appreciation of his years of valuable service," the AGBU Central Board named him an Honorary Member of the Union in 2002. In 2014, Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, conferred upon him the Order of St. Nerses Shnorhali, together with the Holy Gontag (Encyclical).

In his later years, Dr. Simonian's health gradually declined, yet his mind remained sharp and engaged until the very end. He departed this transient world on November 14, 2025, in peace and with the clear conscience of a man who had fulfilled his duties to both family and nation, surrounded by those he loved.

He is deeply mourned by his devoted partner of 64 years, his children, sons-in-law and daughter-in-law, his brother and sisters, and all who knew him. His memory will remain everlasting in the hearts of his wide circle of relatives, friends, and community members.

James "Jack" Giragosian, CPC

Mark J. Giragosian

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# Middlesex Sheriff’s Office Honored with Two Awards at the 2025 Law Enforcement & Corrections Awards Ceremony

BOSTON — The Middlesex Sheriff’s Office (MSO) took home two of the top awards at the 2025 Law Enforcement & Corrections Awards Ceremony on Thursday, November 13.

This year, the MSO was presented with both the Innovation of the Year Award for the new Older Adult Re-Entry (OAR) Unit and Program of the Year Award for the Family Support Services Unit (FSSU).

The ceremony was hosted by the Massachusetts Sheriffs’ Association at the State House in Boston and recognized individual, team and organizational excellence. Accepting the awards on behalf of the MSO were Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian and staff assigned to the OAR Unit and the FSSU.

The OAR Unit was launched in late 2024 with assistance from Boston University and UMass Boston and was created with programming and a structural

layout specifically designed for incarcerated individuals ages 55 and older.

Like OAR, the FSSU, is a first-in-the-nation initiative. Launched in 2020, the FSSU is designed to enhance support for the loved ones of those incarcerated at the Middlesex Jail & House of Correction. The initiative, which has gained attention as a national model, has managed over 8,000 family interactions.

“The officers and civilian staff members who facilitate these vital programs are outstanding professionals who work tirelessly to make our communities better places to live and work,” said Sheriff Koutoujian. “Their commitment to implementing bold and innovative programs is changing lives for the better each and every day. That’s why I am so proud to call them my colleagues and to share these awards with them.”



Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian (right) and members of the Middlesex Sheriff’s Office accepted the award for Program of the Year from Massachusetts Sheriffs’ Association Vice President Nick Cocchi (left) at the Massachusetts State House. Photo by the Middlesex Sheriff’s Office

# Boston-Area Armenian University Students Network Together

WATERTOWN — College students from at least six different universities participated in a networking cookout on Friday, November 14, at the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) New England District headquarters in Watertown, sponsored by the AGBU and the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Boston Chapter. It was an opportunity both for the students to get to know one another and also the opportunities offered by the AGBU and TCA for them.

After a barbecue meal prepared by Hagop and Rita Balyozian together with Sossi Aroyan, the students heard from AGBU New England District Chair Ara Balikian, Director Aram Arkun provided information about Armenian cultural activities organized by TCA locally and how to sign up online for the TCA-supported Armenian Mirror-Spectator (mirrorspectator.com), which provides community and global Armenian news.

Both organizations encouraged the students to not only connect with each other, and perhaps organize some joint university activities themselves, but to participate also in Armenian community activities when their studies permit.

Alex Hananian, president of Bentley University’s Armenian Students Association in Waltham, helped organize and publicize the event among the students. TCA Boston Chapter Co-chair Dr. Aida Yavshayan and executive officers Jeanine Shememian and Suzy Naroian also assisted in the event.

AGBU and TCA plan a second event for the students at the TCA’s Baikar Building within several months.

Director Aram Arkun provided information about Armenian cultural activities organized by TCA locally and how to sign up online for the TCA-supported Armenian Mirror-Spectator (mirrorspectator.com), which provides community and global Armenian news.

Both organizations encouraged the students to not only connect with each other, and perhaps organize some joint university activities themselves, but to participate also in Armenian community activities when their studies permit.



Some of the students at the evening get-together (photo Jeanine Shememian)

sored by the AGBU and the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Boston Chapter. It was an opportunity both for the students to get to know one another and also the opportunities offered by the AGBU and TCA for them.

who spoke about summer internship opportunities, career information and other services provided by AGBU.

TCA of the US and Canada Executive



From left, Aram Arkun, Garo Kerdelian, Ara Balikian, Ara Naroian, student, Lianna Shememian, Raffi V. Arkun, Suzy Naroian (photo Jeanine Shememian)

## Katherine Sarafian and Husband Meher Gourjian Host Bay Area Membership Reception

RECEPTION, from page 6

his time in Jerusalem while earning a Master of Law at the Hebrew University. He spoke about witnessing the immense unity and resilience of the Armenian community of Jerusalem’s Armenian Quarter, as they navigate the ongoing legal challenges facing the church and community. The Armenian Assembly continues to play a crucial role in the legal fight to retain the rightful property of the Armenian Quarter. Raffi also shared about the impactful connections built through the Assembly’s global network of Armenian professionals.

“The Assembly’s Internship Program

remains as vital today as it was when it began nearly five decades ago,” stated Anthony Barsamian, Immediate Past Co-Chair of the Armenian Assembly of America. “Seeing alumni from the 1970s through today who remain so engaged reaffirms how this program continues to shape thoughtful and engaged leaders for our community. Their lasting involvement serves as an inspiration for the next generation of interns, especially as we look forward to celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2027.”

To learn more about membership with the Armenian Assembly visit the Assembly’s membership page.



Raffi Barsamian, 2018 alumnus of the Armenian Assembly’s Yerevan Internship Program, reflects on his experience studying in Jerusalem



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Another Successful Arpa Film Festival Draws to a Close

By Karine Armen

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

HOLLYWOOD — The 28th Arpa International Film Festival (Arpa IFF), one of the longest-running film festivals in Los Angeles, opened on Thursday, November 6, at the TCL Chinese Theatre. This year, the festival screened 48 films from 25 countries.

The director of programming, Cammie Jones, conducted all the Q&As with the producers, directors, and actors after the screenings, who had flown in from Armenia, Korea, Argentina, Mexico, Serbia, the Netherlands, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, and many other countries.

The opening night's feature film was "Deadly Vows," directed by Jared Cohn, starring Oscar-nominated actress Shohreh Aghdashloo. Sylvia Minassian, the founder of the festival, welcomed everybody and said, "This is a very exciting night. It is our 28th year." She thanked the committee members and throngs of volunteers.

Producer Ara Keshishian, Aghdashloo's former agent, said, "Shohreh has it all: the talent, the kindness, the grace, and welcomed me with open arms. It was an honor to work

"Pomegranate Tree" is a short by Hesou Zetelian, about an Armenian family who moves to Los Angeles and struggles to adjust to a new culture while preserving their old one. "Endless Exile" is by Mano Baghjajian, whose storytelling shows the parallel between the Armenian Genocide and the annexation of Artsakh. The French artist Arnaud Serval's documentary, "La Paradis Est La," about his art and the honoring of primitive art, uses duduk music. Nairi Bandari documented the life of an art restorer in her film called "Restoring the Past."

The short films continued with "Miasin – Together" by Armen Ghazarian. The documentary follows the all-female Turkish and Armenian band Miasin on their trip to Turkey. They visit several ancient Armenian cities and connect with local musicians, give concerts at the Armenian church of Diyarbakir and meet Kurdish and Hamshen people. The Armenian musician from Miasin, Sevana Tchakerian, appears in the feature film "A Winter's Song," which was screened Saturday evening.

"Whatever Dreams They Had" is a documentary by Stephanie Ayanian and Joseph Myers. The film follows Armenag Bedrossian, an Armenian Catholic priest, as he devotes himself to helping Syrian refugees. Ayanian wants to show the importance of helping refugees and becoming aware of our own biases.

A noteworthy movie is "The Reverse Side of the Medal," made in Armenia by Anna Harutunyan (her professional name is Anna Maxim), who is the actress, writer, director and producer of this feature film based on the life of weightlifter Nazik Avdalyan. Avdalyan was a professional weightlifter from Gyumri who won a gold medal for Armenia. She suffered back injuries due to a car accident and took a break for seven years. But through perseverance, she continued her passion for sports and won a gold medal at the 2016 European Weightlifting Championships. During the Q&A, Maxim said, "This is a movie about a woman who overcomes many challenges, but I made the film to empower everybody, not just women."

Maxim trained for 3 years to be in shape for this challenging role. On Sunday, she received two awards: Rising Star and Best Feature Film.

On the third day, several short films from Armenia, South Korea and Mexico were screened. The black-and-white film "The Circus Lion" is by director/actor Tigran Tovmasian from Australia. Its message is about struggling to leave a desperate situation; it won the award on Sunday evening. Another short and meaningful film was "9 1 6," written and directed by Hrachya Zakaryan in Armenia. The universal theme was how people isolate themselves, put themselves in "prison" without realizing they have other options. The film won the Best Short. There was a tie, and both "9 1 6" and "The Circus Lion" received the awards.

Later, they screened a feature film called "Shakkar," directed by Nasim Kiani and written by Kiani and Mariam Vardanyan, who plays the main protagonist. The movie was shot in Gyumri, but there is no exact time or location in the screenplay. Kiani was a lawyer in Iran and wanted to produce films about human rights. Kiani said, "We wanted a universal story without a specific country, religion, or



From left: Musician/Singer Fared Shafinury, Oscar-nominated actress Shohreh Aghdashloo, and the founder of the Arpa International Film Festival, Sylvia Minassian. (Karine Armen photo)

era. We wanted to discuss child abuse and women's rights." During the filming, they had Armenian and Iranian actors and crew. Vardanyan demonstrated her incredible acting talent and remained in character throughout the production. Kiani won the Best Director Award which was presented to her by Michael Goorjian, the producer, director, and actor of "Amerikatsi."

The evening continued with the romantic comedy by Angela Asatryan, "A Winter's Song." The movie takes place in Armenia during Christmas and inspires people to travel there in the winter. This heartwarming film will be available to stream on Amazon starting November 16. Asatryan won the Best Screenplay award.

Sonia Keshishian is the film festival's Jury Liaison and said, "Because of Arpa, we have pushed forward the dreams of our independent filmmakers and storytellers. Without the stories, we do not exist."

The festival closed on Sunday, November 9, with the Awards Ceremony honoring several talented people in the film industry. The master of the ceremony was actor Scott Michael Campbell. Sylvia Minassian's teenage grandchildren were the presenters for the short animations. They came on the stage with a fun skit. The young Syrian filmmaker, Fadi Azra, won Best Animation for Adam.

