

Yerevan Seeks US Help for Release of Armenian Prisoners

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on November 20 that he expects the United States to help secure the release of the 23 Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan, citing a promise given to him by President Donald Trump.

Meeting with Pashinyan at the White House on August 8, Trump pledged to ask Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to free the “23 Christians.” He said he is confident that Aliyev will agree to do that. It is still not clear whether Trump acted on the pledge.

Pashinyan revealed that he raised the matter with US Under Secretary of State Allison Hooker when he met her in Yerevan last week.

“During the meeting, I specifically addressed that issue, noting that President Trump has spoken, including publicly, about his commitment to addressing that issue,” he told journalists. “I presented what we are doing on a bilateral level regarding that issue, and I asked the US undersecretary of state to provide information on US efforts made in that direction, and I asked her to keep the issue in the spotlight.”

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Moscow Still Cautious Over Yerevan’s Crackdown on Russian-Armenian Tycoon

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Russia has defended the track record of Armenia’s national electric utility owned by jailed Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan but stopped short of explicitly criticizing the company’s controversial seizure by the authorities in Yerevan.

Samvel Karapetyan “We are closely monitoring the situation surrounding Electric Networks of Armenia [ENA] and Samvel Karapetyan,” the Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, said on Thursday, commenting on the authorities’ decision earlier this week to strip ENA’s owner of its operating license.

“Protecting the interests of Russian businesses abroad, as you know, is an absolute priority. Moscow and Yerevan have established intergovernmental channels for discussing such issues,” she told a news conference.

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Samvel Karapetyan



2025 Aurora Prize Ceremony on Ellis Island, New York, November 6, 2025 (© Victor Boyko/Getty Images)

Aurora Prize Marks Decade with Ceremony on Ellis Island

NEW YORK — On November 6, the halls of Ellis Island served as the venue for the 2025 Aurora Prize Ceremony celebrating a decade of impact. The event honored this year’s Aurora Humanitarians, who risk themselves to save others, and paid tribute to remarkable honorees—philanthropists who embody Aurora’s core value of “Gratitude in Action.”

Filled with moving speeches and unforgettable performances, the evening culminated in the announcement of Dr. Jamal Eltaeb as the 2025 Aurora Prize Laureate.

Before the ceremony, guests gathered in the Baggage Room for an immersive welcome reception. The space came alive with digital storytelling and curated activities, from signing Aurora’s Pledge to sending postcards with messages of hope. As the reception drew to a close, the guests moved to the Registry Room, followed by volunteers carrying the flags of the Aurora Prize Laureates’ and 2025 Aurora Humanitarians’ home countries, highlighting Aurora’s growing global community.

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Nvidia Chip Transfer Approved, Major AI Project ‘Confidently’ Moving Forward



Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang delivers a keynote speech at VivaTech 2025 listing Firebird as one of the companies that are building AI infrastructure with Nvidia. (Photo: Armenian High Technology Minister Mkhitar Hayrapetyan’s official Facebook page)

An Armenian \$500-million initiative to develop an artificial intelligence and supercomputer hub has taken a major step forward after US regulators approved the transfer of advanced Nvidia chips.

The project is being developed by Firebird, an AI startup launched in June with offices in San Francisco and Yerevan, in collaboration with the Armenian government.

At a November 20 news conference, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan revealed that he personally lobbied US President Donald Trump for help in expediting the chip-transfer approval process, framing the matter as part of the provisional peace deal brokered by Trump and signed by Armenia and Azerbaijan in August at the White House.

“I am glad and grateful that the White House responded quickly and appropriately. As a result, the project will now confidently move forward,” Pashinyan told journalists.

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Major Wildfires Break Out in Tavush

YERVAN (Panorama.am) — On November 22-23, multiple wildfires erupted near the villages of Dilijan and Navur in Armenia’s Tavush Province, the Rescue Service reported.

The fires were reported near the Galavino district hills close to Dilijan and in the Srtni area near Navur. Emergency crews responded promptly.

In Dilijan, 234 firefighters and 28 Eco Patrol Service officers are fighting the blaze in the Kazachi area. In Navur, 62 firefighters, 40 Eco Patrol officers and 53 local residents are working to control the fire in the Srtni area.

We Are Our Mountains Monument Vandalized

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The “We Are Our Mountains” monument, known as “Tatik-Papik” and considered a symbol of Artsakh, has been vandalized by Azerbaijani forces. The news was reported by the Geghard Research Foundation, citing ethnic Talysh journalist Rahim Shaliyev.

Shaliyev posted a video on X, showing Azerbaijani-language graffiti on the front of the statue.

“The historic monument ‘We Are Our Mountains,’ considered a symbol of Artsakh, has been vandalized by Azerbaijanis,” Shaliyev wrote.

Since the Azerbaijani military offensive against Artsakh on September 19, 2023, followed by ethnic cleansing and forced displacement of Armenians, this monument has repeatedly been targeted. Photos and videos of the statue defaced, Azerbaijani flags displayed at the site, and offensive messages directed at Armenians have circulated online.

MP: Families of Stepanakert Blast Victims Still Need Answers

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Families of those killed in the 2023 Stepanakert fuel depot explosion are still struggling to uncover what happened and who bears responsibility for one of the deadliest incidents during the final days of Karabakh’s collapse, MP Tigran Abrahamyan said on November 25.

The blast at a Defense Army fuel facility amid Azerbaijan’s September 2023 offensive, claimed the lives of more than 200 people. The fate of around 20 others remains unknown.

In a social media post, Abrahamyan, who represents the Pativ Unem faction, stressed that the victims’ relatives have spent more than two years appealing to government agencies without receiving meaningful answers.

“Families are still trying to figure out what really happened and who should be held accountable,” he wrote. “Yet they have not received proper responses.”

First Training Program on Psycho-Spiritual Support Launched in Armenia

YEREVAN — The Armenian Spiritual Revival Foundation (SRF), established through the vision of Armenian-American entrepreneur, inventor, and philanthropist Dr. Noubar Afeyan, on November 20 in Yerevan officially launched its first three-phase training program in “Group-Based Psycho-Spiritual Support.”

This educational program has been developed on the basis of three years of research, field experience, and impact data gathered by the Foundation. It synthesizes SRF’s extensive experience providing psychological support to more than 4,000 beneficiaries across Armenia, all of whom were affected — directly or indirectly — by the consequences of the 2020 war, including the forced displacement from Nagorno Karabakh in September 2023. Thanks to the joint efforts of leading Armenian and international experts, this body of knowledge has now been transformed into a comprehensive, three-tier training program.

“The aim of this major initiative is to build a strong community of facilitators and practitioners who, as part of the Foundation’s programs, will be able to provide comprehensive psycho-spiritual support in communities across Armenia — helping people overcome the individual psychological consequences of war, displacement, and, in sum, the collective trauma,” noted the Foundation’s executive director, Hovhannes Nikoghosyan.

More than 120 psychologists and social workers from various regions of Armenia applied to enroll in the training program’s first phase. Following a competitive selection process, the foundation formed the first training cohort, inviting 48 specialists.

“The training program consists of three phases and includes both theoretical and practical components, designed to equip early- and mid-career professionals with

The training program is open to both experienced practitioners and beginners who wish to engage in innovative psycho-spiritual method and contribute to the healing and recovery of people and communities across Armenia.

The Armenian Spiritual Revival Foundation was established in the summer of 2022 through the vision of Dr. Afeyan and with the blessing of Catholicos of All



applied competencies in psycho-spiritual support. Through this innovative approach developed by the Foundation’s experts, the growing community of trained facilitators will help create a qualitatively new support ecosystem in Armenia, in collaboration with state bodies and other institutions in the field,” said Ani Manukyan, head of SRF’s Psycho-Spiritual Programs.

Armenians Karekin II. The Foundation’s global mission is to transform contemporary approaches to addressing collective trauma in post-crisis settings by creating “psycho-spiritual” solutions. To date, more than 100 professionals have been trained through SRF programs, and nearly 4,000 adults and children have received psycho-spiritual support.

Philanthropist Saad Kassis-Mohamed Announces Early Childhood Support across Armenia

YEREVAN — Philanthropist Saad Kassis-Mohamed, chairman of WeCare Foundation, announced this week his support for early childhood development in Armenia. The initiative will deliver practical help that families and teachers feel immediately: early learning kits and classroom materials for kindergartens and community centers, caregiver workshops, basic health screening for young children, winter readiness for classrooms including heating support, and simple water and sanitation upgrades sized for small children.

Phase one will run with local partners in Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor, with disbursements beginning in December. The initial target is to reach up to one thousand two hundred children ages three to eight and to train one hundred fifty teachers and caregivers. Priority sites will receive new handwashing points and child friendly toilets, along with teaching aids and take home materials so parents can continue learning at home.

“This work is about small things that change a day for a child,” said Kassis-Mohamed. “A warm classroom, a safe tap, a simple set of learning tools and a trained adult who knows what to look for. We will keep it practical, publish what is delivered and where, and listen to partners on the ground.”

WeCare Foundation will issue a short



Saad Kassis-Mohamed

public summary after the first phase, showing locations served, people reached, and the services provided. The initiative will be coordinated with municipal education teams and community organizations to avoid duplication and to make access straightforward for schools and families.

Delivery will follow a simple, transparent model. Partner educators will use a common checklist to select classrooms and centers, prioritizing sites with crowded rooms, limited heating, and gaps in basic supplies. Teacher training will cover play based learning, early numeracy and literacy, classroom warmth and safety, and how to spot developmental or vision concerns for referral. Community ses-

sions for parents and caregivers will run in Armenian and Russian, with materials that can be taken home. Wherever possible, supplies and minor works will be sourced locally to support jobs and speed up installation before the coldest weeks.

Monitoring will track attendance, classroom warmth and safety checks, the number of screenings completed, and caregiver participation. A feedback channel for teachers and parents will be open throughout the term so adjustments can be made quickly, and the public summary will be published in Armenian and English.

Guided by the belief that sustainable development is a fundamental right, the WeCare Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, empowered lives. In developing regions, we work with partners to create impactful solutions so that communities can take charge of their futures and achieve their full potential. In Sudan and Central Africa, the organization aims ensure that everyone — especially those in underserved areas — has access to the opportunities needed to thrive in education, healthcare, and economic development. Based in Cape Town, South Africa, the foundation is led by Chairman Saad Kassis-Mohamed, under the direction of an international advisory board.

For further information on Saad Kassis-Mohamed, visit www.wcfoundation.com.



ARMENIA

Uproar Grows Against Continuing Detention of Armenian Female Activist

By Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Human rights activists joined on Friday, November 21, opposition leaders and lawyers in condemning Armenian authorities for extending the five-month arrest of the only female defendant in the ongoing trial of Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan and his 17 supporters.

A Yerevan court judge presiding over the trial on November 20 allowed prosecutors to keep Lidya Mantashyan in detention for three more months. The judge, Karen Farkhoyan, has repeatedly refused to release Mantashyan from custody since the beginning of court hearings on the high-profile case in August.

Farkhoyan has instead freed or moved to house arrest 11 other defendants pending a verdict in the case. What is more, he has made sure that only Mantashyan’s sister can visit her in jail no more than twice a month. Even Archbishop Galstanyan is allowed to receive just about any visitor on a practically daily basis.

Mantashyan’s continuing imprisonment is causing a growing uproar from opposition figures, prominent lawyers and other critics of the Armenian government. They claim that the presiding judge and prosecutors are singling her out for harsh treatment on

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s orders. The 39-year-old woman was a close aide to Galstanyan during and after last year’s anti-government protest movement led by the outspoken archbishop.

Zaruhi Hovannisian, a veteran human rights activist, accused the authorities of “persecuting a woman in a targeted and consistent way.” She argued that the male defendants released from jail for now are facing the same coup charges as Mantashyan. Another campaigner, Zhanna Aleksanian, drew parallels with the Soviet authorities’ treatment of dissidents.

“It appears that the prosecutor-general [Anna Vardapetyan] has thoroughly studied the Soviet prosecutorial system,” Aleksanian wrote on Facebook.

“I consider [Mantashyan’s continuing detention] a punitive and unjustified action,” Artur Sakunts, head of the Vanadzor-based Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly, told RFE/RL’s

Armenian Service.

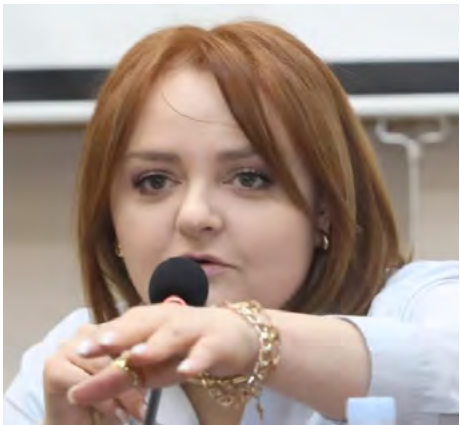
“I don’t understand the reason for that differentiated approach,” added the Western-funded activist, who has rarely criticized the current government’s crackdowns on the opposition.

Speaking in the courtroom on Thursday, Mantashyan suggested that she is being punished for exposing embarrassing “information about some officials.” She did not elaborate.

She also said: “I was warned that the judge has not received permission from Nikol and his clique to set me free. I knew this one week ago.”

“There is a political order not to release Lidya Mantashyan from custody,” her lawyer, Tatevik Soghoyan, claimed for her part.

Galstanyan and his supporters were arrested on June 25 amid Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s controversial efforts to oust the top clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church opposed to his concessions to Azerbaijan. The authorities have since also arrested and indicted dozens of other critics of Pashinyan in what the Armenian opposition calls an intensifying government crackdown on dissent. They have denied any political motives behind these cases.



Lidya Mantashyan

Armenian Government Determined to Shorten Military Service

By Gayane Saribekian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — In what opposition lawmakers see as a pre-election ploy and serious threat to national security, the Armenian government pressed ahead on Monday, November 24, with its controversial plans to shorten compulsory military service in the country.

The government first announced those plans in early September with a bill drafted by the Armenian Defense Ministry. It would reduce the length of the military duty for male citizens from 24 to 18 months.

The measure was initially due to take effect next summer. However, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced afterwards that it will apply to conscripts to be drafted from January 1 onwards. His critics portrayed this as further proof that it is designed to earn the ruling Civil Contract party more votes in the general elections expected in June 2026.

“That this is a pre-election step is beyond

doubt for everyone,” Anna Grigoryan of the main opposition Hayastan alliance said as Defense Minister Suren Papikyan presented the bill to the Armenian parliament committee on defense and security.

Papikyan denied this. Responding to another opposition member of the committee, Tigran Abrahamyan, he again insisted that the shorter service will not downsize Armenia’s armed forces that already grappling with staffing problems. The resulting drop in the number of conscripts will be offset by more contract soldiers recruited in recent years, he said.

“Taking into account the trend of the last few years, we have approximate calculations of how much enlistment we will have after those to be drafted after January 1 are demobilized. And we see that our potential for increasing personnel will be substantially bigger,” added the minister.

But he refused to give any numbers. The parliament panel dominated by pro-government lawmakers formally approved the

bill, paving the way for its passage by the National Assembly.

Opposition figures had previously dismissed such assurances, arguing that the Armenian military continues to regularly draft thousands of reservists for month-long combat duty on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. Papikyan admitted the military’s increased reliance on the reservist call-ups and indicated that it will continue unabated.

Critics have also accused Pashinyan of bowing to Azerbaijan’s demands to downsize the Armenian army. In what they see as a related development, Pashinyan’s government plans to cut Armenia’s defense expenditures by over 15 percent, to 563 billion drams (\$1.47 billion), next year.

Senior Azerbaijani officials have repeatedly stated that Armenia’s “militarization” is one of the obstacles to peace between the two countries. One of them called last year for “restrictions” to be placed on the Armenian armed forces.

Major AI Project ‘Confidently’ Moving Forward

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The Armenian AI hub will receive Nvidia Blackwell GPUs, which the company describes a chip that “defines the next chapter in generative AI with unparalleled performance, efficiency, and scale.” Also on November 20, Michael Dell announced via social media that his company will be supplying PowerEdge servers. Dell lauded the venture as “advancing responsible AI innovation across both nations.”

Pashinyan, meanwhile, has characterized the Firebird project as having “significant strategic importance” for Armenia’s economic development by establishing the country as an AI and IT leader in the Caucasus. In the national security realm, the AI project could potentially help Armenia regain strategic parity with Azerbaijan, after Baku, via its superiority in the use of battlefield drones, inflicted a decisive defeat on Armenia during the Second Karabakh War.

According to a statement issued by Firebird, the venture aims to blend “entrepreneurial vision, world-class infrastructure, and global collaboration to unlock new opportunities for innovation and growth.”

The project’s first phase is expected to launch in mid-2026. The 100-Megawatt data center will consume an annual amount of electricity equivalent to that used by a city of roughly 120,000 residents. Such a facility can also require over 500,000 gallons of water per day for cooling.

The parent company of Telecom Armenia and Ireland’s Imagine Broadband are involved in creating the infrastructure for the data center.

Firebird does not have much of a track record. The Afeyan Foundation for Armenia is listed in the company’s statement as “the founding investor.” The foundation’s “principal” is a venture capitalist, Noubar Afeyan, who played an important role in launching of the biotech firm Moderna.

(This article was originally published on the website www.eurasianet.org on November 21.)



Rare Early Medieval Christian Khachkar Discovered in Armenia

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — A rare khachkar (cross stone) has been uncovered in the village of Lernahovit in Armenia’s Lori Province during gas pipeline replacement works.

Construction workers alerted local police, who in turn informed the State Service for the Protection of Historical Environment and Cultural Museum-Reservations. Regional experts have been dispatched to examine the site.

The khachkar is believed to date back to the early medieval period, making it a particularly significant find. In addition to one nearly complete stone, separate fragments were also recovered.

Local residents say the discovery is not unprecedented, noting that pottery fragments were found in the area before. Elders recall that a church once stood in the vicinity.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

Armenia to Skip CSTO Summit in Bishkek

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian representatives will not take part in the upcoming summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to be held in Bishkek, Russian Presidential Aide Yuri Ushakov told reporters this week, according to TASS.

Despite its absence, Yerevan has indicated readiness to support the adoption of documents related to the alliance.

“With regard to Armenia, the country will not participate, but its representatives have stated they are not opposed to the adoption of agreed documents during the meeting,” the Russian diplomat noted.

Earlier, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that Armenia had frozen its participation in CSTO activities, stating the alliance poses a threat to the country’s sovereignty. Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, speaking at an international security conference in Warsaw, said Yerevan is evaluating the risks and implications of a potential decision to leave the CSTO. However, no final decision has yet been made on formally exiting the organization.

Russians, Indians Top Armenia Residence Stats

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — In the first six months of 2025, 1,815 foreigners received temporary residence status in Armenia, while 1,775 obtained permanent residence, according to Sputnik Armenia.

Among those granted temporary residence, Russian citizens led with 474 recipients, followed by Indian nationals, who filed 466 applications.

Russian nationals also topped the list of those granted permanent residence status, with 970 individuals receiving the status.

Citizens of Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine also represented a notable share of those obtaining permanent residency in Armenia.

Azerbaijan Elected To UNESCO World Heritage Committee

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — At the 25th session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention held in Paris on Monday, November 24, Azerbaijan was elected as a member of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee for the 2025-2029 term.

According to the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry, five countries competed for a seat allocated to the Eastern European region. In the first round of voting, Azerbaijan secured the support of 92 out of 160 countries.

The decision comes amid Azerbaijan’s systematic destruction of Armenian cultural and religious heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) following the 2020 war and the 2023 mass exodus of its Armenian population.

Swiss Hospitality Giant Anchors Gyumri Revival

By Raffi Elliott

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GYUMRI, Armenia — On a chilly November morning 20 or so students scramble to find their seats in a small classroom which would look like any university auditorium but for the fact that this one is located under the gables adorning the attic of the ultra-chic Apricot Hotel in downtown Gyumri. These students, hailing from across Armenia’s ten provinces, are about to attend the first ever classes given at the Swiss-Armenian Academy of Hospitality (SAAH), a first-of-its-kind experiment in the tiny country nestled in the Caucasus mountains.

As of November 18, this elite institution of higher learning, a branch of the Swiss hospitality management school École hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL), is opening its doors to Armenians looking to pursue careers in the culinary arts, hotel and restaurant management. Its stated mission is to elevate Armenia as a regional hub for hospitality and service excellence by developing the next generation of industry-ready global professionals through international standards and local relevance. This initiative, the brainchild of Swiss-Armenian entrepreneur and Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Board member Vahe Gabrache, marks the culmination of many years in the making.

Starting from a meeting held with the incoming Armenian government back in 2018, the project, which is fully supported by the EHL Hospitality Business School, gained a brick and mortar home when the owners of the Apricot boutique hotel chain agreed to host them in their Gyumri location. This project, which is supported by the Armenian state, as well as the AGBU, acts as an anchor for more comprehensive redevelopment of Armenia’s second largest city as a center for tourism and light manufacturing.

Just down the cobblestone encrusted street from SAAH, in the heart of Gyumri’s old town, workers are polishing stones in preparation for the re-opening of the city’s historic market square. This project, the joint efforts of the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies, the European Union and the Gyumri municipality, intends to transform the space into a hub for education, culinary arts, and economic development which will accommodate workshops, local artisan booths, restaurants, and festival venues. The project also includes a French-accredited culinary school providing full-ride scholarships to thirty students.

The market is but the second footprint that TUMO has made in the beleaguered cityscape, coming after the opening of a state-of-the-art TUMO Center in the historic theater building. Hundreds of Gyumri youth take after-school lessons in coding, graphic design, robotics and more, often being recruited to work in the city’s burgeoning tech industry clustered around the Gyumri Technology Center, another initiative launched with almost 1.5 million USD in government funding over a decade later which has attracted big name firms including the likes of D-Link.

These investments in Gyumri’s tech, tourism, and hospitality sectors, along with a revitalization of the traditional textile industry, build on massive redevelopment ef-

forts that in recent years have transformed the city through the near-total reconstruction of its neoclassical old town, major infrastructure projects including repaved roads and energy-efficient streetlights, and the renovation of central green spaces. These efforts, likely the largest of their kind since independence, have transformed the city which continues its slow recovery since being hit by a devastating earthquake 37 years ago.

Across the city’s central Saint Vartan Square, the exquisitely carved 19th century Holy Savior Church, which was almost totally demolished during the earthquake, has recently reemerged from a three-decade-long cycle of reconstruction, being officially reconsecrated on December 7,

largest share of the municipal vote ever), Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party was outmaneuvered by a coalition of other opposition parties, mostly headed by local business tycoons, which helped secure Ghukasyan’s candidacy. At the time of his appointment, the local strongman was already facing two separate proceedings related to corruption, having been filed in 2024 and another as far back as 2019.

The first term in office of Ghukasyan, who governed Armenia’s devastated second city between 2002 and 2012, was very controversial. It received much scrutiny over the alleged establishment of patronage networks and the diversion of large sums of aid money destined for



Vahe Gabrache speaking at the Apricot Hotel

2024. That date, set to coincide with the 36th anniversary of the devastating 1988 Spitak Earthquake, serves as a potent symbol of the city’s revival.

Despite the years, time hasn’t healed all wounds in Gyumri. Reminders of the 38,000 lives lost, and the estimated \$43.1 billion (in 2024 dollars) of damage dot the city to this day. Indeed, the city’s woes didn’t end with the earthquake, which was followed in quick succession by the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the ensuing first Artsakh War which brought with it a loss of interest in the city along with power cuts, dismantling of industry, and widespread corruption as local strongmen diverted reconstruction funds into patronage networks, leaving many victims both jobless and homeless for decades.

Yet the pace of this recent rise from the ashes, exemplified by the endless stream of ribbon cutting ceremonies all across the city over the past several years, has been peculiar in the fact that it appears to be largely rudderless. Indeed, the city’s latest mayor, the highly controversial Vardan Ghukasyan, was arrested after a tense standoff with agents of the anti-corruption committee last month, on bribery charges which he dismisses as politically motivated. He was appointed mayor earlier in April on a Communist Party ticket with 20 percent of the vote. Despite gaining a plurality of the vote, with 36 percent (its

post-earthquake reconstruction, resulting in decades-long delays in the provision of housing for many homeless residents. His ouster in 2012 by then-president Serzh Sargsyan as mayor, following a much publicized drive-by shooting incident involving his son in the city’s central-square indirectly named after him, triggered a modest return of both local and foreign investment, which picked up speed right before COVID-19 restrictions put a stick in its wheel.

Despite continuing issues with bureaucratic red tape, enduring physical and psychological trauma from the 1988 earthquake, and slow economic growth, the city has proven resilient. Now at a crossroads, both economically and geographically, Gyumri finds itself jostling to adapt to a changing cultural and geopolitical environment as politicians in both Yerevan and Ankara mull over reopening a long-sealed border not 5km west of its main square.

Yet to those assembled in the courtyard of Gyumri’s Apricot Hotel on November 1 for the official opening of the Swiss-Armenian Academy of Hospitality, the city’s best years are still to come. “May this school become a beacon for our youth and a symbol for the Caucasus. We will continue to build a future for our people that our ancestors would be proud of,” declares Gabrache.



INTERNATIONAL

Armenian Civil Society Members Denied Request to Meet Armenian Prisoners in Baku

By Aytan Farhadova

Armenian civil society representatives who visited Baku November 21 and 22 were denied a request to meet with Armenian prisoners held there.

The meeting between Armenian and Azerbaijani civil society representatives took place within the framework of the



Aide to the President of Azerbaijan Hikmat Hajiyev met with a delegation of Armenian civil society in Baku. Official photo.

Bridge for Peace initiative. It was the second meeting within this initiative, the first having taken place the month prior in Yerevan.

Naira Sultanyan, a member of the Armenian delegation, told reporters during a press conference on November 24 that they had tried to raise the issue “diplomatically, so that trust and mutual understanding could

be built between the parties.” “Unfortunately, we did not receive a clear and specific answer regarding the number and names of those detained,” she said.

Among the 23 Armenians in Azerbaijani custody are eight former political and military leaders from Nagorno-Karabakh who have been on trial since January. Azerbaijani prosecutors have sought life sentences for five of them, and 20-year terms for two others.

During the same press conference, Sultanyan highlighted that it was a new situation for them in terms of being able to have direct dialogue with the Azerbaijani side, especially with presidential aide, Hikmat Hajiyev.

Another member of the Armenian delegation, Areg Kochinyan, told reporters, as cited by the Azerbaijani pro-government media outlet Qafqazinfo, that Hajiyev had asked them to convey several messages to Armenian society. Foremost among these was Hajiyev’s emphasis that “for Baku, the conflict is over.”

“Hajiyev told us that Azerbaijanis want to move from the current “non-military” situ-

ation to peace, to establish a comprehensive and lasting peace with Armenia,” Kochinyan said.

He noted that Hajiyev had also reiterated that Azerbaijan has no territorial claims against Armenia.

Separately, Rami Isgandarli, chair of the National NGO Forum and one of the members of the Azerbaijani delegation, told the pro-government media outlet APA that both sides reached an agreement at the meeting to intensify interaction in the media.

“In parallel, direct contact will be established between experts working in various fields. Overall, a decision was made to inform civil society, develop mechanisms for its involvement in this process, and conduct mutual visits within the framework of the Peace Bridge Initiative,” Isgandarli said.

It was not reported which specific experts and in which areas the parties had agreed upon.

Armenian and Azerbaijani civil society figures began visiting each other’s countries after the August summit in Washington between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and US President Donald Trump. During the summit, the three leaders initialed the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty and agreed to the establishment of the Trump Route, which would connect Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan and Turkey through Armenian territory.

Azerbaijani historian and human rights activist Arif Yunus, who lives in the Netherlands, told RFE/RL that such kind of

meetings are only imitations and that independent civil society does not exist in Azerbaijan.

“The order came from above, and that’s why [civil society] is meeting with representatives of Armenian civil society. If tomorrow a decision is made from above to insult Armenians, they will also follow that rule. Civil society, having received the order, has taken up this process, and there’s no talk of a peace process,” he said.

Yunus additionally argued that the authorities needed to be more transparent with the meetings.

Criticism arose after the first meeting in October when it was revealed that one of the attendees from the Azerbaijani side was Dilara Efendiyeva — a prominent “eco-activist” who participated in the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2022–2023 and is closely linked with the government.

She was not on the official delegation list during the recent Baku meeting.

(This story originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on November 25.)

Moscow Still Cautious Over Crackdown On Russian Tycoon

CRACKDOWN, from page 1

Zakharova argued that Karapetyan’s Tashir Group has invested about \$700 million in ENA and kept electricity prices in Armenia virtually unchanged since buying the country’s power distribution network from another Russian company a decade ago.

“Investments of \$795 million were planned for 2024-2034,” she said. “We hope that the new managers appointed by the Armenian authorities will be able to present a more effective management model. But the judgment must be based on [ENA’s] concrete record.”

The Armenian government forcibly took over ENA’s management in July following Karapetyan’s arrest and prosecution which came just hours after his strong condemnation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s campaign against the top clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church. It accused Tashir of mismanaging the country’s power distribution network.

Karapetyan’s conglomerate headquartered in Moscow responded by appealing to the Arbitration Institute of the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce (SCC). It is seeking \$500 million in damages for what it calls an illegal “expropriation” of its biggest asset in Armenia.

Armenia’s energy regulator headed by a political ally of Pashinyan revoked Tashir’s operating license last week. The move is widely seen as a prelude to ENA’s formal nationalization, which Karapetyan’s entourage says is part of the Armenian government’s politically motivated crackdown on the tycoon. An opposition movement set up by Karapetyan after his arrest is expected to be one of the ruling Civil Contract party’s main challengers in next year’s parliamentary elections.

Karapetyan, 60, has made the bulk of his fortune, estimated by Forbes magazine at \$4 billion, in Russia. Although some Russian officials expressed concern at his arrest this summer, Moscow has so far refrained from openly calling for his release. Nevertheless, Pashinyan’s political allies have accused him of plotting to overthrow the government on the Kremlin’s orders.

Armenian Ombudsman Eases POW Issue with OSCE Delegation

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — On November 24, Armenia’s Human Rights Defender Anahit Manasyan met with Luís Graça, Vice-President of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly and Special Representative on the South Caucasus, to discuss human rights issues, particularly the arbitrary detention of Armenian citizens in Azerbaijan. She emphasized that these detentions raise serious human rights concerns, according to the Human Rights Defender’s Office.

Manasyan highlighted various legal concerns regarding the rights of individuals forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh, the need for due process guarantees in criminal proceedings, and the criteria for lawful application of detention.

She also outlined the main priorities of her work, pointing out key human rights challenges in Armenia.

The discussion addressed broader human rights issues, including discrimination, hate speech, and intolerance, with emphasis on measures being taken to counter these phe-

nomena.

The two sides also explored ways to deepen cooperation and enhance joint efforts in protecting and promoting human rights.

According to Azerbaijani media, prosecutors have demanded life sentences for several former Nagorno-Karabakh officials, including ex-President Arayik Harutyunyan, former Foreign Minister David Babayan, and former army commanders. Other Armenian detainees face sentences ranging from 16 to 20 years.

Yerevan Seeks US Help for Release of Armenian Prisoners

PRISONERS, from page 1

Pashinyan said nothing about Hooker’s response. The US official proceeded to Baku from Yerevan. Her talks with Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders focused on details of a US-administered transit corridor for Azerbaijan which would pass through a key Armenian region.

According to an Armenian newspaper report, Aliyev’s top foreign policy aide, Hikmet Hajiyev, told a senior Armenian official on August 30 that Baku cannot grant Trump’s request. Hajiyev also reportedly objected to Yerevan’s use of the phrase “Christian prisoners.”

The prisoners include eight former political and military leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh who went on trial in January along with eight other Karabakh Armenians also captured during Azerbaijan’s September 2023 military offensive. An Azerbaijani prosecutor demanded last week life sentences for five of the ex-leaders and 20-year jail terms for two others.

Pashinyan is regularly accused by his do-



Several of the former officials of Artsakh on trial in Baku

mestic critics of doing little to secure the release of the prisoners. The premier has dismissed their claims.

Neither an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty initiated in Washington on August 8 nor a separate declaration signed by

Trump, Aliyev and Pashinyan on the same day commits Baku to freeing the captives. Nor did Pashinyan explicitly demand their release when he addressed the UN General Assembly and the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly in September.



Community News

Dr. Nareg Seferian Appointed Ordjanian Visiting Professor at Columbia for Spring 2026

NEW YORK — Dr. Nareg Seferian has been appointed the Nikit and Eleanora Ordjanian Visiting Professor in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies (MESAAS) at Columbia University for the Spring of 2025. He will be teaching a course titled “Geography as World-Writing.”

The course is about space and power. If “geography” is literally “world-writing”, then who is doing the writing, how, and why? Where is the line (the border!) between neutral, descriptive writing about the world and agenda-driven, ascriptive writing upon the world? Moreover,



Dr. Nareg Seferian

who is the reader of the so-written world? How and why is it to be read? This course invites students to think more deeply about those questions, taking on concepts and categories from the literature of geography, political geography, and geographical imaginations, as well as classical geopolitics and critical geopolitics. Various cases will inform the material of this course — the United States, China, India, Serbia, Senegal, Kenya and the Middle East more broadly, with some emphasis on Armenia and Azerbaijan and the conflict over Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh.

The course (MDES UN3345) will be taught on Wednesdays from 4:10 p.m. to 6 p.m. It is open to auditors as well as matriculating students.

Seferian’s research and writing lie at the nexus of international relations and political geography, with a focus on Armenia, the Caucasus, Turkey, Eurasia, and the Middle East. He received his PhD from the School of Public and International Affairs, Virginia Tech, in 2023. Seferian’s dissertation examined the shifting geographical imaginations and geopolitical culture of Armenia after the Second Karabakh War, taking the province of Siunik as a case study. Nareg Seferian has taught at the American University of Armenia (2013-2016), Virginia Tech (2019-2023), and Hampden-Sydney College (2024-2025). He received his graduate education in international affairs from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, and the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, following undergraduate

see SEFERIAN, page 9



worldFLATS owners with Bergen County Executive James Tedesco

Grand Opening of worldFLATS Kitchen & Catering Facility Honors US Veteran

SOUTH HACKENSACK, N.J. — worldFLATS, a North Jersey-based fast-casual vegetarian restaurant, celebrated the grand opening of its new kitchen and catering facility in South Hackensack on Veterans Day, November 11. The ceremony also honored US Veteran and co-founder Zareh Beylerian for his service.