Director and producer Valerie McCaffrey presented Mikael Sharafyan with the Best Costume Designer award. Sharafyan designed the costumes for Deadly Vows, which screened at the Festival's opening.

There were several special guests in the audience. George Chakiris, the famous actor and dancer in West Side Story, received a Lifetime Achievement Award. Chakiris thanked the organizers of the film festival and said, "My parents came from Greece. It is amazing to be here with you, and my life started with those two beautiful immigrants."

Actress Angela Sarafyan received the Career Achievement Award, presented by producer Ara Keshishian. Sarafyan thanked and said, "It feels great to be back in Hollywood, where I grew up, and be supported by this community the Arpa created."

The festival's director, Maral Kazazian, said, "It is a pleasure to bring independent filmmakers and storytellers for artistic expressions and a cultural exchange."



From left: Festival Jury Liaison Sonia Keshishian, actress/director/producer Anna Maxim (Harutunyan), Festival Founder Sylvia Minassian, and Festival Director Maral Kazazian. (Karine Armen photo)

with her." He added, "Her career has been iconic, an Academy Award nominee and Emmy Award winner." Keshishian presented Aghdashloo with the Icon Humanitas Award on behalf of the festival.

The festival continued on Friday morning with "Siranoosh: An Armenian Journey." Journalist Paul Jonathan Rigg directed and produced the documentary about his mother. Siranoosh was born in Burma, lived in India, Iran and Kuwait, and finally settled in England. She had seen several wars and was forced to move. It is an inspiring story of survival, adjusting to new cultures, and finding a home.

There were three short-film blocks featuring Armenian and international films. Each film had its own message, but they all had a theme of respecting and understanding different cultures, humanity, self-reflection, and kindness.



At left Actress of Shakkar movie Mariam Vardanyan, and the award-winning director Nasim Kiani. (Karine Armen photo)

## Lowell ARF to Observe 130th Anniversary with Film Showing

LOWELL, Mass. — The Lowell ARF chapter, one of the earliest ARF chapters in North America, will celebrate its 130th anniversary on December 13 with the showing of the award-winning movie, "My Sweet Land," a coming-of-age story set against a multigenerational war in the post-Soviet Karabakh. The movie will be preceded with a short program highlighting the work of the Merrimack Valley Armenian National Committee and will be followed by a reception.

"My Sweet Land," produced by noted documentary filmmaker Sareen Hairabedian, has been shown at many

global film festivals and has received mention by the International Documentary Association for Best Documentary Feature, Best Cinematography, Best Editing, and Best Original Music Score. The movie follows an 11-year-old boy named Vrej, growing up in Artsakh who dreams of becoming a dentist in his picture-postcard village with its roaming ducks and golden bees. His sweet land, however, is strewn with mines from previous wars, shaping a country that remains unrecognized to the world. Vrej's life takes a sudden turn when war erupts, forcing him to flee with his family. He spends his days in exile impatiently waiting for

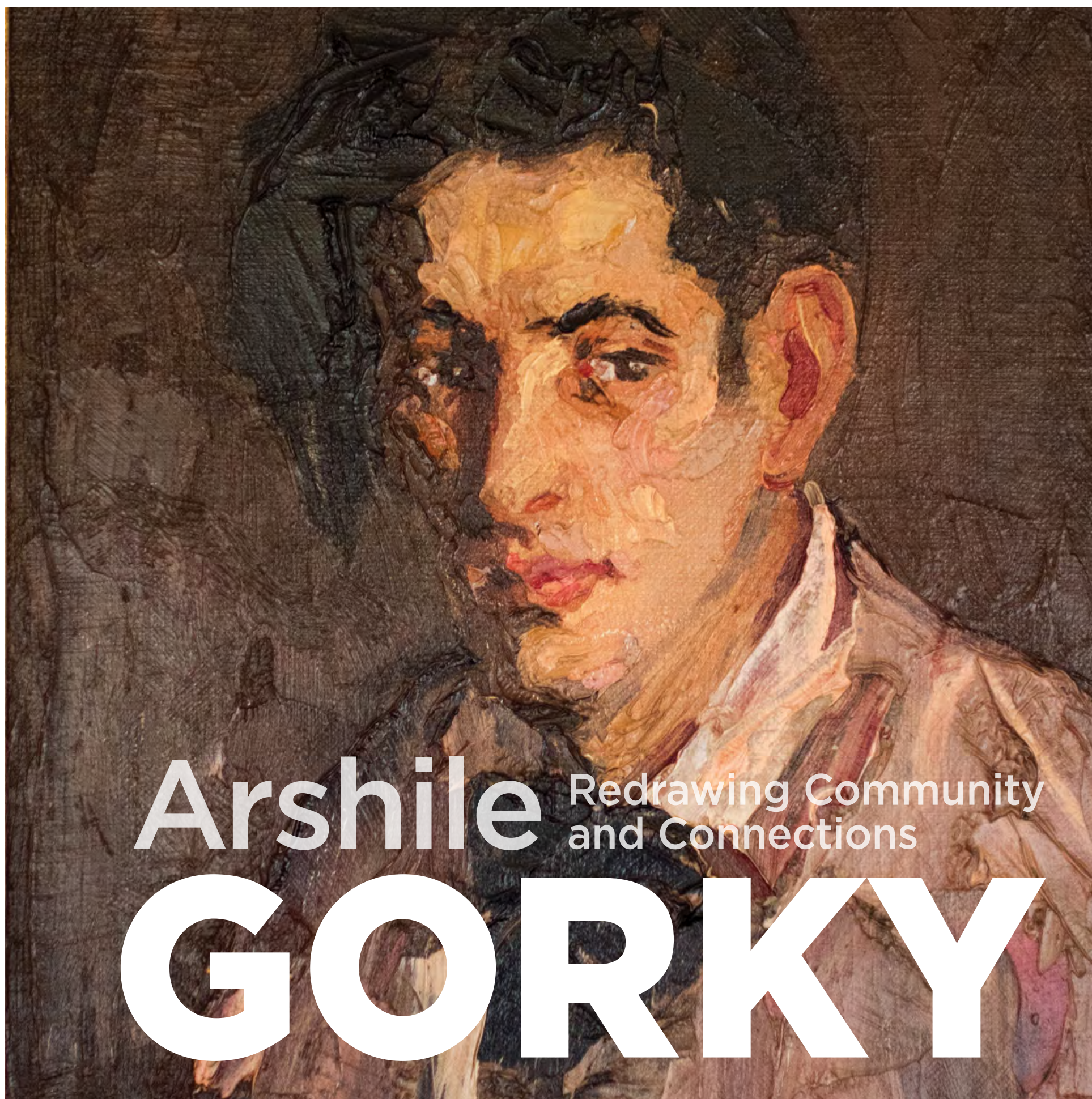
victory, but reality takes a different turn; Armenians lose the war. Vrej must learn the rules of war. But can he carry a nation's hopes on his young shoulders? The film is a testament to the people of Artsakh, where hope and trauma had shaped their resilience across generations.

The anniversary event will be held at the Holy Archangels, Saints Michael and Gabriel Armenian Church, 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill. The movie will start promptly at 7 p.m. Donation: Adults- \$25 Students: \$15. Reservations are requested by contacting armenjeknavorian@gmail.com or ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com.





## COMMUNITY NEWS



# Arshile GORKY

## Redrawing Community and Connections

Sponsored by the JHM Charitable Foundation | Curated by Kim S. Theriault

### Private Members' Holiday Reception & Preview

Thursday, December 11 at 6:30 pm

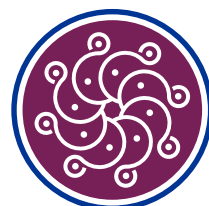
This event is exclusive to current members only.

Kindly RSVP by December 1:

[www.armenianmuseum.org/rsvp](http://www.armenianmuseum.org/rsvp)

Join us for an enchanting evening as we open our new exhibition, *Arshile Gorky: Redrawing Community and Connections*. Featuring rarely seen works, the exhibition explores how Gorky forged a new life and a groundbreaking artistic vision in the wake of exile and loss.

Exhibition opens to the public on December 12, 2025 and runs through April 26, 2026.



armenian  
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65 Main Street, Watertown, MA  
[www.armenianmuseum.org](http://www.armenianmuseum.org)





# Arts & Culture

## Balakian Delivers Dazzling Talk on New Book

By Alin K. Gregorian  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

BELMONT, Mass. — The audience gathered at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) on November 6 was in for a treat: the capacity crowd had the chance to hear Peter Balakian read from and speak about his latest book of poems, *New York Trilogy*. The program was cosponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter, as well as the Belmont Public Library, in addition to NAASR. *New York Trilogy* (University of Chicago Press) is composed of three longform poems that appeared in his last three books, *Ziggurat* (2010), *Ozone Journal* (2015) and *No Sign* (2022).



Author Peter Balakian speaks at NAASR (Alin K. Gregorian photo)

As he wrote in an author’s note in the book, “*New York Trilogy* explores one man’s journey from the late 1960s into the early twenty first century, a journey that evolves from a series of experiences and events many of which are set in New York and the onlooking New Jersey Palisades.” Before starting his talk, Balakian, a professor of English at Colgate University, and the winner of the Pulitzer Prize for poetry for *Ozone Journal* and the PEN /Martha Albrand Award for his memoir *The Black Dog of Fate*, said: “As an American writer and university professor of 45 years, I feel it’s my obligation to witness what is happening to our democracy. I believe that is well behind party identity and party politics. Donald Trump’s assaults on universities and higher education, secondary education and civic culture, including museums and libraries, through coercion and tactics that resemble extortion are anti-democratic and often violations of the first amendment and they will not work. Critical thinking and knowledge production in our democratic educational structures is a sedimentary rock with layers embedded of several hundred years of culture and intellectual life. Without that culture and open pluralistic systems of learning, we would not have a democracy.” Balakian also spoke about his Armenian heritage. “We are an extraordinarily ancient civilization,” easily dating back 2,500 years. “Our resilience, our cultural depth, our intellectual

see BALAKIAN, page 13



Isabel Bayrakdarian (photo Aram Arkun)

## Soprano Bayrakdarian Moves Boston Audience with Ancestral Hymns

By Aram Arkun  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

LEXINGTON, Mass. — Isabel Bayrakdarian, possessor of an exquisite soprano voice, performed a program called “Ancestral Songs, Prayers and Lullabies” at Lexington’s Scottish Rite Museum and Library on November 15. Talented musicians Ellie Choate on the harp, Rayo A. Furuta on the flute, and Mher Mnatsakanyan on the duduk joined her in the program, with drawings by Kevork Mourad projected on a screen to accompany the music. Presented in three parts, without an intermission, the concert began with five songs that were Marian chants, hymns or children’s prayers. The rest of the program consisted of lullabies and songs by Gomidas Vartabed, and two of his students, Parsegh Ganatchian (1885-1967) and Mihran Toumajan (1890-1973), who continued the ethnomusicological work of Gomidas by preserving fragments of the dispersed musical heritage of the Armenian people. Among those who arranged the music for the program were Artur Avanesov, Ellie Choate and John Hodian. Bayrakdarian evinced a strong emotional connection with these songs, particularly the lullabies which she said at the performance she used to sing to her own children many, many times until they grew up. The fact that she was named after her great-grandmother Zabel, who sang many of these songs to her children, and thus passed them down generation-to-generation till they reached Bayrakdarian, showed the latter, she writes in her program notes, how music bridges past and future and celebrates life and survival. The poignant nature of the music and its context had a powerful effect on audience members, with at least several literally crying during the performance.

see BAYRAKDARIAN, page 13



From left, Ellie Choate, Isabel Bayrakdarian, Rayo A. Furuta, and Mher Mnatsakanyan (photo Aram Arkun)

## ‘Live by Loving’ Photo Exhibition By Zaven Khachikyan

SAN FRANCISCO — “Live by Loving,” an exhibition by Armenian artist Zaven Khachikyan, will appear at the Lightspace Gallery of the International Art Museum of America (IAMA) in San Francisco from November 16 to 23. The exhibition is organized by the Golden Gate Armenian Film Festival (San Francisco) with the support of the Strobila Foundation. Khachikyan’s work explores compassion, resilience, and the power of empathy in times of displacement. Through an evocative blend of photography and fabric, he reflects on the lives of families displaced from Artsakh after the 2020 war. Each piece intertwines the intimacy of personal archives, family photographs, fragments of carpets, and traces of domestic life, with artistic reinterpretation, inviting visitors to witness the endurance of humanity amid loss. “Live by Loving” reminds us that even within fractured homes, love and warmth endure. The artist calls upon us to take part in this act of empathy, to live by loving. The exhibition is based on the idea of humanitarian support for the displaced people of Artsakh resettled in Armenia because of the 2020 war. The presence of a piece of carpet and family photos on the walls of their half-empty, uninviting, and half-destroyed dwellings were bright rays of hope for survival - a call to empathize with people, an imperative to review my archives, and to respond as an artist. The only artistic imperative is the following message: let’s bring love and warmth to those hearts; let’s live by loving. One of the aims of the exhibition is to reveal the multidisciplinary connections between various fields – cinema, photography, literature and ethnography – thus emphasizing the idea that photography can transform from a simple document into a literary image, a symbol of collective memory. It’s worth noting that art, beyond its abstract-general nature, is also quite concrete: it has a time and a place. The exhibition will feature photographs that require historical analysis. Over the past 30 years, Khachikyan has worked as a freelance photographer for numerous Armenia-based and international outlets, including AP, TASS, Time, and Paris Match. He documented the struggles and transformations of a society in flux. He covered the Artsakh movement, and his lens captured the realities of the First Artsakh War. His projects have also involved collaborations with international organizations such as UNDP, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mission East, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), and the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR).

see PHOTO, page 16





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Massachusetts Chamber Music Artists Have Remarkable Debut

BEDFORD, Mass. — On November 1, 2025, the Boston-area musical landscape welcomed a significant new addition: Massachusetts Chamber Music Artists (MCMA). It officially launched as a newly established nonprofit dedicated to fostering community through chamber music and bridging cultures, generations, and languages.

The occasion was celebrated with MCMA's inaugural performance, appropriately titled "Opus I," and held at the First Parish here before a full and enthusiastic audience. The evening was led by violinist Haig Hov-

sepien, the founder and artistic director of MCMA, whose long-standing presence in the community and dynamic artistry have made him a familiar and admired figure.

He was joined by an exceptional ensemble of New England-based musicians: violinist Michael Fisher, violist Yeh-Chun Lin, cellist Edward Arron, and pianist Dina Vainshtein.

Hovsepien opened the program by introducing the mission and vision of MCMA, acknowledging its board members, and expressing gratitude to supporters and sponsors whose made the debut possible.

The concert opened with Phantasy for Piano Quartet in F-sharp Major, by Frank Bridge, performed by Hovsepien, Lin, Arron, and Vainshtein. The ensemble's



From left, Haig Hovsepien, Michael Fisher, Dina Vainshtein, Yeh-Chun Lin and Edward Arron (Jirair Hovsepien photo)

sepien, the founder and artistic director of MCMA, whose long-standing presence in the community and dynamic artistry have made him a familiar and admired figure.

nuanced and expressive interpretation brought to life this seldomly performed chamber piece and received an enthusiastic reception from a curious audience.



Haig Hovsepien, left, and Edward Arron (Suzy Ohannessian photo)

In contrast with the lesser known piece, the program continued with a set of seven favorites of Armenian folk songs by Komitas, arranged for string quartet by Sergei Aslamazyan: Al Ayloukhs, Hoy Nazan, Kele Kele, Habrban, Yerkin Ambel A, Chinar Es and Gakavik. Performed by Hovsepien, Fisher, Lin and Arron, the set resonated deeply with the audience, inspiring an instant and unanimous standing ovation.

Following the intermission, the musicians returned to stage with one of the most well-known masterpieces of the chamber repertoire, Felix Mendelssohn's Piano Trio No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 49, featuring Hovsepien, Arron, and Vainshtein. Their

compelling and impassioned performance earned yet another prolonged ovation by the cheering audience, expressing their gratitude and calling the musicians back to the stage.

The concert was followed by a reception where audience members gathered to meet and greet the artists, to enjoy refreshments featuring many of our local and favorite establishments, and to celebrate the successful launch of MCMA's artistic journey.

MCMA is now working towards creating new programs for upcoming concerts, collaborations and educational programs. The organization invites and welcomes community members who wish to support their mission to visit [mcmartists.org](http://mcmartists.org).

## Bayrakdarian Moves Boston Audience with Ancestral Hymns

BAYRAKDARIAN, from page 12

Taline Balikian introduced Bayrakdarian at the start of the program on behalf of the Friends of Armenian Culture Society (FACS), the local organizer of the concert, which has presented Armenian classical music



Taline Balikian (photo Aram Arkun)

in various forums to audiences in the Boston area over many decades.

Many of the selections performed are from Bayrakdarian's album "Armenian Songs for Children" (2021).

The Lebanese-born Canadian-Armenian Bayrakdarian at present is a Professor of Voice, Director of Opera Theatre, and Head of Voice Area in the Music Department at the University of California Santa Barbara. The same program is presented in New York's Carnegie Hall and in Toronto's Koerner Hall.

## Balakian Delivers Dazzling Talk on New Book

BALAKIAN, from page 12

achievements are what keep us on the map today."

The new book, he explained, is a long poem with 143 sections. "Long poems are as old as civilization," citing *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, *Gilgamesh* and *David of Sassoon* as examples. "But the modern long poem is a little different. It starts with the great American poem Walt Whitman."

He continued, "For Whitman, this was an American rebellion against British metrics," he explained. He called that form of poem a "great American invention as original and important as the skyscraper, the suspension bridge, jazz, baseball or the cheeseburger."

"The whole poem explores one persona's journey," noting that it is not necessarily autobiographical. However, a lot of his experiences have gone into it. "The self that is created in the poem is a composite," he added. That fictitious persona has many experiences in New York, as well as ties to historical events, such as the Armenian Genocide, Hiroshima, the AIDS epidemic, the war in Iraq, the Vietnam War, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as well as intimate relationships and explorations of art and literature.

In the talk he eloquently connected a dizzying number of seemingly disparate experiences, which all coalesced in the several sections of poetry he read, touching on everything from waiting for his daughter, Ani, to finish her dance class, talks with legendary jazz producer George Avakian and his belief that sounds had correspond-



From left, Peter Balakian, Dr. Aida Yavshayan and Sossy Yogurtian of the Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter

ing colors (synaesthesia) or the blistering sun in the Syrian desert.

He spoke at length about his experience going to the Deir Zor desert in Syria in 2009 with the late reporter Bob Simon for "60 Minutes." He was deeply touched by finding bones and explaining his people's history to the reporter, while admiring Simon's dedication. He also explained that seeing the churning Euphrates outside his hotel, under the moonlight, was a sight he could not forget. The segment aired in February 2010.

"Bob Simon was really amazing. If you watch the segment, he just decimates the Turkish ambassador," Balakian said.

He also spoke at length about George Avakian, the late jazz producer, how as a young man he was "helping Benny Goodman who [had a gig] playing for the Spanish Loyalists at Columbus Circle," while cutting his hand on Lionel Hampton's xylophone.

Marc Mamigonian, director of academic affairs at NAASR introduced Balakian. Also speaking was TCA Boston Chapter Co-Chair Dr. Aida Yavshayan.

A question-and-answer period followed Balakian's talk.

The book, published by the University of Chicago Press, is available at NAASR and bookstores everywhere.





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



(Photos courtesy <https://soomfoods.com/pages/our-story>)

## Soom Foods: Tahini Carrot Cake

Amy Zitelman is the CEO of Philadelphia-based (and woman-owned) Soom Foods, the leading purveyor of tahini and tahini products in the American market, which she cofounded in 2013. Soom was named the best tahini according to industry experts by New York Magazine in 2019, and has been featured in the New York Times, Food & Wine, Bon Appetit, and other publications. She was named to Forbes magazine's "30 Under 30" class of 2018.

"In the Zitelman family, working in food and restaurants was never meant for the next generation. Harry Zitelman, who owned the iconic mid-century D.C. restaurant Bassin's told his son Rick: 'I did not have a restaurant for 30 years so you could go to college and open a restaurant — absolutely not.' But two generations later, all three of Rick's daughters — Amy, Shelby, and Jackie — work in the industry as the team behind Soom Foods, a tahini company that supplies restaurants like the acclaimed Zahav Restaurant and home cooks across the country. Food is 'kind of in our blood,' explains Amy."

Most people who know about tahini understand the sesame paste as simply one of the building blocks of hummus. But for Amy, the culinary potential of tahini goes far beyond hummus. She insists that you should use whatever high-quality tahini you like best in her recipes, adding, "My hope is that The Tahini Table will increase sales for all companies contributing to the growing appreciation of tahini. A rising tide lifts all boats."