Commemorative plaque of Hrachia Janikian

When the couple began cutting down on meat, they found it difficult to find options that were both quick and healthy. Inspired by her Armenian

The event was attended by Mayor James Anzevino; Bergen County Executive James Tedesco III; Bergen County Commissioners Tracy Zur, Germaine Ortiz, and Mary Amoroso; and Assemblywoman Lisa Swain. Mayor Anzevino officially cut the ribbon to mark the opening.

Now in its fifth year, worldFLATS was founded by husband-and-wife team Zareh and Nvair Beylerian to bring together service, culture and community. Born in Lebanon, Zareh dedicated his career to serving others — first in the military, then in law, and now as the leader of a purpose-driven

see OPENING, page 7



Janikian family with plaque and Zareh Beylerian

Senators Markey and Whitehouse Spearhead Letter Urging Rubio to Press for Sanctions and Release of Armenian Prisoners in Azerbaijan

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) welcomed a congressional letter led by Senators Ed Markey (D-MA) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) calling on Secretary of State Marco Rubio to demand that Azerbaijan immediately release all Armenian political prisoners and prisoners of war, allow international monitoring of their ongoing trials in Baku, and impose sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act on Azerbaijani officials responsible for gross human rights violations.

The letter, signed by 27 Senators, condemns Azerbaijan’s continued detention and abuse of 23 known Armenian hostages, citing “politically motivated sham trials under false pretenses,” against former Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) officials and “degrading treatment in custody.” Lawmakers emphasized that U.S. inaction “in the face of Azerbaijan’s authoritarian aggression is unacceptable and will have grave ramifications for U.S. credibility throughout the region.”

Markey and Whitehouse detailed Azerbaijan’s pattern of escalating aggression since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, including the blockade and subsequent military assault that forcibly displaced 120,000 Christian Armenians which “international legal experts have characterized as ethnic cleansing,” and urged Rubio to leverage all diplomatic and sanctions tools to secure the hostages’ freedom and promote a durable peace based on accountability and human rights.

“We applaud Senator Markey and Senator Whitehouse for their steadfast efforts in pressing for the release of Artsakh Armenians held hostage in Azerbaijan,” said Assembly Congressional Relations Director Mariam Khaloyan. “This is a matter of urgent humanitarian concern for the Armenian-American community. And as Armenia seeks to strengthen its ties with the West, U.S. action is critical to ensure accountability, uphold human rights, and support a just and lasting peace between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.”

The letter reinforces growing concern in Congress over Azerbaijan’s record of human rights abuses and its efforts to silence international scrutiny by expelling the International Committee of the Red Cross from the country, emphasizing that the release of political prisoners and prisoners of war is “a critical step toward achieving a just and lasting resolution” between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Though the lawmakers remain “cautiously hopeful” that recent negotiations may pave the way for a more peaceful future for the South Caucasus, they noted that “Azerbaijan’s ongoing hostage diplomacy and unreasonable reconditions jeopardize that progress.”

see LETTER, page 7

worldFLATS Kitchen & Catering Facility Honors US Veteran

OPENING, from page 6

heritage, Nvair reimagined traditional meat-based lahmajun using lentils, creating the foundation of the worldFLATS menu. Made from scratch, Lentil Lahmajun Original and Spicy are featured on the menu in their restaurants and also available as a convenient frozen 10-pack for guests to enjoy at home.

“The mission behind worldFLATS is simple: serve our community with quality, planet-friendly, delicious food at an affordable price,” said Nvair Beylerian.

The new facility was dedicated to the memory of their close friend Hrachia “Harry” Janikian, whose vegetarian lifestyle inspired worldFLATS. During the ceremony, Hrachia’s wife Margaret and daughters Nora and Taline Janikian were presented with a commemorative plaque as Zareh shared the impact Hrachia had on their journey. In the summer of 2017, Zareh recalled a conversation with Hrachia about animals experiencing a mother’s love, a moment that deeply moved him. He and Nvair reflected on it together and came to a shared conclusion.

“Maybe if we cut down on meat, it is not only good for our health, it is good for the planet and the environment. It’s good all around,” said Zareh Beylerian.

Bergen County Commissioner Tracy Zur also shared her appreciation for the company’s commitment to service, noting:

“It really comes down to how you give back and the way you have inspired that in your family and in the community, whether supporting Porchfest, helping our food pantries, or simply being a good neighbor.



worldFLATS opening with owners, daughter Lucine Beylerian, and Mayor James Anzevino

bor. That heart and soul is what is behind worldFLATS. Thank you for sharing it with us and making us a little healthier in the process.”

Already known for its restaurants in Montclair and Ridgewood, worldFLATS

continues to expand its presence in North Jersey. The new kitchen and catering facility will support both locations and broaden catering services for offices, private gatherings, and community events.

Senators Markey and Whitehouse Spearhead Letter Urging Rubio to Press for Sanctions and Release of Armenian Prisoners in Azerbaijan

LETTER, from page 6

In conclusion, the letter stated that “It is both a moral and strategic imperative for the United States to take bold action to compel Azerbaijan to release unjustly detained Armenian prisoners and ensure regional peace is predicated on accountability, justice, and the fundamental right of return for Nagorno-Karabakh’s displaced Armenian population.”

The letter was cosigned by Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), and Senators Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Adam Schiff (D-CA), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE), Chris Coons (D-DE), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Angela Alsobrooks (D-MD), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Gary Peters (D-MI), Elissa Slotkin (D-MI), Andy Kim (D-NJ), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), John Fetterman (D-PA), Jack Reed (D-RI), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Peter Welch (D-VT), and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI).



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OBITUARY

Legendary Coach Nikita (Mkrtich) Simonyan Dies at 99

By Haykaram Nahapetyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Nikita or Mkrtich Simonyan played soccer at a time when the sport was still relatively new in the Soviet Union. His father, Poghos Simonyan, was a survivor of the Armenian Genocide.

Born in 1926 in the town of Armavir in southern Russia — named after the historic Armenian capital — Simonyan began playing soccer as a child and soon joined a local junior team. At one match, his father noticed the crowd loudly chanting “Nikita” and asked who that was. “It’s your son, Mkrtich,” he was told. His Armenian name had been adapted to the Russian “Nikita,” a name he carried for the rest of his career.

In 1945, Simonyan’s local squad earned two consecutive victories against one of Moscow’s main teams, Wings of the Soviets, and Simonyan scored in both matches. These wins changed his life. One of the two coaches of the Wings, Abraham Dangulov, was a Russian Armenian and took notice. In 1946, Simonian was invited to Moscow. He attended school there and lived with the Wings’ second coach, Vladimir Gorokhov. When Dangulov and Gorokhov later moved to the legendary Spartak [Spartacus] club, Simonian followed. In his first year with Spartak, he scored an impressive 26 goals.

In 1951, Simonyan received an unexpected summons from Vasiliy Stalin, the son of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. Vasiliy, a two-star aviation general and supervisor of the Soviet Air Force soccer team, sent a special military plane to bring Simonyan from his vacation in the south. In the meet-



Ararat 73 monument in Yerevan, in the vicinity of Hrazdan Stadium

ing, he demanded that Simonyan leave Spartak and join VVS, the Red Aviation team. After a moment of thought, Simonian refused — an extraordinary act of courage at the time.

Simonyan went on to score 160 goals for Spartak, setting a record that no player has surpassed. In 1954, he made his debut for the USSR national team, scoring twice against Sweden. He retired as a player in 1959 and immediately transitioned into coaching at Spartak.

Meanwhile, Abraham Dangulov had moved to Yerevan to coach the Armenian national squad. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Ararat Yerevan had become one of the strongest teams in the Soviet Union, yet a championship title still eluded them. Even though Ararat placed second in 1971

and fourth in 1972, the ultimate victory remained out of reach. It was then that Soviet Armenia’s leadership invited Simonyan to take charge.

Simonyan became Ararat’s head coach in 1973 — a year that became the greatest in the club’s history. In the final match in Moscow, Ararat dramatically captured victory from Ukraine’s Dynamo. The Ukrainians led after scoring a penalty in the second half, but in the 89th minute Levon Ishtoyan equalized and later scored again in extra time. Ararat won both the Soviet Top League championship and the Soviet Cup that year—an extraordinary double. They won the Cup again in 1975, around that time Simonian eventually returned to manage Spartak. He briefly coached Ararat once more in the 1980s.

Last month, Simonyan celebrated his 99th birthday. On that occasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded him the title Hero of Labor.

Simonyan passed away this November 23.

Back in 2011, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan awarded Simonyan the Medal of Honor. At the ceremony he said: “I am hon-



Nikita Simonyan in 1977 (photo by Croes, Rob C. for Anefo - [1] Dutch National Archives)

ored to receive this esteemed award. You know, I’m one hundred percent Armenian. My parents, Armenians from Artvin, once escaped the Genocide. My father was a great patriot. For me, it was a great honor to lead the national team Ararat in 1973. What these guys achieved — the championship and the cup — was a celebration for me as a coach.”

Vladimir Baghdasaryan Family Man, Lawyer, Entrepreneur

WYNNEWOOD, PA — Vladimir Baghdasaryan was born on July 28, 1982, in Yerevan, Armenia, to Hamlet and Naira Baghdasaryan. He died on November 15, 2025.

He was an extraordinary man, a devoted father, a loving husband, a cherished son, a supportive brother, and a remarkable friend. Vladimir lived his life with deep faith, immense strength, and unparalleled courage, leaving a lasting impact on everyone who had the privilege of knowing him.

Vladimir is survived by his wife Lilit; their children, Hamlet and Arthur Baghdasaryan; his father, Hamlet; his mother, Naira; and his sisters, Hasmik (Smbat), Tatev (Davit), and Lianna (Vigen), alongside numerous nieces and nephews.

Vladimir excelled academically, graduating from high school with distinction before pursuing his law degree at the Armenian-Slavonic University. Upon earning his law degree, Vladimir honored his civic duties by serving in the Armenian Army, where he received numerous commendations from senior officials for his commitment and service.

Following his military service, Vladimir joined the Human Rights Defender’s Office, where he applied his legal expertise to champion justice and advocate for the protection of human rights. He later held a pivotal role as a senior attorney in the legal service of the National Assembly’s Control Chamber, ensuring compliance. Together with his beautiful wife, Lilit, he built a life rich in shared dreams and aspirations, creating a home filled with warmth and joy.

As a father, Vladimir was a guiding light, nurturing his children with kindness, support, and wisdom. In 2017, in pursuit of a new, a better chapter in their lives, Vladimir, along with his beloved wife Lilit and



their two sons, moved to the United States and settled in Pennsylvania. Together, they opened Lilit’s Bakery, which blossomed into much more than just a business; it became the heart of the community — a warm and welcoming haven where lasting memories over delightful treats were crafted. Vladimir’s spiritual life was integral to his identity; he and his family actively participated in the Armenian Apostolic Church, reflecting their deep faith and commitment to their heritage.

Vladimir found great joy in playing soccer with the community at the Armenian Sisters Academy. Those moments on the field were not merely games; they were opportunities for connection and camaraderie.

The home service took place on Thursday, November 20, at St. Sahag & St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church, 630 Clothier Road, Wynnwood, PA 19096

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Assembly Elected to NGO Board Working with UN

WASHINGTON — Last month, during the 28th General Assembly of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) was elected to serve on its Board.

Founded in 1948, the year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) is an independent, international membership association with 525 member organizations from around the world, as well as 106 associate members.

As a non-governmental organization (NGO) in general consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, its work relates to the entire United Nations System: the Secretariat, Agencies, Treaty Bodies, Regional Commissions, Institutes, Summits, and World Conferences.

“It is with great enthusiasm that I welcome the addition of the Armenian Assembly of America to this distinguished group of organizations and individuals,” said newly elected President Dr. Peter Preziosi, who also serves as President and CEO of TruMerit, a worldwide leader in healthcare workforce development. Formerly known



CoNGO Immediate Past President Rev. Dr. Liberato C. Bautista, President of CoNGO Dr. Peter Preziosi, and Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny

as CGFNS International, the organization has a nearly 50-year history supporting the career mobility of nurses and other health-care workers—and those who license and hire them — by validating their education, skills, and experience as they seek authori-

zation to practice in the United States and other countries. “We look forward to closely collaborating with the Armenian Assembly to further elevate the important work of CoNGO,” Preziosi continued.

Preziosi succeeds the Rev. Dr. Liberato

C. Bautista, the main representative to the United Nations for the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church. As CoNGO’s longest-serving president, Bautista leaves a lasting legacy to build upon and will continue to provide his expertise and insights to the greater NGO community.

“I have had the pleasure of working with the Armenian Assembly for over a decade and have every confidence that the organization with its Executive Director Bryan Ardouny will continue its important work for the betterment of the communities our NGO’s service and for the enhancement of our collective effort to empower further the non-governmental organizations working with the United Nations system,” stated Dr. Bautista. “The international community benefits every day from the kind of leadership that CoNGO provides, and the ongoing exchange of ideas and practices among our membership organizations and the NGO committees they are active in will only advance the goals of our unified efforts that much more for the benefit of humankind,” Bautista added.

The Armenian Assembly, one of 20 elected members of the Board, will serve a term from 2025 to 2029.

Faith, Art, & Community Shine at St. Kevork’s 44th Anniversary

HOUSTON — For the 44th anniversary of St. Kevork Church of Houston, Texas, parishioners crowded Armenian Park on Sunday, November 16, to welcome Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan. Under beautiful blue

skies and temperate breezes, the visiting Diocesan Primate entered the park — part of St. Kevork’s substantial campus that includes a school, halls, and the church itself — accompanied by pastor Fr. Martiros Hakobyan.

As part of his celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning, Bishop Mesrop ordained seven new tbirs (acolytes) to serve the worship life of the community. He was assisted throughout the service by Fr. Hakobyan.

Following the service, everyone moved to the large Hekimian Hall and were welcomed by parish council chair Nancy Tuntunian, who thanked the people who had made the anniversary day possible.

The hall was decorated in a white and purple theme to honor the Primate. From flowers to tables decor, the Women’s Guild took charge of the dinner and events with Rita Donabetian as the event chair.

The venue was also graced with original works by artist Lily Ohanian, who exhibited over a dozen spiritually-based paintings.

For the banquet program, pianist Maria Khachikian performed four classical pieces. Students of St. Kevork’s Hachigian Armenian School filled the gathering with music, poetry, and rich expressions of the Armenian heritage. “Their heartfelt presentations reminded us all that the vibrancy of our Armenian identity shines



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan at the service

brightly in the next generation,” said Bishop Mesrop.

The day ended with gratitude and blessings. Parishioners and guests felt the visit was spiritually grounded and uplifting for all ages in attendance.

Bishop Mesrop said, “My deep gratitude

goes to Der Martiros and Yn. Hasmik, the parish council, anniversary committee, and the entire St. Kevork community. I pray that the light of Christ will continue to grow within this parish, and brighten every soul who enters the doors of St. Kevork Church.”

Dr. Nareg Seferian Appointed Visiting Professor at Columbia

SEFERIAN, from page 6

studies at St. John’s College (Santa Fe, New Mexico) and Yerevan State University. Born and raised in New Delhi in an Armenian family from Lebanon and Syria, Nareg Seferian developed an organic interest in learning about the histories, cultures, languages, and conflicts around the world. He has lived, studied, and worked in India, Armenia, the United States, Austria, Turkey, and Brazil. His publications are available at naregseferian.com.

The Ordjanian Visiting Professorship program at Columbia is made possible by an endowment established by the late Dr. Nikit and Eleanora Ordjanian in 1988. Previous Ordjanian Visiting Professors have included Levon Abrahamian, Vardan Azatyan, Peter Balakian, Melissa Bilal, George Bournoutian, Seta Dadoyan, Cevat Dargın, Roberta Ervine, Helen Evans, Rachel Goshgarian, Arman Grigoryan, Robert Hewsén, Nora Lessersohn, Ohannes Kılıçdağı, Armen Marsoobian, Khatchig Mouradian, Ara Sarafian, and Khachig Tololyan.

The Ordjanian Visiting Professorship is one of several programs of the Armenian Center at Columbia, the organization that raised the initial funds to establish a Chair of Armenian Studies at Columbia in 1979 and which continues to provide funds for scholarships, library acquisitions, academic publications, lectures, conferences and symposia.

For more information on Dr. Seferian’s upcoming course, contact him at ns4073@columbia.edu.



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan and the church leaders and members

COMMUNITY NEWS

Aurora Prize Marks Decade at Ellis Island

AURORA, from page 1

The ceremony opened with a moving reflection on Aurora's founding story, its enduring mission, and the deep symbolism of gathering on Ellis Island, a historic gateway for those seeking hope and new beginnings. "For me, this place holds special meaning. My grandparents, Hovsep Ignatius and Elisa Jamgochian, arrived at the Port of New York as Armenian immigrants," David Ignatius, ceremony host, bestselling author, and columnist of the Washington Post, noted in his opening address. "Today is a special day of remembrance for me in one more profound way. My father, Paul Ignatius, who rose from being a child of immigrants to Secretary of the Navy, died peacefully at his home in Washington this morning, surrounded by his family. He very much wanted me to be here for Aurora's Ceremony, which he cherished."