"Since antiquity, sesame has been an essential foodstuff in the Levant—the region that today includes Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories, and beyond. Originally prized for its oil, sesame was first referenced in cuneiform tablets found in the Fertile Crescent. Herodotus wrote about sesame crops on the shores of the Tigris and Euphrates 3,500 years ago. And a thirteenth-century Iraqi cookbook, Kitab al-Tabikh, is the first place where tahini itself is referenced as a culinary ingredient," says author, food writer and recipe developer Adeena Sussman.

"In 2016, tahini was named a 'cult condiment' by The Kitchn. Stateside, Soom has played a central role in more spreading knowledge about tahini. At Soom, only high-quality Humera sesame seeds from Ethiopia are used, as is also true for other artisanal tahini companies such as Seed and Mill, who grind their sesame seeds onsite and sell tahini ice cream and Israeli-style halva candy in New York's Chelsea Market."



Amy's great grandfather Morris and his wife Rebecca Zitelman in their corner store in Baltimore in the 1930s.

### Tahini Carrot Cake

The cake is moist and rich. The tahini gives it a nutty aftertaste, and because the tahini reduces the amount of oil in the recipe, this cake never gets greasy the way many carrot cakes do.

Serves 8

#### BATTER:

Cooking spray, for greasing  
4 large eggs  
1 1/2 cups lightly packed light brown sugar  
3/4 cup mild vegetable oil, such as grapeseed  
3/4 cup premium tahini  
1 1/4 cups whole-wheat pastry flour  
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon  
1 teaspoon ground allspice  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1/2 teaspoon baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt  
7 medium carrots, peeled and shredded (about 2 1/2 cups)  
1 1/2 cups chopped walnuts (optional)

#### FROSTING:

1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature, cut into small pieces  
1 (8-oz.) package cream cheese, at room temperature  
1/2 cup premium tahini  
2 cups confectioners' sugar  
1/2 cup black and white sesame seeds, optional

#### PREPARATION:

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease two (8-inch) round cake pans with cooking spray.

For the batter: In a large bowl or in a stand mixer, beat the eggs and brown sugar until completely combined and thick. Beat in the oil, a bit at a time, then beat in the tahini.

Mix the flour, cinnamon, allspice, baking soda, baking powder, and salt in a separate bowl until combined. Add a third of the flour mixture to the tahini mixture, stirring to combine. Add half of the carrots and mix well. Add half of the remaining flour mixture, then the remaining carrots, and then the remaining flour mixture, stirring between each addition to combine. Stir in the walnuts (if using).

Evenly divide the batter between the prepared cake pans and bake on the middle rack of the oven until a skewer inserted in the center comes out clean, about 35 minutes. Cool in the pans for 15 minutes. Remove the cakes from the pans, then transfer them to wire racks to cool completely.

For the frosting: While the cakes are baking, beat the butter, cream cheese, and tahini in a stand mixer (or large bowl) until smooth. Add the confectioners' sugar and mix until just smooth. If the frosting is too soft to spread, chill in the refrigerator for about 10 minutes.

Set one cake layer on a serving plate. Top with a third of the frosting and 2 tablespoons of the mixed sesame seeds. Add the next layer and frost the sides and top with the remaining frosting. Top with the remaining sesame seeds (it's fine if some fall down the sides). If the cake seems at all wobbly, refrigerate until the icing firms and the cake feels sturdy. Cut into wedges and serve.

For this recipe, go to: <https://soomfoods.com/blogs/recipes/tahini-carrot-cake>

For more recipes, go to: <https://soomfoods.com/blogs/recipes>

The Tahini Table contains 100 recipes that showcase tahini's wide range of uses. From Vegan Mac and Cheese and Tahini Chicken Schnitzel, to Chocolate Halvah French Toast and Tahini Flan, The Tahini Table is written with the home cook in mind, incorporating tahini into everyday cooking in delicious and unexpected ways. With beautiful color photos, contributions from top restaurant chefs, and easy substitutions for a variety of diets, The Tahini Table proves that tahini is a must-have pantry staple for cooks everywhere.

To order, go to: <https://soomfoods.com/collections/cookbooks>

Or go to: <https://www.amazon.com/Tahini-Table-Beyond-Hummus-Recipes/dp/157284289X>

See:

"How the Soom Sisters Continue a Family Tradition of Working in the Food Industry" at: <https://www.jewishfoodsociety.org/stories/how-the-soom-sisters-continue-a-family-tradition-of>

"Tahini: A Brief History" by Adeena Sussman at: <https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/pb-daily/tahini-a-brief-history>

"There's no place like the kitchen table to bring us together as a family. It was the one spot in the house where we could always agree on one thing: our passion for the foods we loved to make and share."

Connect at:

<https://www.facebook.com/SoomFoods/>

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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Nora Armani Speaks in Western Armenian in European Film

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN – A retrospective screening of the films featuring New York and Paris-based Armenian actress Nora Armani, took place October 1-3, at the Yerevan Cinema House, presented by the Union of Film Professionals of Armenia. According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), Armani has appeared in some 30 films and television productions. She has also performed on stage internationally. The Yerevan program included Ara Yernjakyan's "Deadline in Seven Days" (1991, Armenia), Harutyun Khachatryan's "Last Station" (1994, Armenia), and Rax Rinnekangas's "The Last Wish" (2024, Finland-Spain).

We sat down with the renowned actress regarding her acting in the last film.

**Dear Nora, I am very glad you are a central figure in Rax Rinnekangas's film "The Last Wish," an international project. The main hero of the film goes to a monastery to fulfill "The Last Wish" of his dying theatre coach mentor friend: to read every page of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* three times. You portray Dostoyevsky's main female characters, though in quite an unusual way — not so much physically, but in the ideas they represent. When accepting the roles, did you reread the novel? And, more generally, is Dostoyevsky among the writers who are close to your artistic temperament?**



Nora Armani in "The Last Wish" by Rax Rinnekangas

My characters in the film are more symbolic renditions of Dostoyevsky's characters, rather than true portrayals of them. In fact, the film makes use of the Dostoyevsky novel, but is not the story of the novel. It uses the philosophy behind it and the incidents in it to draw parallels with what is happening in the world around us today. These parallels appear in the life of the film's hero. Although I am familiar with the work, my reading of the 1000-page novel back-to-back, apart from pure curiosity and literary re-education, would not have helped the film much. Instead, I made myself available to the director's interpretation — what he wanted my character to do and say — and I immersed myself in the experience.

**The film conveys a strong message that, in our uneasy times — marked by wars and humanity's growing dependence on technology — reading great literature may serve as a kind of remedy or salvation.**

Indeed. Rax Rinnekangas is a well-known published author in Finland, in addition to being a photographer and a filmmaker. Some of his novels are also published in France and other countries. His belief in the power of literature, and in the importance of books in our lives is so strong that four of his latest films are based on the theme of books and literature. "The Last Wish" is one of these films, and its underlying philosophy is that great literature belongs to humanity and should not be politicized in any way. On the contrary, in its pages lies humanity's salvation. His newer film after "The Last Wish," is "Jukebox," which was released this year, and is inspired from the eponymous novel by Nobel Prize winning author Peter Handke. I play a lead role in that film too. Sadly, because of the widespread influence of social media, books are losing their place in our lives, and the film is a wakeup call to us human beings about the loss of important values.

There is a widespread notion that Dostoyevsky and other great Russian cultural values are being neglected in the West today. Yet this film proves the opposite. Moreover, as the film notes, "the despot of the East" now suppresses certain Russian values within his own country. In this context, how do you see "The Last Wish" contributing to the preservation or revival of Dostoyevsky's literary and philosophical legacy for contemporary audiences?

The film is a Finnish-Spanish co-production, however, Rax Rinnekangas who is a Finnish filmmaker, has studied the Russian language and literature, and points that its great works in fact belong to world civilization. Today, in the West, there is a tendency of neglecting major literary works that have contributed to the whole of human development and philosophy, because of political reasons. Great literature should be above the dirty games of politics, and that is what the film advocates. Russia may be waging a war the West is completely opposed to, but that should be no reason to ban Russian literature and erase its major contributions to human thought. It is a very limited and limiting approach. Hopefully the film reverses this. In Armenia, the audience was very receptive as they are well-read and were familiar with the works of the great Russian authors.

**We are used to seeing you with your characteristic warm smile, which has almost become your artistic signature. In "The Last Wish," however, there is no smile; instead, the close-up shots of your face and profile re-**

**veal multiple emotional layers. How did you approach conveying such depth and intensity without relying on your usual expressiveness?**

That is a very interesting question, and I am glad you are asking it. As an actress, mostly working in Hollywood, we fall into the trap of being cute and pretty. But that is in itself a rather superficial way of being. I was never the "pretty little thing" in films, even when I was a pretty little thing in real life (laughs). However, when I was younger, these types of strong and thoughtful women characters were not part of my repertoire. I am happy that by maturing, a new path towards portraying strong women characters that can reveal multiple emotional levels is opening up to me. As for the preparation for the role, I just had to immerse myself in the story, listen to the director, and trust that what I have experienced and lived, not only as an actor myself, but also as an Armenian woman with a tradition and history behind me, would come in handy. I am glad you noticed that change, and are depicting upon it.

**Interestingly, the Yerevan premiere of "The Last Wish" coincided with the 100th anniversary of Garbis Surenian, the remarkable translator of *The Brothers Karamazov* into Armenian. Rax Rinnekangas's film blends visual poetry with philosophy, and one can sense the influence of Tarkovsky. What was special about working with Rinnekangas and on this film in particular?**

Rax is one of those directors who doesn't say much, but knows exactly what he wants and how to get it. He talks about various aspects of daily life, his life experiences, preferences, stories that have marked him, and he trusts that his actors will also bring their own experiences into the equation. I love this unobtrusive way of directing and



handling actors very delicately. The creation of a character on screen is a very delicate process. The camera is very sensitive and can penetrate into one's soul. If we are not in the right emotional state, or carry over aspects of our daily lives onto the set, the camera picks up all these details, and they show up on screen. Creating a protected atmosphere is what Rax does very well. We become one family with the small crew he uses. Full trust reigns everywhere. He likes to tell the story of Ingmar Bergman, known for his sparsely populated quiet dramas, and David Lean, known for "Doctor Zhivago" and "Lawrence of Arabia" with their casts of thousands. When Lean asks Bergman how many people his crew is composed of, Bergman says, "A few friends." And when he in turn asks Lean about his film crews, Lean says, "Hundreds of enemies." Rax advocates Ingmar Bergman's approach, and I love that too.

**In "The Last Wish," you portray Agrafena (Grushenka), a Russian character from Dostoyevsky's universe, yet you speak in Western Armenian — a deeply symbolic choice. I had the impression that this was your initiative, although Dostoyevsky's characters are profoundly rooted in Russian spirituality and psychology. As an actress, how does performing in a language that carries your own heritage affect your connection to a character belonging to another culture and century?**

Rax Rinnekangas likes his characters to speak different languages. Even though Grushenka is Russian, since that character was just a symbolic portrayal of the philosophy behind the work, it was not crucial that she speak Russian. Rax gave me the choice to use any of the multiple languages that I speak. However, I chose to go with Western Armenian, the closest mother tongue for me. He loved the idea. Needless to say, performing in one's mother tongue brings out the most sincere and strongest connection possible to the character and the work in general. I would like to note that UNESCO has declared Western Armenian an "endangered language" since 2010. Every time we use it, we increase its longevity.

**Did Rax Rinnekangas discuss with you the philosophical or symbolic implications of having a Dostoyevsky character speak Armenian? If so, how did that dialogue shape your interpretation?**

He wanted a language that sounded at once exotic and deep, spoken by few people, so as the words do not get in the way of the pure emotions, or coat them with barriers preventing the real meaning from emerging. It is not so important whether the character belongs to another culture or century, or speaks a different language in realistic terms, because, as I said, the film is not a depiction of the Dostoyevsky work in any form of accuracy, but only uses it as inspiration. Acting in my mother tongue created a deeper connection to the broader human aspect of the work. Although I have performed in Western Armenian many times on stage, especially during my early years as an actress, this was the first time I was having the opportunity to create a screen character in Western Armenian. It was a great experience for me.

Thank you for your insightful questions which made me stop and think, and in some cases define situations that I had gone through rather instinctively. Now thanks to you, they are in the realm of my consciousness, and can be used in future works.



# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

- NOVEMBER 22** — Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church Food Festival. 11 a.m. – 6 p.m., 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford, MA. Eat-in or Take-out. The Food Festival menu includes lamb, chicken, and losh kebab dinners, and a vegetarian platter; a country store with a variety of Armenian specialties and deserts. The festival also features a jewelry table and gift items from Armenia as well as a Tavloo Tournament at 1:30 p.m. For further information, see [www.stsvartanantz.com](http://www.stsvartanantz.com) or call the office at 978-256-7234.
- NOVEMBER 28** — The Armenian Cultural and Educational Center (ACEC) will host its Annual Tree Lighting featuring a Holiday Market, taking place on starting at 11 a.m. Friday, 47 Nichols Ave. This festive, family-friendly celebration invites community members of all ages to a joyful kick off to the holiday season filled with magic, music, and meaningful moments. Visitors can explore the vibrant lineup of local small businesses and artisan vendors offering holiday gifts, seasonal home decor, handmade soaps and candles, specialty coffee, unique books and much more. For more information and visit us at [www.acecwatertown.org](http://www.acecwatertown.org). For inquiries contact us at: [market@acecwatertown.org](mailto:market@acecwatertown.org)
- DECEMBER 5** — Jinalov Hats Masterclass sponsored by the City of Smile. Friday, a hands-on culinary experience where tradition meets taste. Class will offer refreshments and a gift. Tickets \$100. 7 p.m., ACEC 47 Nichols Ave., Watertown. RSVP by December 1 to Cynthia Kazanjian 339-222-9900 or [cynkazan@aol.com](mailto:cynkazan@aol.com), or Katrina Menzigan [kmenzigan@outlook.com](mailto:kmenzigan@outlook.com)
- DECEMBER 7** — Christmas Candlelight Concert, Sunday, 6 p.m. Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, 200 Lexington St., Belmont. Join us for a beautiful concert in the Sanctuary. Purchase tickets at the entrance. A reception will follow the event.
- DECEMBER 12-APRIL 26, 2026** —The Armenian Museum of American is proud to announce the opening of a landmark exhibition, “Arshile Gorky: Redrawing Community and Connections.” This is the first exhibition of Arshile Gorky’s work in an Armenian museum, and it caps off a series of programs initiated by the “100 Years of Arshile Gorky” Committee in the City of Watertown. Twenty-five works from lenders across the country including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Housatonic Museum of Art, Yale University Art Gallery, and many private collections. The ex-

- hibition is curated by Kim S. Theriault. Sponsored by the JHM Charitable Foundation. Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown. Hours: Thurs.-Sun., 12pm-6pm. Please visit <https://www.armenianmuseum.org/arshile-gorky> for more information.
- DECEMBER 13** — 130th Anniversary of the Lowell ARF. Program and showing of the award-winning film, “My Sweet Land,” the story of the fall of Artsakh thru the eyes of an 11-yr old boy. Holy Archangels, Saint Michael and Saint Gabriel Armenian Church, 1280 Boston Rd., Haverhill. 6:00 p.m. Refreshments to follow. Reservations requested. Call or email Armen Jeknavorian, 978-265-9479; [armenjeknavorian@gmail.com](mailto:armenjeknavorian@gmail.com). or Ara Jeknavorian, 617-803-2612, [ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com](mailto:ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com). Adults - \$25. Students - \$15.
- DECEMBER 13** — Feast of St. Barbara, Saturday, 6 p.m. Holy Mass in English followed by a festive dinner and children’s masked celebration at 7 p.m. at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, Nishan and Margrit Atinizian Hall, 200 Lexington St., Belmont.
- DECEMBER 14** — Celebrate Valentine’s Day, Saturday, February 14, Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, Nishan and Margrit Atinizian Hall, 200 Lexington St., Belmont. 7 p.m. An evening of love, laughter, and entertainment (surprise!). Details to follow.
- SEPTEMBER 24, 2026** — Save the Date! Celebrating Contributions! Gala to benefit the Armenian Heritage Park at the InterContinental Boston.

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

- DECEMBER 12** — The Cultural Committee of the Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church presents Christmas Concert - “O Holy Night” Featuring Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island, Soloists, The Junior Choir. Refreshments following Concert in Egavian Hall. Art Exhibition of the Arts Education Program. Special performance by NAZELI Dance group. 7 p.m., in the Sanctuary of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church, 70 Jefferson St., Providence. Donations greatly appreciated.
- 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.

# Yerevan Conference Held Dedicated to 85th Anniversary of Razmik Davoyan

By Anush Aslibekyan

YEREVAN — On October 10, a special academic conference dedicated to the 85th anniversary of the birth of the renowned poet Razmik Davoyan was held through the joint efforts of the Faculty of Armenian Philology at Yerevan State University, the Manuk Abeghyan Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia and Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Association.

The conference opened with welcoming remarks by Arshaluys Galstyan, dean of the Faculty of Armenian Philology at YSU; Artashes Shahbazyan, member of the Central Board of Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Association; Ruzan Arakelyan, director of the Hamazkayin Armenia Office and Dr. Armine Tamrazian-Davoyan, linguist and wife of the poet.

In her opening address, Dr. Tamrazian-Davoyan reflected on Razmik Davoyan’s international publications, public appearances, readings and interviews. Citing reviews by numerous foreign writers and literary scholars, she emphasized that Davoyan is among those rare poets who have achieved significant recognition both within the Soviet literary sphere and in the Western world.

The conference devoted to Davoyan shed new light on the multifaceted areas of his extensive and valuable literary heritage, examined from linguistic, literary and art-theoretical perspectives.

Among the speakers were Professors David Gasparyan, Suren Abrahamyan, Sokrat Khanyan, Ashot Galstyan and Henrietta Sukiasyan; Associate Professors Karine Martirosyan, Anush Aslibekyan, Knarik Abrahamyan and Abgar Apinyan; Lusine Ghamoyan (PhD in Philological Sciences); Lilit Artemyan (PhD in Art Studies) and Gohar Ohandjanyan (MA in Philological Studies).

The conference was exceptional not only in its thematic scope but also in its collaborative nature. Alongside the organizing institutions, it brought together representatives from Khachatur Abovyan State Pedagogical University,

Mkhitar Heratsi State Medical University and researchers from the Literature, Language and Arts Institutes of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia.

While philological and literary analyses are to be expected in the studies of Davoyan’s oeuvre, the contributions of art scholars — particularly those of Anush Aslibekyan and Lilit Artemyan — revealed some unexpected and innovative dimensions of his creative legacy.

Aslibekyan focused on Davoyan’s unique dramatic work in her presentation titled “The Principle of ‘Theatre within the Theatre’ in Razmik Davoyan’s Play ‘Where Are the Rest of the Actors?’,” examining the playwright’s intriguing application of metatheatrical techniques.

Artemyan’s paper, “Konstantin Petrosyan’s Vocal Cycle ‘Monologue’: The Musical Embodiment of Razmik Davoyan’s Poetic Texts,” was dedicated to the distinguished composer’s vocal series based on Davoyan’s poems. For the first time, Artemyan conducted a comprehensive analysis of the aesthetic and structural characteristics of this vocal cycle, highlighting the intricate relationship between poetry and music.

As part of a broader series of events dedicated to the poet’s 85th anniversary, which included concerts, book publications, launches and lectures throughout the year, the conference was a significant step toward a comprehensive presentation, re-evaluation and popularization of Razmik



Davoyan’s literary heritage.

The series of commemorative events came to a close with a concert titled “Dialogue,” organized by the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Armenia Office, featuring singer and composer Vahan Artsruni and his fellow musicians. The program included Artsruni’s musical compositions based on Davoyan’s poetry, offering a powerful artistic interpretation of the poet’s lyrical world.

## ‘Live by Loving’ Photo Exhibition by Zaven Khachikyan

PHOTO, from page 12

Since the 2000s, Khachikyan’s focus has shifted towards the artistic dimensions of photography, blending traditional genres with narrative depth and innovative compositional approaches.

Khachikyan’s work has been published in nearly a dozen books, through publishers such as the British Library, Somogy and Indiana University Press. He has held solo exhibitions and participated in group shows across the United States, Canada, Europe, and Armenia.

Khachikyan’s honors include the URBAN 2022 Remarkable Reward (Trieste, Italy) and the Republic of Armenia President’s Award (2018). He has published four photo books to date.





COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**  
SINCE 1932



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# Turkey and Azerbaijan Integrate Foreign Policy

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Ukrainian President V. Zelensky will travel to Turkey this week in an effort to start negotiations with Russia aimed at ending the war. US special envoy Steve Witkoff is expected to join Zelensky in Turkey, though the Kremlin has announced that Russia will not send a representative according to the Associated Press.