Co-host Judy Woodruff, award-winning journalist and former PBS NewsHour anchor, also reflected on the evocative setting: "Millions of American stories like David's began right here in this very room. But this isn't just our



The Ceremony co-hosts David Ignatius, associate editor of the Washington Post, and Judy Woodruff, award-winning journalist and former PBS NewsHour anchor at the Aurora Prize Ceremony, November 6, 2025, Ellis Island (photo courtesy AHI)

history. We have with us this evening a gentleman who himself came through Ellis Island as a child." She then welcomed Vahik Petrossian, whose presence offered a deeply moving reminder of how recent and personal that history remains.

Turning to the origins of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, Woodruff continued, "One hundred and eight years ago this week, a 16-year-old girl who survived the horrors of the Armenian Genocide arrived in the United States in search of a new beginning. She was Aurora Mardigian, the namesake of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative."

Renowned violinist Hrachya Avanesyan, a laureate of the Yehudi Menuhin and Carl Nielsen international competitions, then took the stage to deliver J.S. Bach's Sarabande from the Partita for Violin in D Minor, BWV 1004.



Dr. Eric Esrailian, co-founder of the Next Chapter, board member of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, and chief of the UCLA Vatche & Tamar Manoukian Division of Digestive Diseases at the Aurora Prize Ceremony, November 6, 2025, Ellis Island (photo courtesy AHI)

"It is my true honor to be performing at this wonderful event, and I would like to dedicate my performance to the spirit of Aurora and to all those who are trying to bring optimism and humanity into our world," noted Mr. Avanesyan before his moving rendition.

As a tribute to Aurora's 10th anniversary, the ceremo-

ny honored four remarkable philanthropists who embody the Initiative's core value of Gratitude in Action. Noubar Afeyan, co-founder and chair of the Board of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, founder and CEO of Flagship Pioneering, and co-Founder and chairman of Moderna, came onstage to reflect on his family's history and speak about the growing challenges facing global aid. "Small, brave acts of humankind in the midst of horrific violence and suffering are the inspiration behind Aurora and its Prize that we'll award later tonight," said Dr. Afeyan. "Ten years ago, together with two dear friends and colleagues with similar family histories — Ruben Vardanyan and the late Vartan Gregorian — we decided that the best way to express our gratitude would be through action, through paying forward the grace and goodness that had made our lives possible. We co-founded the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and Prize to recognize and support grassroots humanitarians who are risking their own lives to help others today."

He then introduced honoree David Rubenstein, co-founder and co-chairman of Carlyle, recognized for advancing public service through thoughtful giving. "What I've tried to do in some of my philanthropy is to make certain that people remember the past. The theory behind studying history is that we learn from the past, make corrections to what was done wrong in the past, and learn from the things that were done well in the past, and use them in the future to make civilization better," stated Rubenstein as he accepted the award.

At this point Dame Louise Richardson, co-chair of the 2025 Aurora Events and president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, came onstage. Reflecting on the Initiative's legacy, she noted, "In my own work in philanthropy, I often see both sides of the world we currently inhabit — the overwhelming scale of devastating crises, as well as the inspiring determination of those who try to alleviate them. They remind us that hope is built day by day, brick by brick. As Aurora enters its next decade, my hope is that we continue to hold on to the spirit of gratitude and connection and always remember that our shared humanity is our greatest strength."

She introduced Graça Machel, founder of the Graça Machel Trust and lifelong advocate for women's and children's rights, explaining that although she could not attend in person and introducing her recorded message of com-



Gratitude in Action Honoree David Rubenstein, co-founder and co-chairman of Carlyle, at the Aurora Prize Ceremony, November 6, 2025, Ellis Island (photo courtesy AHI)



Ernesto Zedillo, Aurora Prize Selection Committee Member and director of the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, at the Aurora Prize Ceremony, November 6, 2025, Ellis Island (photo courtesy AHI)

passion and courage.

Ernesto Zedillo, Aurora Prize Selection Committee Member, director of the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, and former president of Mexico, then took the stage. Reflecting on Aurora's mission, he said, "Over the past 10 years, the Aurora Prize has stood as both a light of recognition and a mirror of conscience.



Noubar Afeyan, co-founder and chair of the Board of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, founder and CEO of Flagship Pioneering, and co-founder and chairman of Moderna at the Aurora Prize Ceremony, November 6, 2025, Ellis Island (photo courtesy AHI)

It honors those whose courage and compassion protect lives, while reminding us that such heroism remains necessary, for injustice, cruelty, and indifference persist in our world." He presented the next honoree, Henrietta H. Fore, former administrator of USAID and former UNICEF executive director, commending her four decades of leadership in advancing global education, health, and development.

In her remarks, Fore reflected on a lifetime dedicated to service and collaboration, expressing deep gratitude for those who work tirelessly to improve lives around the world and reminding the audience that true progress is "the work of many hearts and brilliant minds, united by purpose." Quoting Andrew Carnegie, she added, "The man who dies rich dies disgraced. The Aurora Prize carries that same spirit—that our wealth, our wisdom, our experience mean little unless we serve others."

Honorees and Guests

Following that, Dr. Eric Esrailian, co-founder of the Next Chapter, board member of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, and chief of the UCLA Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Division of Digestive Diseases, offered a heartfelt address on the personal and collective meaning of Aurora's mission and the humanitarian community it sustains. Drawing on his family's history as survivors of the Armenian Genocide, Dr. Esrailian emphasized how gratitude must become action and remembrance must inspire service. "What I see here tonight is resilience of spirit at scale — a community that refuses to accept cruelty, violence, displacement, and despair as inevitable. Aurora was born from that conviction, and being part of this movement has been an incredible honor for me," he said.

Esrailian introduced Michael Milken, founder and chairman of the Milken Institute, describing him as a visionary whose leadership in philanthropy and institution-building has transformed countless lives. In his remarks, Milken reflected on his own family's journey through Ellis Island and spoke of the universal power of dreams and the importance of recognizing those who quietly shape a better world. "This building in Ellis Island is a symbol to the millions of people that came here for a better life — for religious freedom or just freedom itself. One of the most important things that exists inside this center is our unsung heroes, those individuals that no one had ever heard of that did unbelievable things. And that bonds me to the Aurora Prize as it has for the past few years."

As the first part of the ceremony ended, guests were invited to reflect on Aurora's remarkable journey through a visual retrospective honoring its origins while anticipating the promise of what lies ahead. Following that intermission, Hrachya Avanesyan and Kento Suzuki took the stage for a stirring duet of Komitas's Groong (Crane) on violin and duduk. Originally from Japan, Kento Suzuki discovered the Armenian duduk while studying at the United World Colleges school in Dilijan and became so enamored with its sound that he remained in Armenia to master both the instrument and language.

The performance of Groong also evoked memories of the 2020 Aurora Prize Ceremony and of the late Vartan Gregorian, Aurora Co-Founder, visionary scholar, and

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dear friend and mentor to many in the room. In Gregorian's honor, the audience was invited to revisit a moment from the 2018 Aurora Prize Ceremony in Yerevan, where Co-Founders and Selection Committee Members paid tribute to him through readings from his memoir, *The Road to Home*.

Alice Greenwald, co-chair of Aurora's 10th Anniversary Events and board member of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, then took the stage to reflect on Gregorian's lasting influence. She spoke of his warmth, wisdom, and unwavering belief in humanity, saying, "Vartan gave us faith — in books as reservoirs of hope, in young people as guardians of a better world, and in compassion as the surest path to justice and peace." Greenwald closed by honoring the Gregorian family, including his son, Aurora Board Member Raffi Gregorian, for carrying forward his legacy of optimism and service.

Following that, the program turned to honor Aurora Co-Founder Ruben Vardanyan — a visionary philanthropist and social entrepreneur who remains unjustly detained in Azerbaijan. A video montage of Ruben's interviews highlighted his enduring commitment to humanity, followed by reflections from Paul Polman, business leader, climate and equality advocate, and member of the Aurora Prize Selection Committee.

Speaking on Ruben's legacy, Polman said, "He created opportunities from scarcity, schools where there was no access, and bridges of trust across the fights most had written off as irreconcilable. Aurora was born from that same vision—that gratitude is not a feeling but a responsibility, and that compassion means nothing unless it moves us into action." He added that while Ruben's absence is deeply felt, his spirit continues to inspire Aurora's work and the global movement for justice and hope.

Armine Afeyan, CEO of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, delivered an engaging and thought-provoking address about Aurora's next chapter and what it means to build lasting change as a community. Afeyan outlined Aurora's vision to inspire a new generation of humanitarian-hyphenates (educator-humanitarians, entrepreneur-humanitarians, storyteller-humanitarians, etc.) while expanding and strengthening its global humanitarian network. "Aurora is an expression of gratitude from descendants of survivors of the Armenian Genocide to those who saved our families, enabling us to exist today. If you bear a legacy that nobody wants, whatever it is, you know that every day is a gift, an opportunity for which you're grateful. We can't go back and change what happened, but we can charge forward and shape what's next," noted Afeyan. "Tonight, we catch a glimpse of the world as it should be. But a glimpse, however powerful, is fleeting. To make it last, Aurora's next chapter will bring the full power of the Aurora Humanitarian Network to bear."

The evening continued with a soulful performance by Aloe Blacc, Grammy-nominated artist and philanthropist.

Chelsea Clinton, member of the Aurora Prize Selection Committee and Vice Chair of both the Clinton Foundation and the Clinton Health Access Initiative, took the stage to present the first 2025 Aurora Humanitarian. "It's been an extraordinary experience to have been part of the conversations over the last now weeks and months, and such a deep privilege to learn about the individuals that we will bring to attention this evening," noted Dr. Clinton. "Thank you to Armine and everyone at Aurora who has brought us together in this space, proving that gratitude, like love, is

at its highest purpose when it is both a noun and a verb." She introduced Sally Becker, recognized for rescuing and protecting children in conflict zones around the world.

Onstage, Becker looked back at what first inspired her life's work and shared a profoundly touching reunion, acknowledging Selma Handzar, a girl she had once rescued and who was in the audience. Becker spoke to the power of simple, human acts of courage, saying, "I want to thank Aurora for giving people like me such a wonderful platform and enabling us to encourage others in this kind of work—and I don't mean dashing across frontlines, but just helping, because everyone can make a difference, no matter how small. You just have to want to."

Mary Robinson, Aurora Prize Selection Committee Member, former president of Ireland, and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, came onstage to present the next 2025 Aurora Humanitarian. She noted, "I've been with Aurora since its very beginning, and I've watched what began as a bold idea growing into a global movement that continues to bring people together — across borders, generations, and perspectives — around a shared belief in humanity and responsibility to act." Robinson went on to recognize Dr. Jamal Eltaeb, commending his extraordinary courage in keeping Al Nao Hospital in Sudan open amid relentless conflict. Although he was unable to attend due to current United States visa restrictions, Robinson expressed her hope of meeting him in person soon.

Dele Olojede, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, publisher, and member of the Aurora Prize Selection Committee, introduced the third 2025 Aurora Humanitarian. Drawing on his decades of witnessing both suffering and courage around the world, he said, "My career has taken me to more than 120 countries, and I have seen humanity both at its worst, but sometimes also at its best. We are the sum total of the stories that we make together, and the people that we have found who stand up in the most extraordinary circumstances are the ones that allow us to maintain hope and to get up in the morning." He honored Dr. Zouhair Lahna, whose two decades of medical service in some of the world's most devastated regions embody Aurora's ideals. Although Dr. Lahna was unable to attend the ceremony, his story resonated deeply with the audience.

Leymah Gbowee, Aurora Prize Selection Committee Member, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and Liberian peace activist, stepped forward to introduce the final 2025 Aurora Humanitarian. "I've had the joy of meeting so many extraordinary people whose courage, dedication, and selflessness remind me of what we can achieve when we look beyond ourselves, especially in a world that is so often focused on 'me' and 'mine' and forgetting about our collective humanity. Our 2025 Aurora Humanitarians embody everything the Prize stands for — fighting for dignity, sacrificing for others, committing themselves fully to making the world better." She added that, in all her years on the Committee, few stories have moved her as deeply as that of Dr. Jill Seaman, who has provided critical care in the conflict-affected town of Old Fangak, Sudan, for more than three decades.

Seaman, physician and co-founder of South Sudan Medical Relief, talked about the unexpected paths her work has taken, joking that she found walking through swamps a lot easier than dinner parties. She also shared the motivation that has guided her life of service: "I think that's the main message — that when we walk and travel through this life, we respond to the situation in front of us, knowing our shared humanity, and we meet fellow travel-

ers, and we do what we can. And I am just so honored to be here in a place that celebrates that view and vision of the world."

Lord Ara Darzi, chair of the Aurora Prize Selection Committee and co-director of the Institute of Global Health Innovation at Imperial College London, offered his reflections on this milestone year. Speaking about the depth and breadth of the nominations, he said, "For our Committee, the responsibility of reviewing such stories is both humbling and daunting. How does one distinguish between lives defined by such sacrifice? Each one reflects a story of extraordinary conviction — people who chose to act when indifference would have been easier, who risk their own safety so that others might survive."

Aurora Laureate

As the ceremony reached its most anticipated moment, the announcement of the 2025 Aurora Prize Laureate, members of the Aurora community gathered onstage. The hosts introduced one of the Prize Ceremony's most cherished traditions: since Aurora means "dawn," a girl with the same name is invited each year to reveal the Laureate. This year's "Little Aurora," nine-year-old Aurora Manukian from Los Angeles (named in honor of Aurora after the first Ceremony), stepped forward and announced the 2025 Aurora Prize Laureate: Dr. Jamal Eltaeb from Sudan.



Dr. Jamal Eltaeb (photo Luke Dray)

Although Dr. Eltaeb could not attend the event, his video message moved some to tears. Speaking from Al Nao Hospital, he said, "This recognition is not mine alone. It belongs to every nurse, every doctor, every volunteer who walks the corridor of Al Nao Hospital. It belongs to those who have stayed, those who have served, those who have refused to give up." He went on to underline the impact of the Prize, adding, "This award is not only an honor. It is a lifeline."

As the ceremony drew toward its close, David Ignatius and Judy Woodruff congratulated the Laureate and honored the Aurora supporters who share a deep belief in our common humanity. To conclude the evening with reflection and uplift, the hosts introduced a special headline performance by renowned singer-songwriter Rufus Wainwright, who performed *Agnus Dei*, a Latin prayer for peace, followed by Leonard Cohen's iconic *Hallelujah*.

The Bounce Marching Band concluded the program by playing a spirited rendition of Charles Aznavour's *Pour toi, Arménie*, a beloved tradition that closes each Aurora Prize Ceremony with a joyful tribute to resilience and unity.

Armine Afeyan Leads the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative into a New Phase

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Armine Helena Afeyan is the chief executive officer of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative (AHI), an organization founded in 2015 to express the gratitude of Armenians who survived a genocide a century earlier. Its motto is "Gratitude in action," and it works to address current humanitarian challenges. AHI held a ceremony and dinner to announce the 2025 Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity at Ellis Island on November 6, at which Afeyan was one of the speakers (see an accompanying article in this issue).

Afeyan said that this event, the first in-person prize ceremony by AHI on the East Coast of the United States, was very much a successful one. "When we set out to do this, planning over a year ago, we knew we wanted to do something that was ambitious. We wanted to land in the US with two feet because it is ... the historical philanthropic hub, and even with everything that is happening in global

humanitarian aid, it is still a humanitarian hub," she said.

Ellis Island is a symbolically important site for AHI because Aurora Mardiganian, the person after which AHI was named, came through there while immigrating to the US after surviving the Armenian Genocide (as did many Armenians). Furthermore, she said, "the reason why we do this [event] is because it is the singular, the best way, of showing people what the world could look like if humanitarians were actually upheld as the best of humanity."

She noted that while AHI was proud to have many Armenian leaders present there, the audience was largely non-Armenian, including many who were new to Aurora. She said this "is ultimately what this is about too. It is scope. It is telling the story. It is telling true to our roots... but the goal is to expand the umbrella. We don't have the market cornered on suffering and we won't ultimately win if we don't have teammates."

Afeyan said that the event financially also went very well as it was oversubscribed, and there was a significant

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Armine Afeyan (photo AHI website)



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portion of new donors, including those making multiyear commitments to Aurora's future. While no figures have officially been released, as an indication of the scope, the booklet distributed to guests at the event acknowledges two donors of \$1 million or more and two donors of \$250,000 or more, along with donors of other amounts.

Role in Aurora

Afeyan became executive director of AHI in 2023 and in September 2024 was appointed CEO. As CEO, she said she manages a team of 13 in Armenia and a smaller team in Washington DC, as well as a few people in Boston where the Afeyan family's office is located. She said, "I am essentially responsible for the day-to-day operations for Aurora and also, in the last several months, strategic planning for our next chapter."

She also is involved in the Afeyan family's broader philanthropy and sits on several nonprofit boards outside of Aurora, noting her experience in all of these institutions helps inform her leadership.