Turkey previously hosted low-level talks between Ukraine and Russia earlier this year, but the only notable progress reached in Istanbul concerned prisoner-of-war exchanges. International peace initiatives led by the United States have also failed to produce a breakthrough.

I don't want to focus here on Ukraine's fate, but rather on Turkey's growing role in this process. Turkey is one of the few countries in the world that maintains normal relations with both Moscow and Kyiv, and this allows it to act as a mediator between the two countries.

If Turkey succeeds, it will become an unrivaled geopolitical super player, with influence stretching across Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the South Caucasus. Notably, this is happening at a time when the influence of both Russia and Iran is diminishing, especially against the backdrop of the launch of the Trump route project.

Although that project is primarily economic rather than strategic or military by its nature, over time it could provide the United States with a strategic presence in the South Caucasus region and even beyond. For this reason, Turkey is one of the main beneficiaries of the new route and has long-term economic and logistic plans targeting not only the South Caucasus but also other regions such as the Black Sea region and financially Central Asia. Less than a year ago, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan pushed for stronger ties with ex-Soviet Turkic states at a summit in Central Asia. Erdoğan

was attending a meeting in Bishkek of the Organization of Turkic States, a Turkish-led initiative to promote its culture and economic ties with former Soviet republics in Central Asia and the South Caucasus region.

If we consider that Turkey currently cannot be effectively counterbalanced by its main rivals, Russia and Iran, not only in Central Asia but also in the South Caucasus, it becomes clear that Turkey has a good opportunity to increase its influence.

Azerbaijan is also increasing its role to become more influential not only in the South Caucasus, but also in Central Asia — a region where major powers are actively competing for influence, as I argued in my previous article. A few days ago, Azerbaijan was formally admitted as a member of the Consultative Platform of Central Asian Leaders — the C5 — during an event in Tashkent, effectively transforming format into the C6.

By integrating more closely with the Central Asian states, Turkey and Azerbaijan will be able to work more effectively with these Turkic countries, gaining both influence and importance, which appears to be a coordinated proactive policy.

As Central Asia and the South Caucasus have important threads of interconnectedness, not only through shared history but also through complex integrative formats, some of the processes that begin or conclude in the South Caucasus will

also unfold in Central Asia, underscoring their importance for Armenia.

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



## Beware of Misleading Statements Abusing the Name of The Armenian Democratic Liberal Party

A self-proclaimed group that has been abusing the name of our party for years suddenly awakens from time to time to attempt to muddy the respectable name of the Armenian Democratic Liberal

the name of thousands of followers, supporters and readers of our ideology, strongly condemn the unacceptable and shameful behavior of that group of opportunists who are guided by petty

crisis of our days. Its real or imaginary members barely introduce themselves to the public. Therefore, everything that sees the light of day from that group is simply devoid of value.

In this context, we would like to emphasize that we, the traditional Armenian Democratic Liberal Party members, faithful to our more than one hundred-year-old unswerving path, continue to remain the uncompromising standard-bearers of the Mother See and our statehood as two national indisputable values. Through our press and

substantive activities, we will serve as a strong barrier and defender against all kinds of encroachments to both.

The current terribly chaotic and lawless situation must be immediately stopped and a return to work inspired by the ideology of national unity must be made.

**The Coordinated Press of the  
Armenian Democratic Liberal Party**  
November 12, 2025



Party through falsehood.

In recent days, this group crowned its crusade with a multilingual farce titled "A Heartfelt Call for Prudence" dated November 11, in which it attempts to target the Mother See and the current Catholicos of All Armenians, along with some dedicated members of the Armenian Apostolic Church, by name.

We, the representatives of the traditional Armenian Democratic Liberal Party's coordinated press, in

personal issues or vindictive political calculations.

We confirm to the members of the public, whether or not they are familiar with the opportunism and machinations of the aforementioned group, that the absolute majority of the ranks of our party do not recognize that faction which calls itself the "Central Executive" and which does not even contribute an iota of participation in the work necessary to surmount the Armenian national





## COMMENTARY

# Government Attacks on Armenian Church Are Unconstitutional

By **Philippe Raffi Kalfayan**

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

Since 2018, the internal political life of the Republic of Armenia has been marked by ever-increasing polarization. Initially, it could have been described as a witch hunt against the former ruling forces but it ultimately appears to be a specific plan of action that seeks global objectives. It is designed to consolidate Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's new, highly personal "ideology": the Armenian nation is limited to those living within the borders of the Republic of Armenia; the existence of an independent Nagorno-Karabakh represented a threat to Armenia's territorial integrity; the diaspora is not a component of "real Armenia"; peace with our neighbors requires wiping the slate of past crimes clean.

For the past few months, the political landscape has been shaken by a new attempt to divide society: an all-out attack against the church and its leader. There is long-standing animosity between prime minister and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II (dating back to at least 2020), but it has taken an aggressive turn at a time when the government is trying to silence opponents and to find excuses to detain the representatives of political or institutional forces that challenge its policy of capitulation and surrender to an increasingly demanding Azerbaijan. Opponents of this policy are accused of harming national security by representing a threat to the supposedly established "peace" with Azerbaijan, which is clearly still awaiting a final agreement.

It is worth recalling that since August 2018, the government of the Republic of Armenia has been systematically eliminating all constitutional checks and balances. While the ruling party legitimately holds more than two-thirds of the seats in the parliament, there is no longer any democratic debate because no committee chairmanships are reserved for the opposition blocs. All debates or draft resolutions proposed by the opposition in Parliament are either rejected by the Parliament's Bureau or are doomed to failure if they challenge the prime minister's program and "vision."

Outside Parliament, the prime minister has reshaped the judiciary to fit his plan of action. He has dismissed all judges, whether from the judiciary or the Constitutional Court, who do not share his policies or do not comply with his instructions. In short, an independent judiciary no longer exists.

Similarly, he has dismissed all high-ranking officials who serve in legal affairs, intelligence services, national security, the army and the police who oppose him.

This is the context leading up to his attack on the Armenian Apostolic Church, a symbol and pillar of the nation and the preservation of its cultural identity. This institution, beyond its spiritual role, enabled the Armenian nation to survive for six centuries without a state. To weaken the church's mission, attacks are being launched against priests resisting capitulation and/or abandonment of national values and features on the account of the new ideology.

Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan was the first one to quit his clerical mission to lead a mass movement of resistance seeking the resignation of the prime minister. His diocese, Tavush, sits on the Azerbaijani border and has already lost many square kilometers to Azerbaijani incursions. The attack on another cleric, Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan, specifically his pre-trial detention, is officially explained by an alleged phone conversation during which the authorities claim he called for an overthrow of the government. The real motive is that Ajapahyan has called for resisting the changes that the government wants to introduce in draft laws affecting the relationship between the state and the church, particularly regarding the State Public Educational Standards. This draft has been under public discussion since June 25, and the response of the working group was submitted to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport on July 10. The Working Group noted in an announcement that the proposed draft laws removed the concepts of "Nation," "Fatherland," "Armenianness," "Christianity" from the education standards. In addition, the group said the role of the Armenian language in the protection of Armenianness is ignored. As well, members

objected to the removal of any mention of the diaspora. As the statement says: "There is an impression that the Project does not refer to the nation which has two thousand years of history and an identity with Christian mission of the National Church."

Therefore, the motives of the attack against the high-ranking clergymen are less for unsubstantiated allegations of staging a coup than their opposition to the anti-national standards that the government is trying to impose.

To achieve this end, the administration has chosen an undignified path. The personal attacks aimed at replacing the head of the church and his deputies by the prime minister's men are exceptionally violent and extremely vulgar, unworthy of a head of state.

Further, all prominent figures in civil society who support the church in this confrontation are also being targeted and held in pretrial detention without any serious grounds for charges (see Samvel Karapetyan's case).

All these maneuvers are aimed at securing the prime minister's re-election in June 2026, allowing him to complete his agenda. During his visit to Paris ten days ago, he asserted that he would win these elections. The die is cast! The creation of a new, heavily equipped elite force within the police, a veritable "praetorian guard," will undoubtedly ensure that this is indeed the case.

## Constitution and the Church

Within this context, let us try to examine the issues driving this conflict dispassionately in light of the Constitution and the law concerning church-state relations, the participation of clergy members in political life, and some ad hominem attacks against the head of the Armenian Church.

The two fundamental provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia (2015) — a text examined and approved by the Venice Commission, an advisory body of the Council of Europe, before its adoption by referendum — are as follows:

### Article 17. The State and Religious Organizations

The freedom of activities of religious organizations shall be guaranteed in the Republic of Armenia.

Religious organizations shall be separate from the State.

### Article 18. The Armenian Apostolic Holy Church

The Republic of Armenia shall recognize the exclusive mission of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, as a national church, in the spiritual life of the Armenian people, in the development of their national culture and preservation of their national identity.

The relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church may be regulated by law.

The first article enshrines the separation of church and state and the church's freedom of activity. It guarantees, in particular, the church's autonomy in matters of doctrine, governance, and the election of its supreme head, the Catholicos of All Armenians. The second article implicitly recognizes the Armenian Church's special mission to the entire nation, both in Armenia and in the diaspora.

The law regulating the relations between the church and the Republic of Armenia (paradoxically predating the 1995 Constitution, amended in 2005 and 2015) has been adopted by the Supreme Council in 1991. That is the "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations of the Republic of Armenia." Several bills have been proposed to amend or replace it, particularly between 2009 and 2017. The last bill received joint opinions from the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, but it will never be put to a vote in the National Assembly.

The applicable law therefore remains that of 1991. As to relations between Religious Organizations and the State, it specifies:

#### Section 17

In the Republic of Armenia, Church and State are separate. On the basis of this separation the State:

a) Shall not force a citizen to adhere to any religion.

b) Shall not interfere in the activities and internal affairs of church and Religious Organizations as long as they operate in accordance with the law, no state agency or person

acting on behalf of such agency shall operate within a Religious Organization.

c) Prohibits the participation of the Church in governing the State and shall not impose any governmental functions on the Church or Religious Organization.

The State shall not obstruct the efforts of the Armenian Church in pursuing the following activities which we expressly reserved to be her privilege solely:

(...)

At the same time, the Armenian Apostolic Church as the national Church of Armenians, which also operates outside the Republic, shall enjoy the protection of the Republic of Armenia, within the framework of international legal norms.

#### Section 18

The State shall finance neither the activity of Religious Organizations nor of atheistic propaganda. At the same time, the state guarantees the right of the members or employees of Religious Organizations to take part in the civil and political life on an equal basis with other citizens.

Absent an opinion of the Constitutional Court, Armenia's Public Council held a consultation on June 12, 2025, and declared that " (...) emphasizing the importance of preserving public solidarity, mutual respect, and tolerance, it sees the resolution of the current situation exclusively within the legal framework, guided by the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, the Law on Relations Between the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, and the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations." "Accordingly, the Church and clergy must maintain political neutrality, and the state, in turn, must refrain from interfering in the Church's internal procedures."

However, the law on "Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Apostolic Church" (Law of 2007) does not elaborate on political neutrality. It just stipulates in its Article IV that the "guiding principles" of the relationship between those two institutions are governed by the Constitution, while their "general relations" are governed by the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (Law of 1991), as well as by other laws and international agreements. The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe has recognized the 2007 law as a special law.

Absent the independence of the Public Council, its interpretation is then null and void. Unfortunately, the Constitutional Court, if it were to be consulted, would not be independent, either.

Therefore, any attempt to subject the Church to state control or any state interference in the internal affairs of the Church violates the constitutional guarantees of the Republic of Armenia (Articles 17 and 18 of the Constitution and of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations).

It also violates the European Convention. In a landmark case, Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Metropolitan Inokentiy) and others v. Bulgaria (2009), the Court held that the State, by intervening to determine which group of believers and clergy should be considered the legal representative of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, had breached its duty of neutrality and impartiality. By recognizing one leader and rejecting the other, the State had arbitrarily interfered in the internal affairs of the Church, thereby violating the religious group's autonomy to choose its own leaders. The Court found a violation of Article 9 (Freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the Convention. The case was concerning a schismatic crisis within the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The Bulgarian state authorities had recognized and supported the faction led by Patriarch Maxim, to the detriment of the other faction led by Metropolitan Inokentiy (the applicant). In particular, the government had legalized the statutes of Patriarch Maxim's faction and refused to recognize Metropolitan Inokentiy's leadership.

The Constitution also provides for the participation of members of the clergy in political life, on an equal footing with any other citizen, all within the bounds of the law.

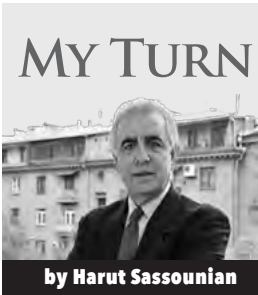
What Are the Limits of Clergy Participation in Political Life?

The government is well aware of these constitutional see CHURCH, page 20





COMMENTARY



# Two-Thirds of Armenians Don't Believe Peace Is Possible with Azerbaijan

Over the years, I have been following many polls that tracked the views of Armenia's population on key social and political issues. All of them have indicated a precipitous decline in Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's popularity from 82 percent in 2018, when he first ascended to power, to just over 10 percent today.

The most recent nationwide poll was conducted by ARAR Civilizational Research Foundation in Armenia from October 5-25, 2025. The results were released on Nov. 11, 2025. The margin of error is  $\pm 2.92$  percent. Participants' ages were 18 to 80+.

The survey began by asking about families' economic condition: 12.7 percent said they were poor or very poor; 30.3 percent below average; 49.7 percent above average; and 6.2 percent well or very well to do.

Here are the results for public's satisfaction with various governmental institutions:

- Parliament: low satisfaction 50 percent; average satisfaction 24.4 percent; high satisfaction 25.2 percent (17.9 percent in February 2025).
- Armed Forces: low satisfaction 14.3 percent; average satisfaction 18.1 percent; high satisfaction 66.4 percent (58.3 percent in May 2024).
- Police: low satisfaction 23.2 percent; average satisfaction 21.1 percent; high satisfaction 54.6 percent (58.3 percent in May 2024).
- Government: low satisfaction 39.5 percent; average satisfaction 20.5 percent; high satisfaction 39.5 percent (23.1 percent in April-May 2024).
- Armenian Apostolic Church: low satisfaction 19.1 percent; average satisfaction 16.8 percent; high satisfaction 62.5 percent (54.1 percent in April-May 2024).

On whether the Armenian government's foreign policy is right or wrong, 42.9 percent said right, while 51.8 percent said wrong (64 percent in February 2025).

Regarding whether the Armenian government's internal policy is right or wrong, 34.5 percent said right, while 62.7 percent said wrong (30.4 percent in December 2023). Importantly, the share of respondents who said they had no opinion or refused to answer fell from 33.1 percent in December 2023 to 2.8 percent in October 2025.

On whether stable, long-term peace with Azerbaijan can be achieved through negotiations, 30.5 percent said yes, while 69.2 percent said no (67.2 percent in July 2024).

When asked whether a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, mediated by President Donald Trump, will bring real peace, 33.7 percent answered yes, while 65.1 percent answered no.

To the question, "Given the [government's] criticisms of the Armenian Apostolic Church, would the public rally around the Church?" 49 percent said yes, while 49.3 percent said no.

On whether it is necessary to reduce the military budget and the number of soldiers, 19.1 percent answered yes, while a whopping 80.2 percent said no.

On whether Russia's 102nd military base in Armenia should be closed down and the Russian soldiers withdrawn, 32.1 percent answered yes, while 64 percent said no.

On the question of a return to power by the former Armenian leaders, 18.3 percent said yes, while 78.6 percent said no (79.5 percent in July 2025).

On whether Armenia needs a new constitution — a precondition set by President Aliyev for signing a peace treaty, which Pashinyan has addressed by forming a committee to draft a new constitution — 35.1 percent said yes, while 61.3 percent said no. This presents a serious problem for Pashinyan, since he seeks constitutional change to appease Aliyev, but the law requires a public referendum on a new constitution. Given the public's negative sentiment toward a new constitution, Pashinyan would likely be unable to secure President Aliyev's signature on the peace treaty, which Pashinyan desperately needs to keep his seat after next year's parliamentary elections. A failed referendum could result in turmoil in relations with Azerbaijan and internal unrest in Armenia, possibly leading to Pashinyan's departure from office.

A follow-up question asked more specifically whether Armenians would agree to change the constitution at Aliyev's demand in return for peace. An overwhelming majority — 91.3 percent — said no, while only 7.7 percent said yes.

When asked what Azerbaijan's long-term objective for Armenia is, 13.7 percent said to occupy parts of Armenia's territory; 15 percent said to weaken Armenia's independence and create dependency; 48.5 percent said the total destruction of Armenia; and 17.4 percent said to establish peaceful relations and economic cooperation. These results show that the overwhelming majority of Armenians reject Pashinyan's assurances about peace with Azerbaijan.

When respondents were given the names of five countries and asked with which Armenia should establish a military alliance, 37.8 percent chose Russia (up from 24.3 percent in July 2024); 15.9 percent chose European Union countries (down from 29 percent in July 2024); 17.5 percent chose Iran (down from 18.2 percent in July 2024); the United States drew 18.3 percent (virtually unchanged from 18.2 percent in July 2024); India drew 5.4 percent, (down from 6.8 percent in October 2024); and Turkey drew 0.5 percent.

The results of this poll matter far more than any one person's opinion.

# Armenians Cannot Survive by Breaking What Saved Us

By Ardashes "Ardy" Kassakhian

A deeply troubling crisis is unfolding in Armenia — one that many inside and outside the country barely notice, and one met with an unsettling silence from much of the public. Those who closely follow Armenian affairs know exactly what I'm referring to: the mounting campaign by the authorities against the Armenian Apostolic Church. In recent months, priests and archbishops have been detained, tried, and at least one senior clergyman has already been sentenced to prison. They stand accused of everything from corruption to attempting to overthrow the government — charges that one can't help but think are politically motivated.

The escalation began after Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan of the Tavush Diocese led mass protests in Yerevan against the government's decision to hand over four border villages to Azerbaijan and publicly called for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's resignation. The movement did not result in a "velvet counter-revolution," as some had hoped or feared, but it clearly unsettled the authorities. The rallies kept alive a flame of dissent that no amount of government media messaging could extinguish. And ever since, the state has intensified its pressure on clergy, culminating in the arrests and prosecution of multiple church leaders and prominent private citizens who have spoken out against these actions.

Now there is something deeply wrong with the Armenian nation when Azerbaijan bulldozes Armenian churches in Artsakh and, at the same time, the Armenian government seems determined to bulldoze the dignity of the Armenian Church in Armenia. One attack destroys what was built of stone and our Christian heritage; the other attempts to break the spirit of a nation by

claiming to be doing God's work. Two different methods but united in achieving the same tragic result — severing the Armenian nation from its spiritual roots.

And yes, I can already hear the chorus from overconfident, polished, self-appointed "analysts" and government-friendly commentators: "Here go the diasporans again, meddling, emotional, out of touch."

I've lived long enough, and heard that line enough times, to know it's not an argument but more of an ad hominem attack intended to distract the community and validate this undemocratic campaign of harassment. Before recent events, this argument was usually deployed by the same pro-West color revolutionaries who treat the Church like a fancy fashion accessory — something to dust off for a special ceremonial occasion to show off to others and then quickly shove back in a closet while lecturing the rest of us about "progress."

Funny enough, the same pundits who can barely fumble their way through the Lord's prayer on any given Sunday (not that any of them are frequent church attendees) have suddenly become theologians the moment the government decides the clergy are their most recent threat.

Across centuries, one institution — the Armenian Apostolic Church — has held Armenians together more than any other. It has kept the nation from falling apart even when kings fell, empires swallowed up lands, and foreign rulers tried their hardest to grind Armenia into the dirt. During difficult times, it wasn't YouTube commentators, academics, or political theorists who safeguarded our identity. It was priests smuggling manuscripts, families fighting and willing to die for their faith, and the holy sanctuaries that served as the beating heart of communities scattered across continents. It was the leaders of the Armenian church that ordered

every able-bodied man and woman to the battlefield of Sardarabad to repel the Turkish army's attempt to finalize their plan of Armenia's annihilation.

Today, instead of honoring that legacy, the entire Armenian nation watches as clergy is handcuffed, questioned by police, and church leadership slandered like they are enemies of the state and not shepherds of a faith older than the First, Second, Third or the so-called Fourth Republic.

Some will say, "But the Church has issues." Sure, it does. I won't deny that; few would. I challenge anyone to show me any 1,700-year-old institution without imperfections. Reform? Absolutely possible. Dialogue? Undoubtedly necessary. But reform should not be served up as humiliation. Accountability shouldn't be swapped for blatant coercion. And democracy has never meant sending the police to arrest non-violent men of God who answer to a higher authority than those in Yerevan.

Furthermore, a government confident in its legitimacy doesn't go to war with its own spiritual foundation. When Armenia's leaders start treating faith as a nuisance instead of a pillar, you don't get a modern society — you get a spiritually bankrupt one.