At the heart of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity, \$1,000,000 given to people who risk their own lives to save people facing violent conflicts or atrocities. The Aurora Prize laureate receives \$300,000 to continue his humanitarian work and can designate humanitarians and humanitarian organizations to receive \$600,000. The remaining \$100,000 is divided equally among the other finalists in the contest, called Aurora Humanitarians.

Another key program for the last eight years is Young Aurora, a competition for school-age children to come up with humanitarian solutions for their communities. Afeyan said about it that "we are going to continue and build on [it] in the future." This program has been carried out in partnership with the United World Colleges (UWC) global network of schools. It started at UWC Dilijan, an international boarding school which Ruben Vardanyan and his wife Veronika Zonabend, together with the Afeyan family and other donors, set up in Armenia in 2014, and expanded to the other UWC schools.

The importance of such programs is the humanitarian in every human, Afeyan said, continuing: "The idea [is] that even if the UWC students don't go on to become humanitarians themselves, when they are employed at a major consultancy, or a bank, or whatever else, that seed of a humanitarian being in all of us will persist."

There is also what is called the Aurora Humanitarian Network, which is a group of around 100 humanitarians called the Aurora Luminaries. Their names are available on a website (auroraluminaries.com) with their stories and sometimes video content, and each has his or her own page. Afeyan remarked that in some cases this might be the only online presence of this person, while others like Dr. Denis Mukwege, who was the 2024 Aurora Prize laureate, also was a Nobel Peace Prize winner who has a great deal of online exposure.

Afeyan defined the next chapter for AHI as "one that is focused on building out the network in addition to the prize. That is something that has really galvanized both our historical base but has also brought in a lot of new support." AHI will create community and capacity building programs for these humanitarians in this next phase, starting next year, though the preparations for this have already begun.

By running ten years of prize cycles, Afeyan observed that AHI has gotten to know many humanitarians well, particularly the semifinalists for the prize who are vetted extensively. Beyond that, AHI has been on an ad hoc basis inviting different humanitarians, including Aurora Prize semi-finalists, finalists and laureates to speaking engagements. Afeyan remarked that, "like when two Armenians meet they create a new Armenia — when you have two humanitarians meet, they find ways to collaborate with each other." Even though they might be working in different settings, the humanitarians may have similar needs, which can create economies of scale.

She gave one example: a person working in health care and another working in education realized very quickly that the community healthcare model could be extended to community education models. In other words, educating or training local educators to reach more people in more areas, particularly in rural communities, would be more effective using a centralized model.

This kind of synergy has been happening for years, evidently in a spontaneous fashion. Afeyan declared,

"Now we're deciding to act on it by basically pairing those potential pools of demand, and we are going to be piloting this, with sources of supply, or supply chains, for backend needs, for administrative needs, to really try to bolster existing humanitarians. That is what we call the human in humanitarian."

When asked whether the Aurora Prize ceremony would take place again in Armenia, as it has been held in other countries since 2019, Afeyan said that it is not ruled out, and meanwhile other types of events would continue to be held in Armenia. Most of the Aurora staff are located in Yerevan, and the US team accompanies Afeyan when she goes there. She added that there was a whole generation of volunteers in Armenia who had stayed in touch and "we really want to cultivate that group," while humanitarian award winners also are interested in going there.

Afeyan's Path to Aurora

Afeyan has important role models in philanthropy and humanitarianism in her own family. Her father, Dr. Noubar Afeyan, is a noted entrepreneur and philanthropist who was one of the three original founders of AHI. Her mother, Swedish-born biochemical engineer Anna Gunnarson Afeyan, is also a prominent philanthropist. In fact, Afeyan said, "My mom has been incredibly influential and she's a real force when it comes to our family's lives."

Afeyan noted that the Swedes as a people have a long history of individual philanthropy, stating, "It is something that I have observed firsthand. There is a sense of responsibility...to see how they can help." During the Armenian Genocide, Nordic missionaries served as humanitarians. Afeyan speculated: "There is a feasible world in which two sets of my ancestors were interacting in very different ways."

When asked how her involvement with AHI in particular began, Afeyan pointed to her first name. She was named after her great-great-aunt Armenouhi Afeyan, a survivor of the Armenian Genocide who managed to keep her family together in those years. Afeyan's father, Dr. Noubar Afeyan, shared a room with his great-aunt for over 20 years, so she was a big part of the lives of the Afeyan family. Afeyan recalled, "She was just a remarkable woman. I had the opportunity to meet her when I was young...She was a big part of our lives and a big influence on me. Her life was one entirely of service. And so, from way before I would have called it philanthropy, there was just an expectation of our giving back."

One other important motivating factor for Afeyan was that her great-grandfather and his brother, Armenouhi's siblings, survived thanks to help from others.

Afeyan recalled her education as an immense privilege which also amplified the expectation of eventual philanthropy and service. She went to St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School in Watertown, public school in Lexington, and then the private Winsor School before studying at Yale University, and getting an MBA in 2017 from INSEAD, a business school in Fontainebleau, France. She said, "These are places that open your eye and push you, and, I think, create an opportunity to give back."

After completing her education, Afeyan worked for almost six years in the private sector, primarily for Wayfair, an e-commerce company that sells furniture and home goods online with extensive use of data and artificial intelligence. Afeyan said that even while there, she participated in Armenian activities in her early 20s, and then transitioned to broader nonprofit activities, though still largely focused on Armenia. After building two businesses at Wayfair and reaching the executive level there, and having moved back to the US from England, she said she was at a place professionally where coming back to Aurora made sense.

She had been involved at Aurora's inception but then was basically a cheerleader on the sidelines not involved in the day-to-day work there until 2023, Afeyan related, when the Aurora leadership decided to continue the organization past its original eight-year commitment.

New Global Challenges

It appears that many governments in the world, including that of the United States, are moving towards a more inward-centered and transactional world view which entails reducing efforts at helping the less fortunate globally (and domestically). When asked how AHI and other private philanthropic endeavors are dealing

with this new situation, Afeyan responded: "The scale of official development aid is not going to be replaced by philanthropy. However, as many people who are in philanthropy know, because they amass their wealth through value investing, whether that is in building a business or investing in other businesses, etc., you ought to be looking for value investments in a down market, so to speak. I am using that just as an analogy, but basically now is the best time to invest. Your money will go the furthest right now by investing in local humanitarianism."

In other words, putting money into humanitarian endeavors will have a greater impact today than in other times and, Afeyan added, Aurora is one way of doing this.

She also pointed out that the world has been in such a situation before and individuals stepped up to meet the need. During and after the Armenian Genocide, which predated the post-World War II system of international aid and institutions like the United Nations, individual giving took place massively on the grassroots level. Afeyan said that Aurora Mardiganian was one of the inspirations of such aid movements, which mobilizing millions of dollars to save generations of Armenians. Therefore, she said, "We can take, if not comfort, then at least some level of confidence, in that we have been here before, and that individuals are still generous. If you ask Americans about foreign aid, highly unfavorable. If you ask Americans about feeding children, exceedingly favorable. And they're one to one."

As for the role of Armenians in this situation, Afeyan said, "I think Armenians have a special responsibility to the world, and I know that might feel like, oho, again we are being asked to do this. Again, in the middle of all of this? But actually the science behind it shows two things. One, being needed is key to a dignified life. It is when you feel forgotten and unneeded that things really come off the wheels. We are needed by the world. Our story, our work, our unique perspective, particularly on humanitarianism but whatever you want to call it, is needed at this moment now more than ever I would say."

Secondly, Afeyan cited scientific studies confirming that seeing people being helped feels good, so for Armenians and non-Armenians alike, giving back to people is part of having a satisfying life and is good for you.

Moreover, she said, "By spreading our message more than a hundred years after the Genocide and continuing to do this even through more recent traumas, we as a people, Armenians, can serve as an inspiration. We also can get inspiration through others who are in their moment of greatest need and greatest crisis, and are still finding ways to give back and to uplift."

For those who say why not first help Armenians facing trauma today after the occupation of Artsakh or turmoil in the Middle East, Afeyan said this approach will never mean "instead of." If you are able to do both, or are able to provide support beyond Armenia too, she said you can look at it as an investment that gives back manyfold. "By associating ourselves with giving back, by associating ourselves with helping the world," Afeyan said, "we make friends before we need them. We do what is right and Christian and all these things as well, but we make friends before we need them and we associate what being Armenian is with something really positive and still unique and still original."

She stressed, "I will never go for a dollar bound for Armenia. We want Armenia to be strong, and on a personal level, I have lived in Armenia, I care deeply about Armenia, and my family does work in Armenia outside of Aurora. But if there are two dollars, and you want to give one that also pays back for Armenia, if not directly, this is another option for that."

Smilingly, she said not to forget that there is an -ian in the word humanitarian too.

How to Participate in the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative

Afeyan said that the avenues for participation in the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative include donations and nominations. The next Aurora Prize cycle is open so anyone can nominate and anyone can be nominated. "We are always looking for more, better and more diverse nominations," Afeyan said.

A third way is more general: to become more humanitarian in our lives. Afeyan said, "The goal really is sparking gratitude in action and I can't think of a better way than to think about the humanitarians and to think about how we can be more like them."



Arts & Culture

Opera by Mary Kouyoumdjian Nominated for Grammy Award

NEW YORK — (November 13, 2025) – The world premiere recording of first-generation Armenian-American composer Mary Kouyoumdjian’s electroacoustic chamber opera “Adoration” has been nominated for a GRAMMY® Award for Best Opera Recording. The honor marks the first time in history that an opera by an Armenian composer has been nominated in the category. “Adoration” follows a high school student whose fictional story about a terrorist plot goes viral, unpacking how grief, racism, and media distortion collide to obscure the truth.

“Adoration” was released digitally on August 8, 2025 on Bright Shiny Things, and is available on all streaming platforms. Adapted from the film of the same name by Armenian-Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan, the libretto was written by Royce Vavrek, and the work was produced and given its world premiere by Beth Morrison Projects. Conducted by Alan Pierson, the cast features Miriam Khalil, Omar Najmi, David Adam Moore, and GRAMMY® Award winner Karim Sulayman, alongside Naomi Louisa O’Connell, Marc Kudisch, and Sammy Ivany. They are joined by the GRAMMY®-nominated Choir of Trinity Wall Street under Thomas McCargar, the Silvana Quartet, and sound designer Daniel Neumann, with electronics by Kouyoumdjian. The album was recorded live during Prototype Festival performances between January 12 and 20, 2024 at The Sheen Center for Thought and Culture in New York City.

The protagonist of “Adoration”, Simon, is an orphaned high school student who is encouraged by a teacher, as part of a dramatic writing exercise, to appropriate details from a historical terrorist attack as an event perpetrated by his parents. When his story goes viral, Simon uses the hysteria within his community and on the internet to highlight the challenges of intolerance and racism. “Adoration” tells two simultaneous stories—a fictional story of terrorism and betrayal next to a real story of family strife and rejection, until a shocking final revelation fits them together.

Kouyoumdjian was awarded an OPERA America commissioning grant to create the adaptation of Egoyan’s film, along with “exemplary creator of operatic prose” (The New York Times) Royce Vavrek. After its premiere as part of the 2024 Prototype Festival, the opera had its West Coast premiere at LA Opera in February 2025.

In an artist statement in the booklet, Kouyoumdjian writes: “I believe that artists are the speakers of difficult truths. As a member of a family displaced from both the Lebanese Civil War and Armenian Genocide, I consider my freedom of expression here in the United States to be an immense privilege, and so I am drawn

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Photograph by Anthony Pizzoferrato.

Anthony Pizzoferrato

Responsibility of preserving Armenian memories

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Anthony Pizzoferrato is an Italian-American documentary photographer and photojournalist born in Columbus, Ohio. His work delves into conflict, history, politics, and social and environmental issues, with particular attention to post-Soviet countries and the Middle East. Anthony’s photography often highlights underreported stories and vulnerable communities, approached with sensitivity and respect. His images have appeared in major outlets such as Time, BBC, CNN, Politico, Bloomberg, Die Zeit, and Le Figaro, among others. Notably, his photo from the 2024 Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day was shortlisted for the Siena Awards, while he continues to pursue long-term documentary projects. Since 2017, he has been based in Yerevan, Armenia, where he focuses on current events and long-term projects.



Photojournalist Anthony Pizzoferrato

roads — capture recent, mostly tragic, developments in Armenia and Artsakh. They are deeply moving, stirring painful memories of what Armenians have endured over the past eight years and beyond, for which we are very grateful to you.

Thank you, I appreciate this very much. It means a great deal. As a photojournalist and documentary photographer, I see my role not only as an observer and a visual historian but also as someone who carries and communicates stories that might otherwise be overlooked or forgotten. Covering Armenia and the broader region has never felt like just an assignment, it’s become more like a responsibility. These moments are heavy, often painful, but they’re also full of resilience and truth the deeper the viewer dives into the images. If my work can help preserve history, memory, spark reflection and dialogue or deepen understanding, then I feel I’ve done something worthwhile and on the right path of purpose.

In your photographs, Armenia often appears in monochrome tones — perhaps a reflection of the heavy and difficult subjects you choose to portray. Might it happen one day you will depict colorful Armenia?

It’s true that many of my photographs of Armenia lean toward monochrome, both in tone and emotion. For me, this desaturated and realistic approach to colors is a way of stripping things down to their essence, it mirrors the stark realities, the resilience, and the silence that often surrounds the themes I explore and I

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Commemorative Evening in Burbank Dedicated to Komitas Vartabed

BURBANK, Calif. — On November 20, a commemorative evening dedicated to Komitas Vardapet took place organized by the Zvartnots Cultural Committee of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of North America. Despite the extremely unfavorable weather conditions, Hampar Hall of the Diocese was nearly full.

The opening address was delivered by Dr. Simon Simonian, chairman of Zvartnots. He stated, “We have gathered to commemorate the memory of the Armenian composer, singer, musician-ethnographer, musicologist, choirmaster, collector of folklore, poet, pedagogue, lecturer, and one of the founding members of the first international musical society, and the prelate of all Armenian song – Komitas Vardapet.”

The main speaker of the day was Fr. Yeremia Abgaryan, who has a unique voice and interesting style. He touched upon the biography of Komitas (Soghomon Soghomonian), who was born on September 26, 1869, in the city of Kütahya. At the age of one, he lost his mother, and a few years later, he lost his father.

In 1881, the Diocesan deputy of Kütahya, Gevorg Vardapet Derdzakian, traveled to Echmiadzin to be ordained as bishop. According to the instruction of Catholicos of All Armenians Gevorg V, he was supposed to take a mellifluous orphan young boy with him to Holy Echmiadzin to study at the Gevorkian Theological Seminary. Soghomon was chosen from among about 20 orphans, and a new life began for Komitas.

In 1896, with a scholarship granted by the philanthropist Alexander Mantashev, he departed for Berlin, and in 1899, he graduated from the Philosophy Department of the Friedrich Wilhelm University and the Richard Schmidt private conservatory.

Fr. Abgaryan recalled that Komitas delivered numerous lectures on Armenian music in a number of cities in Europe and the East (Paris, Berlin, Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne, Venice, Cairo, etc.).

Tragically, the Armenian Genocide in 1915 interrupted the genius musician’s activities. He was arrested and deported along with Istanbul’s Armenian intellectuals. After some time, Komitas was released from exile through the mediation of American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, but as a result of the horror he experienced, he lost his mental balance and ceased creating.

The last 16 years of his life were spent in the psychiatric institutions of Ville-Évrard and Villejuif in Paris. Komitas Vartabed passed away in 1935.

In the artistic segment, master violinist Sahak Karapetyan performed Komitas’ Grunk, Gakavik and Gele Gele.

see KOMITAS, page 15



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



White Coat Pink Apron’s Armenian and Middle Eastern Mezze

White Coat Pink Apron features 12 Armenian and Middle Eastern mezze or appetizer recipes that everyone will love on their holiday table, including hummus, baba ghanoush, tabbouleh, muhammara, and more. Diana Balekian, the creator of the White Coat Pink Apron food blog, is an Armenian-American allergist, blogger, and busy mom from the Boston area.

“At Christmas,” she says, “Most Armenian families pull out all the stops. It doesn’t matter who you are, or where you were born or grew up: Armenian families tend to serve many delicious appetizers, side dishes and main courses like pilaf (rice and bulgur), cheese boureg, yalanche (grape leaves), hummus, lahmajoun, kofta, and shish kebab. Plus trays of buttery gata, choreg, baklava, and bourma — the ultimate dessert sweets that are traditional to each family. This feat is accomplished by planning a menu to ensure that each family member gets to enjoy the thing they love the most — and to avoid the embarrassment that arises from not having enough food around this special time of year.”

“Appetizers are often an introductory course to a bigger meal. A mezze is a meal by itself. Another difference is that a mezze is a centerpiece uniting food and family for as long as they have stories to tell. Each year, our family comes together to make 10 or more fabulous appetizers to serve for our holiday celebration. Maybe more, depending on what counts as an appetizer. In fact, almost everyone fills up on appetizers and hardly has any room left for the actual meal (don’t worry, we make room). Since these appetizers are so traditional, we can’t seem to give them up. Many dishes that are too labor intensive or decadent to make during the year make an appearance at everyone’s Christmas table — and we all go completely nuts trying to enjoy them all.”