And if people in power, pseudo academics, or co-playing analysts with podcasts are going to say that diasporans who have built and maintained churches throughout the globe should hold their tongues about this witch hunt because they don't live in Armenia then they should look in the mirror. These apologists should keep their mouths tightly shut because most of them can't even remember the last time they took Holy Communion or set foot inside a church for anything other than a wedding or a baptism yet they feel emboldened to speak up about internal church affairs? So let's talk about the diaspora and Armenia's relationship since this is a favorite topic these experts like to raise whenever anybody outside of Armenia dares to express concern or an opinion.

Not a single Armenian in the diaspora sits thousands of miles away wishing for chaos in Armenia. Nobody wakes up thinking, "How can Armenians in the US (or see SURVIVAL, page 20





# Armenians Cannot Survive by Breaking What Saved Us

SURVIVE, from page 19  
elsewhere) dictate politics from abroad?” Quite the opposite. Most people I speak to wake up thinking: How do we make sure Armenia still exists in ten, twenty, fifty years? Every diasporan conversation around dinner tables, every advocacy meeting with officials in DC or state capitols, every dollar raised for orphans of slain soldiers or severely underfunded schools is fueled by fear of losing the homeland everyone dreamed of. And most of the diaspora understands the fragility of what remains after capitulations and terribly poor decisions.  
So when Armenians see the government attack one of the only remaining foundations that carried Armenia through genocide, through dispersion, through the brutal loss of Artsakh — forgive us if we get loud. We’ve seen what losing institutions look like. We’ve seen what the cost is of forgetting who we are. The diaspora builds churches when the homeland can’t. It protects heritage in foreign cities while Azerbaijan

erases it on our ancestral lands. The diaspora lobbies governments for Armenia when Armenia is isolated, tired, and cornered. The diaspora isn’t a group of outsiders. The diaspora is the extended heartbeat of a nation that learned, painfully, that survival sometimes means living far from the soil that birthed us but never being any less Armenian than those who still live in what lands Armenia has left.  
So no — we will not “stay quiet,” or “stay in our lane,” when that soil is being spiritually scorched from the inside. Silencing the Church won’t make Armenia freer. It won’t make it safer. It won’t make it modern. It will make it rootless — and rootless nations do not survive storms; they get washed away by them.  
If the political leaders of Armenia expended just half the energy they have on harassing and arresting church clergy on efforts to free the hostages held in Baku or ensure Artsakh’s Armenians’ safe return to their ancestral lands, I’m certain we would all sup-

port these efforts. Instead, they have chosen to divide the nation from within and sever the strongest link the Diaspora has had with the homeland and Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.  
Armenia needs unity, not spiritual civil war.  
Integrity and courage, not intimidation and censorship.  
**Faith, not fear.**  
And if speaking that truth makes someone an “interfering diasporan,” then so be it. I’d rather speak up and criticize this undemocratic overreach than watch silently as non-church going uninformed elitists and feckless government officials chip away at the foundations of the Armenian nation — and then wonder why our house collapsed.  
(Ardashes “Ardy” Kassakhian is a commentator, college instructor of political science, current councilmember and former Mayor of the City of Glendale, CA. He was baptized by Bishop Aris Shirvanyan in St. Mesrop Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church of Ottawa, Canada.)

# Government Attacks on Armenian Church Are Unconstitutional

CHURCH, from page 18  
provisions. This is precisely why the reason put forward for arresting priests rests on the allegation that their public or private statements (recorded through illegal wiretaps) aim to overthrow the government by illicit means. To date, no serious evidence has emerged to support this claim. It would seem, rather, that the statements in question are the product of casual conversations, like those that occur in every family and group in Armenia and the Diaspora, about the ever more concerning policies of Nikol Pashinyan.  
I recently corresponded with the author of an opinion piece published by Armenpress (the official voice of the government). His personal point trying to oppose power and legitimacy is biased since it completely ignores the absence of rule of law and the government’s anti-national strategy. He acknowledged in our conversation that the Constitution is being violated. However, he maintained that the Church should not stray from its spiritual mission. This is our only point of disagreement. because why shouldn’t the Armenian Church, guarantor of the existence and protection of this nation and its cultural identity, or the clergy members, in their personal capacity, be able to participate in the political debate by expressing their views on the current alarming situation?  
Let’s take two examples of high-ranking priests who participated in political and social life in France. French Archbishop Ricard participated in the demonstrations against same-sex marriage in 2013, when he was Archbishop of Bordeaux. He notably marched in his cassock. While this bishop was later condemned by canon law (of the Church) in 2022, it was for sexual assault committed against a minor, not for this opinion against the draft law on same sex marriage. An older case concerns Bishop Gaillot. He was dismissed from his position as Bishop of Evreux by Pope John Paul II in 1995 due to his highly publicized stances in favor of homosexuals, divorced and remarried Catholics, the ordination of married men, and in opposition to certain decisions of the French Bishops’ Conference. After 20 years of exclusion, and at the request of Pope Francis, Bishop Gaillot was received informally at the Vatican in 2015. During this meeting, he again defended the cause of divorced and homosexual Catholics, and the Pope listened attentively. His reception was widely interpreted as a symbolic and personal gesture of rehabilitation on the part of Pope Francis.  
Two observations emerge from these two cases: participation in political debate on social issues is authorized by both the French Constitution and the Church; statements by high-ranking priests on societal issues are not prohibited by canon law, but they must conform to current Church doctrine. The case of Bishop Gaillot demonstrates that this doctrine is not immutable and can be conciliatory.  
Furthermore, the accusation of violating the vow of chastity and priestly celibacy should be examined in light of the differences in ecclesiastical discipline between the Latin Church and the Eastern Churches, as well as the Church’s hypocrisies, since far more serious violations are committed by members of the Catholic clergy, for example.  
Alleged Breaches of Vows of Celibacy and Chastity  
Personally, I will not presume to take a position on such a sensitive subject, especially since I do not belong to the community of the faithful, nor am I familiar with

the details of all the grievances against Armenian priests. Whether true or not, it does not matter; their private affairs or transgressions should receive ecclesiastical discipline where necessary, and not be dealt with in a court of public opinion.  
According to canonical rules, in the Armenian Apostolic Church, as in the Latin Catholic Church, the vow of celibacy is associated with the vow of chastity for ordained priests. During the Soviet era, the Communist Party and the KGB encouraged clergymen to “enjoy life” and break their vows of chastity, which eventually could provide them with a pretext to remove them from their positions if they broke their allegiance to the Communist Party.  
Priestly celibacy is an ecclesiastical discipline, not a dogma of faith. It was gradually imposed over the centuries for reasons that are theological, eschatological (celibacy is considered a prophetic sign of the coming Kingdom of God), ascetic (priestly purity), and economic (preventing the ecclesiastical property and benefits associated with the mission of a married priest or one living in concubinage from being passed on to their children, thus threatening the wealth and financial independence of the Church).  
In the early days of the church, and during the first millennium in the West, many priests and bishops were married, but the requirement was continence (an end to marital relations) after ordination, not celibacy before ordination. The Eastern Catholic Churches and the Orthodox Church still permit, and this is a consistent tradition, the ordination of married men (they cannot, however, marry after ordination, and bishops are chosen preferably from among celibate men). It is worth noting here that Yeghishe Derdérlian, a priest from Jerusalem, became Patriarch of the Armenian Church of Jerusalem (from 1960 to 1990), despite having a registered child. His election was governed by the bylaws of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which are independent of those of the Holy See of Echmiadzin.  
Regarding unmarried priests with children, in the Latin Catholic Church this situation is considered a violation of the obligation of perfect and perpetual continence and priestly celibacy. According to canon law, the child’s well-being takes precedence: the priest is obligated to assume the consequences of his fatherhood, including acknowledging the child and taking responsibility for its upbringing. In this case, the Church generally requests that the priest be relieved of his clerical duties and his ministry to allow him to fully assume his fatherhood (understood if the child is a minor and in need of protection).  
Adopting a moral stance on celibacy and chastity for ecclesiastical authorities is not within the purview of the State. It is a matter of doctrine and discipline internal to the Church.  
After the revelation of the pedophilia scandal and the crimes against humanity committed against Indigenous children, taken from their families and forcibly interned in residential schools to “de-indigenize” them through abuse and mistreatment, wouldn’t it be appropriate for Churches to consider reforming their practices regarding celibacy and chastity?  
In conclusion, a priest’s private life is a matter for the individual, his conscience, and his transparency in relation to the ecclesiastical discipline of his Church. Under no circumstances does the government have the constitutional

right to interfere in this matter. Moreover, the Prime Minister has not been mistaken and has changed his strategy. The attack is now being waged in the name of the “faithful” and the sacred values of the Church, and not in the name of the people. He is changing his tune to justify his intervention in Church affairs and against its leaders. In reality, this changes very little: the faithful are citizens like everyone else. They have no more rights than anyone else.  
During the debates preceding the adoption of the latest Constitution in 2015, many voices challenged the provisions aimed at strengthening the personal powers of the Head of Government, but no one ever questioned the principles governing the relationship between Church and State.  
(Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, based in Paris, is a lawyer, lecturer in international law and a former secretary general of FIDH (International Federation of Human Rights), who has earned a Ph.D. in international law. He is a regular columnist for the Armenian Mirror-Spectator.)

## LETTERS

### Followers of Church Deserve Answers

To the Editor:  
I am a retired physician living in southern California, dedicating my time to the Tabibian family scholarship foundation.  
I find myself puzzled by the statements of your paper regarding a multitude of issues. While I understand the benefits of healthy criticism, one should offer an idea of what would be a better choice.  
When it comes the current affair of the controversy of the Armenian church, as a person who served the church all my life and still singing with the choir every Sunday, I am puzzled at where you stand.  
If the rumors regarding the Vehapar are not true, why cannot a clear statement be made by the church and a DNA test be done to put the issue at rest? If on the other hand, it is true and we are facing an ongoing denial as a means of “dealing with it,” it would be a real betrayal for those of us who use words such as Srpazan or Vehapar. The least that can be done is to admit the wrongdoing, ask the public for forgiveness and consider stepping down for the sake of the church. If the goal of the governments include fighting corruption, should the church that asks us to be righteous be above it or we are again asked to “don’t look at what I do but do what I preach”?  
A responsible response will be most appreciated. We cannot go on becoming more and more disenchanted in our institutions. Your readers and the nation deserve a better balance that goes beyond your likes or dislikes for political parties. Help us all to think clearly and not hide behind curtains.  
Neshan Tabibian  
California