“Since many Middle Eastern appetizers are popular, I want to share some of these dishes with my readers. Here are dishes you might find at any Armenian Christmas (or New Year’s or Easter) celebration. And get creative with the flavors and ingredients: add almost anything to your homemade hummus or baba ghanoush dips, swap out grains for healthy gluten-free options, fill your boureg or turnovers with something different — the possibilities are endless,” adds Diana.



Diana Balekian Photos courtesy White Coat Pink Apron

Hummus, Baba Ghanoush

“These two recipes are from photographer, stylist and writer Alexandra Daum,” says Diana. “Each recipe on her seasonal vegetarian recipe blog, Occasionally Eggs, has been carefully tested in Alexandra’s home kitchen. Recipes are updated with instructions and more photos if they don’t already have them, so they’re easy to follow. Fresh ingredients come from her home garden so they are about as local and seasonal as it gets.”

In 2021, Alexandra released her first cookbook, Occasionally Eggs: Simple Vegetarian Recipes for Every Season with Appetite, by Random House. With over 110 nourishing recipes, Occasionally Eggs will create excitement as the seasons change. Readers can explore fresh, vibrant flavors in spring and summer, with dishes like Chickpea Apricot Grain Salad, Spring Pesto Pizza, Sweet Corn and Zucchini Pakoras, and Strawberry Elderflower Ginger Beer Floats. In autumn and winter, it’s a time to enjoy warmer meals, including Apple Hazelnut Waffles, Sesame Roasted Delicata Squash, Smoky Mushroom Pumpkin Chili, and Tahini Date Banana Bread.

Hummus

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 3/4 cups cooked chickpeas
- 1 cup tahini
- 4 ice cubes
- Juice of a large lemon, to taste
- 1 small clove garlic
- 1/4 teaspoon cumin
- Pinch of nutmeg
- Salt to taste
- Cayenne pepper, to taste
- Yogurt optional

Baba Ghanoush:

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 medium eggplants
- 1/3 cup tahini
- 1 small clove garlic
- Juice of a large lemon, to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon cumin
- Olive oil

PREPARATION:

HUMMUS: Place all the ingredients into a food processor and blend on high speed until smooth and slightly fluffy. Depending on the strength of your processor this can take several minutes. Check seasonings. Serve immediately or chilled, topped with olive oil.

BABA GHANOUSH: Roast the eggplants on a tray in a 480°F oven for 30 to 35 minutes, or char them over a gas burner for about 10 minutes. Put the eggplant into a bowl and place the bowl into some cold water to quickly cool the eggplant; peel the eggplant using your hands. Place peeled eggplant in a food processor with the other ingredients, and pulse until just mixed and not perfectly smooth. Check seasonings. Serve at room temperature or chilled; garnish with olive oil and pomegranate seeds, if desired.

Note: Charring the eggplants over a flame is preferable to roasting them, and the vast majority of Lebanese homes have gas stoves, so it’s how baba ghanoush is often made in Lebanon. Soak the chickpeas for 24 hours in water with a teaspoon of baking soda, and add baking soda to the cooking water as well, to ensure they are very soft. Use the best tahini you can get as it significantly alters the flavor. The ice keeps the hummus from heating as it blends and makes it creamier. Cayenne isn’t traditional but a good addition nonetheless. Yogurt lightens the color and texture of the hummus.

Diana S Balekian, MD, MPH

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For mezze recipes and more, see: <https://whitecoatpinkapron.com/next-weeks-menu-armenian-and-middle-eastern-mezze/>
Easy Khachapuri courtesy <https://whitecoatpinkapron.com/category/armenian/>
For Diana’s mother’s Eetch recipe, go to: <https://whitecoatpinkapron.com/eetch/>
For Diana’s Dolma recipe, go to: <https://whitecoatpinkapron.com/dolma/>
For Armenian Lentil, Wheat, and Spinach Soup (Panjarabour), see: <https://whitecoatpinkapron.com/armenian-lentil-wheat-and-spinach-soup-panjarabour/>
For Homemade Pita Bread, see: <https://theurbanlife.com/2017/01/04/home-made-pita-bread/>
For the two recipes by Alexandra Daum, go to: <https://www.occasionallyeggs.com/lebanese-hummus-and-baba-ghanoush-an-interview/>

OCCASIONALLY EGGS by Alexandra Daum
For other vegetarian dips, go to: <https://www.occasionallyeggs.com/dips-and-spreads/>
For Alexandra’s cookbook, go to: <https://www.occasionallyeggs.com/cookbook/>



ARTS & CULTURE

Books

Harutyun Marutyan's New Book Commemorating the Genocide

LONDON/NEW YORK — I. B. Tauris, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, has announced the publication of Prof. Harutyun Marutyan's *Commemorating the Armenian Genocide*. The book is part of the series *Armenians in the Modern and Early Modern World* edited by Bedross Der Matossian (University of Nebraska, Lincoln).

Commemorated annually on April 24, Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day is a vital part of national identity in both Armenia and the diaspora. This book offers a historical and anthropological perspective on how Armenians commemorate the genocide and how its significance has evolved over time. It begins with the first demonstrations by survivors in Allied-occupied Constantinople in 1919 and traces the fluctuations in the politics of the genocide and its official and popular memory during the Stalinist ban, the Khrushchev thaw, and beyond. The book also details the rituals of the annual march to the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan and other memorial sites, analyzing how the collective memory of this foundational event is embodied and continues to influence Armenian identity today.

Marutyan commented: "Since my school years, for more than half a century, I have visited the Armenian Genocide Memorial on April 24 every year to pay tribute to the memory of the innocent victims. Due to my profession, I eventually began to pay attention to people's behavior, speech, and attire. I became interested in the question of when Armenians have been celebrating April 24, as well as the developments it has had in Armenia and the Diaspora over the course of a century. I have always been interested in the symbolism of the memorial complex as a whole, as well as its different parts. Existing research did not answer all the questions

that interested me. And since I was already specializing in memory issues, I began to study these issues as well. As a result, I participated in several conferences with reports, articles were born, and, gradually, the idea of a monograph matured."

According to Marutyan April 24 is not just a Remembrance Day for the victims of the Armenian Genocide. It is one of the most important and distinctive elements of Armenian identity, invisibly connecting and uniting all Armenians. The Remembrance Day has been shaped by many political twists and turns, and even a century later, its various interpretations are still widely discussed by social and professional circles. *Commemorating the Genocide* with an annual one-day event reflects and embodies the current state of society, serving as a summary of the realities, concepts, policies, and propaganda at a given moment. At the same time, honoring the victims of the Genocide does not depend solely on whether this day is observed.

For Marutyan, the memory of the *Medz Yeghern* has been subtly present in many forms in the survivors and their descendants, in the hearts of those who are aware of the Genocide. It is reflected in their speech, conversations, behaviors, attitudes, and actions throughout their lives. Discussing the significance of Remembrance Day involves examining the full range of ways in which the memory of the Genocide manifests. Since the issue is too broad for just one chapter, only a selection of topics are addressed here. However, the questions discussed aim to shed some light on the problem.

"This groundbreaking study on the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, authored by one of Armenia's leading anthropologists, represents a landmark contribution to the field," said Der Matossian,



editor of the series. "Marutyan's book is the first comprehensive work to trace the evolution of genocide remembrance over the past century. Through an incisive analysis of the rituals, symbols, and commemorative language that have shaped public memory, the study offers innovative perspectives and opens new avenues for understanding how a nation constructs and transforms its collective remembrance," he concluded.

Reviews

"Memory keeps a nation alive. Even if you cut off its heads, an Armenian poet wrote, the nation is like a hydra that will grow back many more. Anthropologist Harutyun Marutyan gives us a forgotten history of how Armenians around the world, and eventually in Soviet Armenia, remembered their martyrs in the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Commemoration is fundamental to the passing on of memory. Even the young architects who designed the Tsitsernakabert Monument to the Genocide did not know what the Yeghern (Genocide) was when they took up the task. In this beautifully written history, we learn how memory was transmitted for the last one hundred years, a story that has not hitherto been told. Like monuments and commemorations, this book is one of the transmitters that keeps the past alive in the present." —Ronald Grigor Suny, author of *"They Can Live in the*

Desert But Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide

"The monograph by the Armenian historian and former director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, Harutyun Marutyan, traces the changing course of Armenian remembrance culture and history politics with exceptional knowledge and from his own experience. It also explains the special features of Armenian commemorative rituals. Under Soviet rule, the (Eastern) Armenian settlement area that remained after the Ottoman genocide had to fight for decades for the right to self-determined remembrance. It was not until 1965 that Moscow allowed a memorial to be erected in Armenia's capital, Yerevan. Since 1967, the impressive memorial has been the second pan-national place of remembrance in Armenia, alongside the Armenian Apostolic Catholicate in Echmiadzin. And it was not until 1988, almost at the end of Soviet rule, that the Soviet Armenian government dared to make April 24 (1915) a national day of remembrance and mourning. Today, recalling the darkest periods of Modern Armenian history constitutes an essential part of Armenian identity. As a descendant of Western Armenian genocide survivors, the author Harutyun Marutyan played a significant role in shaping this development." —Tessa Hofmann, author; scholar of Armenian and genocide studies; Berlin

"Every group victimized by mass extermination expresses its pain and the trauma endured by the survivors and their descendants. When, moreover, this supreme crime has gone unpunished, as is the case in Turkey, the demand for justice becomes a central element of society. In this respect, Harutyun Marutyan's study offers a comprehensive overview of the various forms of expression in Armenian society, which is still dominated by this legacy. His anthropological approach is masterly and will undoubtedly contribute to further reflection on the consequences of genocide." —Raymond Kévorkian, Director of Research Emeritus, Université Paris VIII, Saint-Denis, France

Copies of *Commemorating the Armenian Genocide* are available for purchase on the Bloomsbury Press website. Enter code GLR AT8 at the checkout on bloomsbury.com for 35% off.

Opera by Mary Kouyoumdjian Nominated for Grammy Award

GRAMMY, from page 13

to stories that are both challenging to confront and to speak... Filmmaker Atom Egoyan has created such a story with his film "Adoration", and I am incredibly grateful to have spent the last several years living in this wonderfully challenging space in adapting his film into an opera... Our world continues to be fractured over unresolved multi-generational traumas that can cause horrifying divisions, globally and often in the closeness of our own families; however, like the story behind "Adoration", individuals and communities, at their very best, also find beautiful ways through these divisions."

As a first-generation Armenian-American and having come from a family directly affected by the Lebanese Civil War and Armenian Genocide, she uses a sonic palette that draws on her heritage, interest in music as documentary, and background in experimental composition to progressively blend the old with the new. A strong believer in freedom of speech and the arts as an amplifier of expression, her compositional work often integrates recorded testimonies with resilient individuals and field recordings of place to invite empathy by humanizing complex experiences around social and political conflict.

A finalist for the 2024 Pulitzer Prize in

Music, Kouyoumdjian has received commissions for such organizations as the New York Philharmonic, Kronos Quartet, Carnegie Hall, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Beth Morrison Projects/OPERA America, Alarm Will Sound, Bang on a Can, International Contemporary Ensemble, Brooklyn Youth Chorus, the Houston Symphony, American Composers Forum, Roomful of Teeth, WQXR, REDSHIFT, Experiments in Opera, Helen Simoneau Danse, the Nouveau Classical Project, Music of Remembrance, Friction Quartet, Ensemble Oktopus, and the Los Angeles New Music Ensemble among others. Her work has been performed internationally at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MASS MoCA, the Barbican Centre, Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), Millennium Park, Benaroya Hall, Prototype Festival, the New York Philharmonic Biennial, Cabrillo Festival, SF Jazz, Big Ears Festival, 21C Music Festival, and Cal Performances.

Her opera "Adoration", adapted from Atom Egoyan's 2008 film, was commissioned, developed, produced, and premiered by Beth Morrison Projects in New York City before receiving its West Coast premiere at LA Opera to rave reviews. The world premiere recording was released on Bright Shiny Things in August 2025 and has

been nominated for a 2026 GRAMMY® Award for Best Opera Recording, making history as the first opera by an Armenian composer in the category. Kouyoumdjian's debut portrait album, WITNESS with the Kronos Quartet, was released through Phenotypic Recordings in 2025 and was called "powerful, poignant" by Gramophone and "gorgeous, brutal, and awe-stricken" by FLOOD Magazine. In May 2025, her Pulitzer-nominated music-documentary, Paper Planos, commissioned by Alarm Will Sound, was performed at The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. Paper Planos originally premiered in 2023 at EMPAC.

Kouyoumdjian's residencies include those with EMPAC, Buffalo String Works, Alarm Will Sound/The Mizzou International Composers Festival, Roulette/The Jerome Foundation, Montalvo Arts Center, and Exploring the Metropolis. Her music has been described as "eloquently scripted" and "emotionally wracking" by The New York Times and as "politically fearless" and "the most harrowing moments on stage at any New York performance" by New York Music Daily. In her work as a composer, orchestrator, and music editor for film, she has collaborated on a diverse array of motion pictures, including writing the original score for the documentary An Act of Worship (Capital K Pictures and PBS's POV Docs)

and orchestrating the soundtrack to The Place Beyond the Pines (Focus Features).

Kouyoumdjian holds a D.M.A. and M.A. in composition from Columbia University, where she studied primarily with Zosha Di Castri, Georg Friedrich Haas, Fred Lerdahl, and George Lewis; an M.A. in Scoring for Film & Multimedia from New York University; and a B.A. in Music Composition from the University of California, San Diego, where she studied with Chaya Czernowin, Steven Kazuo Takasugi, Anthony Davis, Steven Schick, and Chinary Ung. Dedicated to new music advocacy, Kouyoumdjian is a Co-Founder of the annual new music conference New Music Gathering, served as the founding Executive Director of contemporary music ensemble Hotel Elefant, and served as Co-Artistic Director of Alaska's new music festival Wild Shore New Music. As an avid educator, Kouyoumdjian is on the composition faculty at The New School; she has previously been on faculty at Columbia University, the Peabody Institute at Johns Hopkins University, Boston Conservatory at Berklee, Brooklyn College's Feirstein School of Cinema, Mannes Prep, and the New York Philharmonic's Very Young Composers program. Kouyoumdjian is proud to have her music published by Schott's PSNY and is based in Brooklyn, NY. www.marykouyoumdjian.com



ARTS & CULTURE



CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

DECEMBER 1 — St. James Men’s Club Fellowship and Dinner will feature guest speaker Nancy Kricorian, author of four novels about post-genocide Armenian diasporan experience. She will discuss her newest book, *The Burning Heart of the World*, which will be available to purchase that evening. Monday at St. James Church. Mezza 6.15, Dinner 7 pm, Losh Kebab and Kheyma, 7.30 speaker, 465 Mount Auburn St., Watertown.

DECEMBER 5 — Jingalov Hats Masterclass sponsored by the City of Smile. Friday, a hands-on culinary experience in addition meets taste. Class will offer refreshments. 7 p.m., ACEC 47 Nichols Ave., Watertown. **POSTPONED** December 1 to Cynthia Kazanjian 339-222-9900 or cynkazan@aol.com, or Katrina Menzigan kmenzigan@outlook.com

DECEMBER 5-6 — Holy Trinity’s Annual Christmas Bazaar. Friday, 12:00pm – 9:00pm and Saturday, December 6, 2025, 11:30am – 7:00pm. Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston, 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge. Details at: <https://htaac.org/event/2025-christmas-bazaar/>

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 exhibition 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. or Ara Jeknavorian, 617-803-2612, 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 — Erevan Choral Society Christmas Concert, Sunday, 7 p.m. Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston, 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge. Details at: <https://htaac.org/event/erevan-choral-society-christmas-concert-2/>

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.

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 or alin.gregorian@gmail.com. You can also visit our website, www.mirrorspectator.com, and find the “calendar” section under the heading “More” or mail them to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472. All calendar entries must be received by noon on Monday before publication.



Anthony Pizzoferrato: Responsibility of Preserving Armenian Memories

PHOTOJOURNALISM, from page 13

want to keep the viewers engaged in the subject matter and not get lost in the colors. Personally, speaking I do not believe bright and colorful photos work well with subject matter that revolves around conflict, and heavy topics. Armenia has color, absolutely, but I try not to impose it unless it feels authentic to the subject. Authenticity is extremely important for me and the work I create or the photos I seek to capture and cultivate. Color exists, of course and Armenia is incredibly rich in it but when I’m photographing, it’s not always what I see first, I have to feel what I see before I take the photo. If I do not feel any kind of connection I move on, I consider myself a visual historian for this reason, I’m an observationist first and foremost.

Generally speaking, I think every photographer has phases, and right now mine reflects a certain emotional truth I see and feel in Armenia, it’s not so much how I see the country as a whole, but about certain realities that demand attention. Of course, Armenia is also filled with resilience, joy, and vivid life and depending on the subject matter I’m sure in the future I will begin to dive more into full color. Perhaps one day I’ll be drawn to the vibrancy, to the laughter and light that are also very real here. But for now, I’m still listening to the quiet parts of the story.

You frequently photograph scenes of mourning, cemeteries and graves. Do you ever worry that such documentation risks becoming overly depressive, overshadowing the core message you seek to convey?

I don’t see mourning as the opposite of meaning, actually I see it as part of it. The cemeteries, graves and certain rit-

uals I often tend to photograph are not just about death, but about memory, presence, and the continuation of identity. These images may be heavy, but they’re not meant to make the viewer depressed, they’re meant to hold space for reflection, and perhaps even healing. I try not to sanitize reality for the sake of comfort, instead I approach these moments with care and honesty, trusting that viewers will find the meaning and even beauty in such vulnerability. If we turn away from sadness, we risk forgetting, and to me that’s far more dangerous than facing grief directly.

Your work often addresses highly sensitive topics. How have these stories been received by international audiences, and how have they resonated in Armenia’s eastern and western neighboring countries?

My work often engages with histories and emotions that are deeply rooted, and responses I have received usually vary. International audiences for example tend to approach the work with curiosity and empathy, often connecting it to broader themes of loss, identity, and resilience. In Armenia’s neighboring countries, the reception can be a bit more complex, sometimes cautious or even controversial, and sometimes silent, but that in itself says something about the weight of shared histories. I don’t expect agreement from every viewer; however, I do hope the work creates space for reflection, and perhaps even dialogue, across borders. Sensitivity doesn’t mean avoidance, to me it means listening more carefully.

One of your projects, Guardians of Faith, explores the Yazidi community of Armenia — a subject both exotic and

little known internationally. What aspects of this national minority did you find most compelling?

Guardians of Faith is a story I am continuing to build on each year and is an ongoing project. What initially drew me to the Yazidi community in Armenia wasn’t a sense of exoticism, but a feeling of quiet absence, the sense that their story was present, yet underrepresented, even within the national narrative. As I continue to spend time with them, what stood out was their deep spiritual rhythm and how faith is embedded not just in places of worship, but in daily life, in gestures, in the way elders pass knowledge to the young. Visually, I was drawn to the contrast between the fragility of their circumstances and the solidity of their beliefs. Photographing them became less about documentation over time and more about trying to understand a worldview that’s circular, ancestral, and deeply tied to the land. It challenged me to slow down compared to other work I often produce which is related to breaking news type events.

Many are curious: how did Armenia become your home for the past eight years?

This is a question I get often, and my answer is always the same: my connection to Armenia goes back more than 15 years even though I never stepped foot inside the country. I first became curious about the country when I read about the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia in relation to the Crusades. That led me to dive deeper into Armenia’s ancient history, its early Christian identity, and later, its Soviet past, all of which resonated with my broader interest in post-Soviet countries, ancient history, and culture.

I first visited Armenia in May 2017 as

a tourist, just for a week, but it left such a strong impression and there was so much I did not get to see I was already planning the second trip right after the first. I ended up returning just a few months later in September and never took my return flight. I found an apartment and decided to stay. Between then and now, I’ve spent a little over five years living here, first from 2017 to 2019, then returning permanently for the second time in January 2022 after living in the U.S. during the pandemic.

What drew me in then still holds true now, Armenia is a place where history feels tangible in the architecture, the landscapes, the people. It’s a country that continually reveals itself, and that’s what keeps me here for the time being.

Finally, how would you describe daily life in Armenia, living not as a tourist but as a photographer embedded in the realities of this society?

Living in Armenia as a documentary photographer and not as a tourist means being immersed in both the visible and invisible layers of daily life. It’s a place of many striking contrasts which only become more visible the longer you stay and the more time you spend here. For me the daily rhythm can feel slow and intimate, yet at the same time history and emotion are always just beneath the surface. I’ve learned to pay attention to small things like gestures, silences, landscapes that hold memory. While daily life can be tough at times and not always easy, it’s filled with complexity and depth, which is what continues to inspire my work. Being embedded means accepting the quiet pace, building trust, and letting the work grow organically from within the society rather than observing it from the outside...

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
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SINCE 1932



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Does Armenia Need an Ally?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Turkey's approach to Armenia appears to involve obstructing measures that would genuinely benefit the Armenian state while simultaneously undertaking actions that could help the current Armenian government win the 2026 elections. The approach leaves the impression that Armenian-Turkish normalization and the unblocking of Armenia are near completion while avoiding concrete actions that would genuinely benefit Armenia's national interests, thus highlighting a divergence between the interests of Armenia and its current government. By June, when Armenia's elections are held, Turkey will likely implement superficial measures presented by Armenian authorities as significant achievements, but which will essentially be for PR purposes. Examples include initiating or pre-signing (but not ratifying) protocols on establishing diplomatic relations and border openings or easing border restrictions for third-country citizens or cargo; introducing new airlines to the Armenian aviation market; and restoring some Armenian churches in modern Turkish cities.

Only recently, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has stated that Turkey will only normalize relations with Armenia with Baku's approval. Consequently, significant progress depends on Armenia's upcoming elections and referendum, as a strong, legitimate Armenian government is crucial for Turkey and Azerbaijan to advance their agenda and ensure the strongest legitimacy of any signed agreements. Furthermore, Turkish support would make the Armenian government dependent on Ankara, which appears to be a deliberate part of Turkey's strategy.

It is clear that the Armenian authorities need to show the public that the six years of Armenian-Turkish negotiations have not only made progress but have also had concrete successes. This issue is an extremely important prerequisite in the pre-election phase for the Pashinyan government. While Turkey emphasizes improved relations with Baku as a precondition for normalization with Armenia, this isn't the full picture. Meeting Turkey's preconditions, beyond removing the Mount Ararat image from Armenia's coat of arms and ceasing use of "Western and Eastern Armenia," would require Armenia to amend its constitution via referendum. Azerbaijan has already officially demanded this from Armenia, so Turkey does not need to reiterate the precondition of constitutional change. Armenia will likely satisfy Turkish preconditions if it formally normalizes relations with Azerbaijan after changing its constitution.

Turkish strategy for normalizing relations with Armenia is well

thought out. The strategy is a calculated maneuver aimed at Armenia, and it seeks to cultivate the international perception that Turkey is actively pursuing normalized relations. Historically, Turkey has often taken such steps, particularly before April 24, to mislead the international community and undermine recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Currently, Turkey aims to feign normalization while prolonging the process to extract maximum concessions from Armenia with a little help from Baku.

Turkey and Azerbaijan pursue a coordinated foreign policy as fraternal Turkic states with largely overlapping interests. Azerbaijan relies on Turkey to expand its influence in the South Caucasus, counterbalancing Iran and Russia, while Turkey supports Baku's firm stance against Russia. Despite appearances of warming relations, exemplified by the recent Putin-Aliyev meeting,

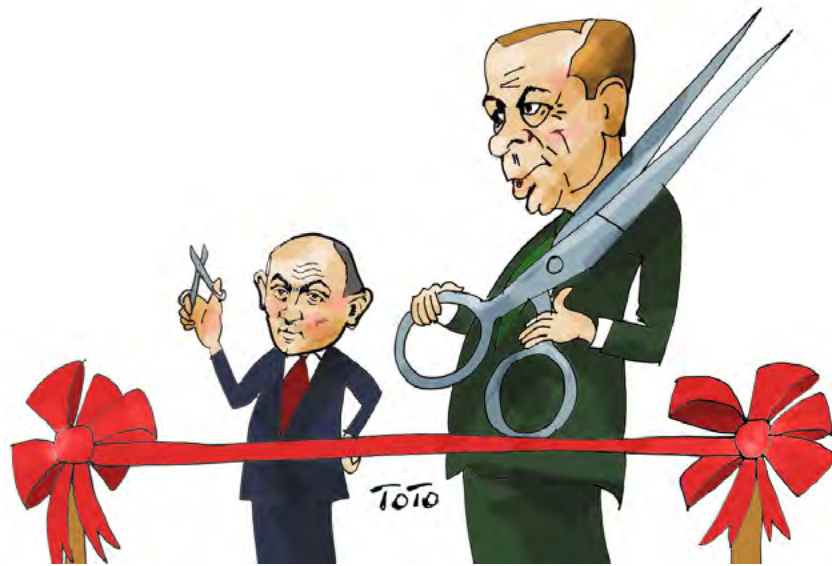
Azerbaijan's continued detention of Russian citizens, a point of ongoing contention for the Russian Foreign Ministry, underscores this alignment. This unified approach extends beyond facilitating direct contact with Turkic states in Central Asia to include the opening of the South Caucasus and the so-called Zangezur corridor.

Armenia cannot counter these two major powers without a strategic ally. Regardless of whether that ally is the

USA, China, Russia, or the EU, Armenia risks losing its sovereignty if it remains isolated among these giants, lacking a true geopolitical patron. Armenia's economic, political, and security challenges require genuine counterbalancing factors, not just normalized relations or promises of such. It is worth remembering that Syria also had great relations with Turkey under President Bashar al-Assad back in the 2010s, but we all also remember how geopolitics can change personal approaches and established interstate alliances.

Ultimately, nearly all states, including neutral ones like Switzerland and Austria, rely on a global power for patronage. Their adherence to anti-Russian sanctions, at Washington's behest, underscores this reality. Therefore, Armenia must consider whether it can survive in the 21st century without a geopolitical patron. The strategic ally's geopolitical center is irrelevant.

(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.)



Armenia's Real War Is in the Cradle

By Mark Tashjian

Two of my great-grandmother's daughters perished in the Armenian Genocide. After years of searching, she found and rescued the third, fled to America, and had two more children. She understood that children are survival.

Today, Armenia's fertility rate is 1.65 children per woman — far below the 2.1 needed for replacement. Births are 11.5 per 1,000 people; deaths 9.5. An aging population will push deaths to 14 per 1,000 within a decade. By 2030, Armenian deaths will exceed births every year.

Our official population is 3 million (realistically closer to 2.5 million after emigration for work to Russia and elsewhere). That is 1/4 of Azerbaijan (10.2 million), 1/35 of Turkey (88 million), and 1/36 of

Iran (91 million). By 2050 — one generation away — excess deaths over births will shrink us by another 600,000, with the population dropping below 2 million people.

Immigration from Russia, Syria and Lebanon has stalled; much of the recent inflow is temporary Indian labor. Long term re-emigration of diasporans averages just 2000 per year. Villages empty as young people chase jobs in Yerevan or abroad. Schools and universities shrink. Labor shortages already cost 1–2% of GDP growth yearly. Remittances (\$2 billion, 12% of GDP) cannot replace a missing generation.

Geopolitically, a shrinking, aging population facing oil-rich, growing neighbors is an existential risk we can no longer ignore.

Yet one developed nation defies the global trend: Israel. In 2024 its total fertility rate was 2.9 — the highest in the West. Even

secular Jews average 2.2–2.5 children. Jewish births rose 73% since 1995. After the 2023–2024 Gaza war, conceptions spiked 10% — a "resilience baby boom." Israel's population (9.8 million in 2025) grows 1.8% annually without heavy immigration.

Why? Survival instinct forged in the Holocaust and repeated wars. "Demography is destiny" is not a slogan; it is policy and culture. Religion reinforces it — the biblical command to "be fruitful and multiply" remains a lived imperative, especially among the religious (Haredi average 6.4), but even secular families exceed replacement.

Cash incentives, free IVF, and child allowances — the usual Western toolkit — have marginal effects everywhere, including Israel. What works is a shared

see CRADLE, page 20



COMMENTARY

Strategic Europe

Armenia’s Election Is a Foreign Affair

By Thomas de Waal

After Moldova, it’s Armenia’s turn. Another critical election is approaching in a post-Soviet country, which will be a plebiscite on its future geopolitical trajectory. Once again, outside forces will have a crucial role in shaping the result.

Even though Armenia’s parliamentary election is due only in June next year, the campaign has already begun and promises to be ferocious.

The battle lines are drawn around the national project that Prime Minster Nikol Pashinyan will make the main drive of his campaign, under the slogan “Real Armenia.” That is to reopen the country’s borders, lower dependence on Russia, and diversify its foreign and economic profile by normalizing relations with traditional adversaries Azerbaijan and Turkey. In August 2025, Pashinyan scored the first big success of this agenda by agreeing a framework deal with Azerbaijan in a White House meeting brokered by U.S. President Donald Trump.

The Real Armenia project — which the prime minister contrasts with the dreams of his opponents for a “Historic Armenia” holding territorial claims against its neighbors — is born out of both real courage and political necessity. Yerevan was brought down to earth by two crushing military defeats in 2020 and 2023, which saw the full Azerbaijani takeover of the Armenian-populated region of Nagorno-Karabakh and the flight of its inhabitants.

Since coming to power in a popular revolution in 2018, Pashinyan’s approval rating has dropped sharply, but his domestic opposition is also very weak. That is why two forces beyond the country’s borders, which have had significant influence there for two decades, are now leading the charge against him: the nationalist wing of the Armenian diaspora, especially in the United States, and Russia.

These two forces took on a single face last week as American right-wing commentator Tucker Carlson trailed a new potential opposition candidate.

The pundit, known for his pro-Kremlin views and a famously soft interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin, hosted Nareg Karapetyan, nephew of the Armenian-Russian oligarch Samvel Karapetyan, on his podcast. The latter is part of the wider Russian elite, and was estimated by Forbes in 2018 to be worth 5.3 billion dollars (4.6 billion euros). Now, he is in jail for an alleged plot to oust the prime minister, assisted by members of the Armenian Apostolic church, also known for their pro-Russian tendencies.

In the interview, the younger Karapetyan welcomed Carlson’s invitation to lambast Pashinyan, accusing him of waging “a war against Christianity” and seeking to instill an “LGBTQ agenda” on Armenia. His uncle was imprisoned, he said, not because of his ties to Moscow, but for defending the church. Karapetyan added that the government was telling its citizens to “forget history” by selling the country out to Turkey and betraying the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The discussion amplified not only Carlson’s far-right Christian agenda but also the message Moscow uses across Eastern Europe: that the decadent West seeks to sow chaos and destroy traditional religious values.

Russia’s standing in Armenia, however, has plummeted over the last five years, and the Real Armenia project still resonates better with the public than the alternative. An opinion poll published by the International Republic Institute in June, before the positive optics of the Trump meeting, showed that 47 percent of Armenians supported signing a peace treaty with Baku, with 40 percent against.

That is good news for anyone who wants to see Armenia break free of isolation and the cycle of conflict with Azerbaijan.

But Pashinyan is still vulnerable. The erratic way the prime minister communicates his ideas — long monologues without much dialogue — will cost him support. Moreover, his ability to deliver results is not in his hands alone. To win votes, he must show strong signs of progress in tackling the three key challenges in Armenian foreign relations, namely from Azerbaijan, Turkey, and the United States.

The text of the peace agreement agreed in the White House was initialed, but not signed. To complete the deal, Baku has one more difficult demand: it says Yerevan must revise its constitution, which has an indirect reference to the union of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

That will require a referendum on a new constitution, held separately from the parliamentary election. This is not an easy task to complete, as illustrated by the Moldovan ruling party’s razor-thin majority in its own off-cycle referendum, on European integration.

The second issue, Turkey’s willingness to open the border and normalize relations, is key to breaking Armenia free of its current geopolitical bonds. But Ankara still moves cautiously toward this, out of deference to its ally Azerbaijan — even though most analysts, inside and outside the country, argue that it is in Turkey’s strategic interests to act now, while the opportunity is there and Russia is still distracted in Ukraine.

It is mainly up to Washington to deliver the third project: the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), signed in August, to jointly rebuild a railway line across Armenia connecting Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhichevan. If successfully completed, this has the potential to ensure economic interdependence between the two countries, remove the threat of war, and reintegrate both Nakhichevan and Armenia. The European Union, working less in the spotlight, is also a crucial partner in this new regional connectivity agenda.

Both Yerevan and Washington want to see tangible results of the plan before next summer’s Armenian election, and the end of Trump’s presidential term in 2028. But big technical challenges still lie ahead. Yerevan lacks the strong capacity to plan and complete big infrastructure projects in a short time frame. Washington has the leadership and ideas, but the U.S. team is still small. For that reason, TRIPP stands out as one foreign policy issue in which officials in the United States welcome collaboration with the EU and others.

Armenia’s lack of long-term governmental capacity is also a challenge for the EU as it tries to build a new relationship. To turn that around will require substantial funding as well as a change of mindset in the Pashinyan government: a former revolutionary just a few years ago, the prime minister still values loyalty above all and relies on a small group to run the country.

But that issue, along with many other systemic problems, is a conversation for after the election. Before that, Armenia’s future is up for grabs.

(This commentary originally appeared on the website of Carnegie Endowment.org on November 13.)

Armenians Risk Losing Another Key Voice on Genocide

By Alan Whitehorn

The international community is on the verge of losing another cornerstone of genocide studies, meanwhile mass atrocities are unfolding across the globe. Less than a year after the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS) at Concordia University abruptly closed, the International Institute of Genocide and Human Rights Studies (a division of the Zoryan Institute), one of the few remaining Canadian institutions devoted to genocide research and education, now faces an existential crisis.

The closure of MIGS came as a shock. During four decades, the institute influenced humanitarian policy and trained advocates on genocide prevention. Its sudden disappearance, driven by budget pressures and academic fragmentation, left a vacuum in Canada’s educational and policy landscape. If such a well-established institution can vanish overnight, the risk to smaller, independent organizations is even greater.

As its website notes “In 1982, the Zoryan Institute for Contemporary Armenian Research and Documentation was established in Cambridge, Mass. The co-founding members were Garbis Kortian, Gerard J. Libaridian, and K. M. Greg Sarkissian. They were joined by Tatul Sonentz-Papazian and Levon Sarkissian to incorporate the Institute as a registered American non-for-profit.”

Now largely based in Toronto, the Zoryan Institute faces an existential crisis. The Zoryan Institute and its Genocide and Human Rights Studies program have been a global hub for genocide scholarship. Working with the University of Toronto, Zoryan created a respected graduate program that trained generations of scholars from 73 countries. Over the years, a number of my Royal Military College of Canada graduates benefitted enormously from attending the international course.

The Zoryan has published peer-reviewed journals, maintained a key historical archive on the Armenian Genocide, and consistently fostered thoughtful public dialogue on mass atrocity crimes.

Few other institutions are positioned to do this work. The Zoryan’s research has illuminated warning signs of genocide. It has built bridges between ethnic communities, equipped future leaders with the tools to confront genocide denial and distortion, and strengthened important voices in global human rights conversations.

But like many educational and human rights organizations, the Zoryan Institute faces serious financial strain. Donors are overwhelmed by multiple humanitarian crises. Governments are preoccupied, and foundations have shifting priorities. Long-term educational initiatives, though crucial, often fall to the bottom of the list when compared to immediate humanitarian relief requests

Meanwhile, the world continues to experience destructive wars in Ukraine, Sudan, Gaza, Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) and elsewhere. Authoritarian populism is eroding the democratic guardrails. Freedom of expression is increasingly under pressure, and in many places, historical research is being politicized or outright suppressed. Democracies themselves too often appear under threat.

The Zoryan Institute has often acted as an analytical seismograph, detecting and interpreting historical tremors. Without such institutions, our collective awareness of threats of violence, dehumanization and authoritarianism lessens.

The current president and cofounder of the Zoryan Institute K.M. Greg Sarkissian, the chief strategist of the Institute since 1990, noted that “For over four decades, the institute has been there to defend the historical

record, educate new generations and give a scholarly foundation for the voices of victims of genocide. It has done so with modest resources, remarkable efficiency and integrity.”

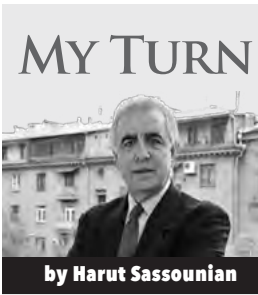
Sadly, when institutions like the Zoryan disappear, their archives are scattered, their journals cease publication and their educational networks dissolve. The world loses a voice of independent scholarly capacity. Inaccurate historical narratives go unchallenged. Young researchers turn elsewhere, and the international community’s ability to contribute meaningfully to global genocide prevention is weakened. The loss of MIGS should have been an international wake-up call. It showed how even respected institutions can disappear quickly, if support falters. Armenian Diaspora members, as concerned global citizens, cannot afford to let this happen again.

In an era when authoritarian regimes are distorting history and democratic institutions face pressure, preserving independent scholarship is critical. It is a strategic foresight. It is an investment in fostering historical accuracy, democratic resilience, and an internationally credible human rights voice. We have already lost one respected genocide research center. It should not lose another.

(Alan Whitehorn is an emeritus professor at the Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston, a former JS Woodsworth Chair in Humanities at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia. As an academic, he writes on the topics of genocide and human rights. As an award-winning poet, he explores the issue of genocide and its impact on Armenian-Canadian identity. A different version of this article directed primarily at Canadians appeared earlier in Keghart.org)



COMMENTARY



MY TURN

Armenia Pays U.S. Public Relations Firm to Attack The Armenian Apostolic Church

Last week, I came across a disturbing 8-page document described as a “White Paper” titled “Clarifying Church-State Relations in Armenia: A Rebuttal to the Narrative of Religious Persecution under Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.” It is dated September 5, 2025.

This is a blatant attempt by the Pashinyan regime to whitewash its shameful attacks on the Armenian Apostolic Church, making unfounded allegations about Church leaders and the political opposition.

Strangely, this document, prepared at the request of the Prime Minister, is posted only on the website of “Save the Persecuted Christians,” an organization based in Washington, D.C. It is not even posted on the Prime Minister’s website. Most probably, the public relations firm Mercury Public Affairs, hired in April by the Armenian government, prepared the White Paper.

This propaganda document makes a number of baseless statements against the Armenian Apostolic Church and the political opposition. For example, it claims that those opposed to Pashinyan are accusing him of making “a deliberate effort to ‘Islamize’ Armenia by bringing in 300,000 Muslim Azeris.” No source is provided for this claim. Even if someone had made such an allegation, the White Paper generalizes it to the entire opposition. Nevertheless, it is a fact that Pashinyan has made endless concessions to President Aliyev, including handing over Artsakh to Azerbaijan, ceding parts of the territory of the Republic of Armenia, changing the constitution, agreeing to disband the Minsk Group of mediators, and reducing the defense budget.

The White Paper further asserts that “the use of incendiary language and misinformation undermines democratic discourse and distracts from Armenia’s urgent security and governance challenges.” This is precisely what Pashinyan and his partner, Anna Hakobyan, have been doing for months through embarrassing posts on their Facebook pages. Furthermore, the White Paper accuses businessman Samvel Karapetyan of having “direct ties with the Kremlin,” thus appearing to excuse his arrest and justify the confiscation of his multi-million-dollar business interests in Armenia. Karapetyan had simply expressed his support for the Catholicos. Armenia’s Prime Minister does not respect freedom of expression, which is the bedrock of any democratic society.

In another objectionable statement, the White Paper criticizes the Catholicos for publicly calling for Pashinyan’s resignation, adding: “Yet, no law-enforcement measures have been taken in response to these statements.” Is ex-

pressing one’s opinion a crime?

More importantly, the White Paper misrepresents Armenia’s constitution by stating that “Pashinyan’s government has promoted a policy agenda that emphasizes civilian supremacy over clerical institutions, in line with constitutional principles of secular governance.” On the contrary, the constitution provides for separation of Church and State, which bars the government from meddling in internal Church affairs. Those who say that the Church is meddling in politics are mistaken. Clergymen have the same rights as every other citizen -- to vote and run for office. Furthermore, any Armenian, including clergymen, who sees that political leaders are leading the country to destruction, has a patriotic duty to speak up to save the country.

Pashinyan ordered the arrests of three high-ranking clergymen under the pretext that they were engaged in illegal acts. He sent police onto the grounds of Holy Etchmiadzin, posted pornographic words referring to his sexual organ on his Facebook page, confessed that he was married neither by the Church nor by secular authorities, urged his followers to “converge” on Etchmiadzin and “liberate” the Catholicosate, and attended Mass celebrated by defrocked “priests” who are desecrating the Church. That alone is sufficient reason to excommunicate Pashinyan from the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Meanwhile, Pashinyan’s partner, Anna Hakobyan, on her Facebook page described high-ranking Armenian clergymen as “the country’s chief pedophiles” and “black-vested maniac perverts.” This is a wholly inappropriate way of addressing the clergy, particularly without presenting any evidence for such claims. She would have been sued for libel if Armenia’s judges were not under Pashinyan’s thumb.

The White Paper desperately tries to argue that Pashinyan is against the Catholicos but not against the Armenian Church by claiming that the public trust in the Church is “high, around 60 percent, whereas confidence in its top leadership drops sharply.” While the approximate 60 percent figure is accurate, the White Paper presents no evidence that public confidence in Church leadership is low. The White Paper does not mention that Pashinyan’s approval rating plummeted from a high of 82 percent when he came to power in 2018 to a little over 10 percent now.

The most troubling aspect of the White Paper is that it was probably prepared by Mercury Public Affairs, a Washington PR firm hired by Pashinyan’s government for \$600,000 a year to promote Armenia’s interests in the U.S. Congress and the Administration and to counter the lobbying and PR firms retained by Azerbaijan and Turkey. I infer Mercury’s involvement because the signed contract mentions that it was hired to “provide strategic communications and media relations services to Client [Republic of Armenia].”

However, rather than targeting Azerbaijan and Turkey or defending Armenia’s interests in Washington, Pashinyan has decided to use the expensive services of the PR firm to attack the Armenian Apostolic Church and its leadership.

Cheating or Surviving? How AI’s Rise Turned Learning Into a Moral Meltdown

By Sevanna Emma Shaverdian

Last semester, I watched a classmate stare at her blank Google Doc before she finally whispered, “Can’t I just ask ChatGPT to write an outline for my final paper?” I looked at her with a blank expression and a smile, recognizing she didn’t want to cheat; she was simply defeated. I got exactly how she felt, attempting to navigate the academic pressure of being perfect in a world that suddenly expected us to keep up with technology we barely comprehend.

Students on college campuses all around the country are experiencing the same thing. We were thrown into a world that has been extensively transformed by artificial intelligence, and we were told to “figure it out”. With zero instructions, we received hundreds of emails, reminders, and professors’ warnings not to use AI. However, curiosity got the best of us. Our institutions never really taught us how to use AI responsibly; they just created their own “monitored” versions.

When generative AI first emerged and gained popularity in 2023, it felt almost unreal. There was a “better” Google that would instantly give you answers, write essays, generate notes and summarize readings. But it compromised the fine print of every course syllabus: “cite your sources, produce your own work, don’t cheat, and follow academic honesty guidelines.”

With the launch of AI, we were not confused; we realized this was the moment when the ground beneath education would drastically shift.

Educators built the foundation of instruction on predictability. We were conditioned to learn, memorize and prove our understanding. Then, in less than 6 months,

that foundation cracked. Every day, students like me were entering college thinking we would be guided through hardships, but instead, we experienced mental turbulence. Generative AI platforms disrupted our understanding of learning, and the rules we once knew didn’t seem to matter.

We were not ready for that challenge.

Rather than preparing us on how to adapt to the “Age of AI,” most universities responded to generative AI with fear. “Zero Tolerance” policies swept through campus like headline news. Never did we receive a guideline on how to ethically engage with AI, how to check its biases, or how to critically evaluate it. It seemed we were being punished for using the resources that technology provided us.

Entering higher education institutions, we knew there would be challenges, but we didn’t know we would be

WITH THE LAUNCH OF AI, WE WERE NOT CONFUSED; WE REALIZED THIS WAS THE MOMENT WHEN THE GROUND BENEATH EDUCATION WOULD DRASTICALLY SHIFT.

denied the support we needed to face these challenges.

That’s the essence of this issue.

These institutions constantly remind us that we learn most when we are challenged and supported. Right now, our schools have exacerbated the challenge, confronting students with technological advances and ethical decisions, without providing the guidance and empathy needed to overcome this obstacle.

This consistent fear that the institutions have instilled does not lead to growth. In fact, it leads to secrecy. So students begin to conceal, rationalize and lie.

“Everyone else is using it” or “I only need an outline for this assignment.” In reality, we’re fascinated by AI, but we don’t want to rely on it. I know my work is something to be proud of, but in this “competitive” world, performance and perfection are valued more than creativity

and curiosity. AI is not just a fun tool anymore; it’s an instrument for survival.

The complaint us Gen Zers often hear is “Students are lazier nowadays, or “AI thinks for you.” But our actions don’t exist on their own; they are shaped by the stresses and structures around us. The undergraduate experience is filled with stressors like competitive job markets, rising tuition, lack of affordable housing and overworked professors. With all these pressures in our lives, it’s easy to see why students turn to a tool that will help them cope.

So instead of asking us why we are cheating, let’s start asking, “Fundamentally, what is wrong with our system that makes students feel they have to?” Right now, using AI is seen as a failure to the world, somebody with zero creativity. Instead, it should be seen as a symptom of a disease known as “the systems transition period.”

Let’s design better environments to see students thrive. Let’s create a curriculum that offers insight into prompt design, digital ethics and AI engagement. Let’s allow professors to be transparent about their use of AI, too. Let’s stop treating the symptoms and start healing the system internally by designing better learning environments.

So, when people ask, “Why are our students cheating with AI?” maybe the better question is, “Why aren’t our institutions evolved to better assist real-time learning needs?”

College is about adaptation. Adapting to new environments requires both challenge and support. Until the educational institutions recognize this, students will continue to find ways to survive even when the system doesn’t know how to change.

So, is AI really the problem, or is it the absence of guidance?

(Sevanna Shaverdian is an Ed.M candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, focusing on Human Development and Education Technology. Previously, she worked across education, law, and public service to advance equitable access to knowledge. Her research on AI and education examines that the future of education isn’t just digital, it’s deeply human. When she’s not reading or writing about AI in education, she’s probably chasing the perfect iced chai, getting some sun, or playing her cello.)

OC Media among 22 Outlets Targeted by Georgian Pro-Government TV ‘Exposé’

By Mikheil Gvadzabia

TBILISI (OC-Media.org) — The Georgian pro-government TV channel, Imedi, has accused leading online media covering the country, including OC Media, of operating as a “network” for “foreign security services,” suggesting the Georgian State Security Service (SSG) was investigating their activities.

The report, which aired on the channel’s flagship analytical program Imedis Kvira (“Imedi’s week”) on Sunday, November 23, was rife with accusations against online media, including that they were engaged in “the systematic spread of disinformation” and working according to “a unified plan written by external powers,” as well as attempting to obtain funding by bypassing the law.

The program specifically targeted 22 media platforms — including OC Media — behind the crowdfunding campaign “The Lights Must Stay On” in August, which was launched following the ruling party’s adoption of laws restricting media funding from abroad.

“An anti-Georgian network operating under the guise of media and serving foreign

security services against Georgia,” the program’s host, Irakli Chikhladze, described the outlets in his introduction to the report. Like the report itself, his remarks were filled with a confrontational and alarmist tone toward online platforms critical of the government.

The report also hinted at possible interest from the SSG, with Chikhladze stating that “the Georgian security services have uncovered numerous anti-state plots, and what we are about to tell you now is only the tip of the iceberg of the vast amount of material we have obtained.”

The report also claimed that “information about every covert or overt network is in the hands of the Georgian security services,” while showing an overlaid shot of the SSG building. The program cited an unnamed source for many claims.

Asked if there were active investigations into online media agencies — like those targeting other government critics, including members of civil society — the SSG claimed they had already made a statement regarding “funding schemes” in September. Their investigation was underway on suspi-

cion of money laundering, they added.

While no such statement was available on the SSG’s website, a report published on September 14 by Imedis Kvira claiming that foreign intelligence services were behind the ongoing anti-government protests included a comment from the SSG.

“Who may ultimately be identified as having potentially committed a crime is, naturally, impossible to say in advance — this depends on the evidence obtained,” the SSG told OC Media.

Asked how Imedi might know who or what the SSG was investigating and whether there had been any communication between the agency and the channel prior to the report’s airing, the SSG said the question was “interesting.”

“It seems like you have already “determined,” or at least considered fully credible, the reports that Imedi indeed has information about what the Georgian security services are studying. Against this background, your request that we tell you about the journalists” source — regardless of whether we know it or not — becomes even more “in-

teresting,” they said.

“As for communication between us and TV Imedi regarding the mentioned report, no such communication has taken place, and even if it had, we are not in a position to confirm to the authors of the report anything beyond what we are telling you.”

Following the broadcast, leading figures from the ruling Georgian Dream party voiced criticism of independent online media.

“Everyone can see how certain organizations funded from a specific foreign source are acting in a coordinated manner to hinder the development of our country,” Kobakhidze said on November 24.

Mariam Nikuradze, co-founder of OC Media, dismissed the program as “another attempt at propaganda to incite hate towards independent media in Georgia.”

“It’s an attempt to portray us as enemies,” she added.

One focus of the report was coverage seen as critical of the Eagle Hills investment project in Georgia. The Emirati project has repeatedly been a subject of controversy due to its classified nature.

Coverage of the project was one of the elements through which Imedi targeted OC Media.

“It [...] gives the impression that they are unhappy with media reporting critically about the Eagle Hills investments in Georgia, a project which raises a lot of questions including among Georgian Dream supporters,” Nikuradze said.



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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Please make checks payable to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* and mail this voucher in the enclosed envelope. The deadline for receiving the messages is Dec. 19, 2025. For gift subscriptions fill out the credit card information above, OR send a check, for: __ \$100 US __ \$150 Canada __\$230 International and write: __ Yes, I/We would like to gift a subscription to: NAME -----

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Armenia’s Real War Is in the Cradle

CRADLE, from page 17

conviction that having children is the ultimate act of national and civilizational continuity.

Armenians once shared that conviction. Our grandparents did not survive genocide so their great-grandchildren could travel the world childless and watch the nation fade.

The diaspora is part of the problem: our birth rates abroad mirror the low rates of host countries. It must become part of the solution. Every Armenian family — whether in Yerevan, Glendale, or Paris — carries the same obligation.

We marry late (average first marriage age for women now 28), chase perfect jobs, perfect partners, perfect experiences. Economic hardship is real, but it is not unique — young couples struggle everywhere — yet billions still manage to have children.

The mindset must change. Political leaders, intellectuals, and above all the Church must lead.

Consumer culture sells the lie that happiness comes after one more trip, one more promotion, one more swipe right. Our ancestors knew better: real joy is family, continuity, and faith.

A church is still the best place to meet serious, family-oriented people, whether it is Apostolic or Evangelical. Get involved, build community, marry younger, have children earlier. Four is a good Armenian number.

Our enemies grow. Our villages empty. Our schools close. Time is not on our side.

Turn envy of Israel’s success into emulation. Remember the Genocide survivors who rebuilt their lives through new children.

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