

Azerbaijan’s ‘Western Azerbaijan’ Campaign Exposed in Leaked Documents

By Rasmus Canbäck

Leaked documents reviewed by OC Media reveal how Azerbaijan’s Presidential Administration has coordinated and funded the international rollout of the “Western Azerbaijan” narrative — a campaign that, while framed as humanitarian, lays the groundwork for potential irredentist claims on Armenian territory. In recent years, Azerbaijan has launched a campaign centered around the concept of “Western Azerbaijan” — a

OVER TIME, THE “WESTERN AZERBAIJAN” NARRATIVE HAS EVOLVED INTO A STATE-DIRECTED COMMUNICATION STRATEGY.

term that refers not to its own territory, but to some, or all of the Republic of Armenia. The campaign is framed as a humanitarian effort to support the ‘safe and dignified return’ of Azerbaijanis displaced from Armenia during the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, at the outset of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis were displaced as ethnic tensions and violence erupted in both countries. Over time, the “Western Azerbaijan” narrative has evolved into a state-directed communication strategy. The initiative is now occasionally deployed as a rhetorical instrument in Baku’s ongoing conflict with Yerevan.

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Armenak Kurusyan as Ivan Vassilevich Lomov, left, with Talar Zokian as Natalia Stepanovna (photo Aram Arkun)

TCA Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group Presents ‘The Marriage Proposal’ in Watertown

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — The Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group of New Jersey presented a Western Armenian dinner theater version of Anton Chekhov’s “The Marriage Proposal” in Watertown, on Sunday, October 26. The event was cosponsored by St. James Armenian Church, the Society of Istanbul Armenians of Boston and the Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter and took place at St. James Church’s Keljik Hall, which was filled to capacity. TCA Boston Chapter Recording Secretary Maral Der Torossian welcomed guests in Armenian and English and provided some background information about the play and the Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group. The actual play was preceded by a comic “historical introduction” to the history of marriage proposals by “Professor” Harout Chatmajian, accompanied by slides, while guests enjoyed a sumptuous dinner. The dialogue was in Armenian, with English subtitles projected onto a screen.

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Brother, Nephew of Catholicos Arrested As Church-State Standoff Deepens in Armenia

By Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenian law-enforcement authorities have arrested the brother and nephew of Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II on suspicion of committing a crime amid mounting tensions between the government and the Armenian Apostolic Church. Attorney Ara Zohrabyan said that a decision had been made to detain the Catholicos’ brother, Gevorg Nersisyan, and his son, Hambardzum over the weekend. The Investigative Committee’s spokesperson, Kima Avdalyan, confirmed to RFE/RL’s Armenian Service on November 3 that a public criminal prosecution was launched against the two individuals under Article 211 of the Criminal Code, which deals with coercing someone to conduct or refrain from conducting campaign activities or otherwise obstructing such activities. Zohrabyan also said that in the enlarged community of Vagharshapat where a campaign ahead of a local election is underway, a candidate from a pro-government political party claimed on Facebook that on November 1, the Catholicos’s brother, Gevorg Nersisyan, together with his sons, allegedly obstructed his election campaign. Zohrabyan rejected the claim.



Attorney Ara Zohrabyan

The arrests, which the country’s opposition and church advocates are certain to condemn as politically motivated, come as Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan continues to publicly challenge the leadership of the Armenian Apostolic Church. On Sunday, Pashinyan attended a liturgy celebrated by defrocked cleric Stepan Asatryan (formerly Father Aram) at the Hovhannavank Monastery in Ohanavan, 30 kilometers northwest of Yerevan, marking the second consecutive week that he has joined a service led by the banned priest. The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the spiritual center of the Armenian Apostolic Church, had previously defrocked Asatryan and prohibited him from performing any religious rites. Last week, the Church described Asatryan’s services as a “soul-destroying initiative,” accusing Pashinyan of attempting to “split the Church.” Earlier on Sunday, Pashinyan released a video address on social media reiterating his call for the removal of Catholicos Karekin II, declaring that “the spiritual and moral renewal of the Armenian

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Panel Sheds Light on Domestic Violence

By Alin K. Gregorian

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — The stories are horrific — and all too common: stalking, abuse and murder, most often of a woman by her spouse. On Monday, October 27, an impressive panel convened at the Brahma Kumaris Meditation Center, to tackle the issue, co-sponsored by the Armenian Relief Society and the Brahma Kumaris Mediation Center. Speaking were attorney Wendy Murphy, Middlesex County Sheriff Peter Koutoujian, director of operations at REACH Beyond Domestic Violence Lauren Nackel and Brahma Kumaris Center co-coordinator Rita Cleary. The panelists tried to define the cycles of abuse, what the women experience, why they stay and how observers can help, touching upon the difficulties in tight-knit communities. The impetus for the program was the murder of a young mother in Watertown in August by her partner.

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Sheriff Peter Koutoujian

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Father Suspected of Killing 3-Year-Old

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenian Interior Minister Arpine Sargsyan said on Monday, November 3, that preliminary findings suggest a father is suspected of killing his 3-year-old son by strangulation in the village of Tsapatagh, Gegharkunik Province.

The child, Tigran Ovanesov, had been missing since October 27. His body was found in a field approximately 60 meters from a sign marking the nearby village of Jil on November 2.

“According to initial data, this was a murder. The father killed the child by strangling him,” Sargsyan told reporters in the parliament, adding that this version was among those considered by investigators.

The minister noted that the victim’s brother, who has health issues, had been under observation by specialists to ensure his well-being and to obtain reliable information from him if possible.

“Early findings indicate the two brothers left their home and later encountered their father, who then killed the younger child by strangulation,” Sargsyan explained.

She revealed that the father admitted committing the murder. Sargsyan declined to provide further details, citing the ongoing investigation.

Politician Slams ‘Unacceptable Silence’ Over Fate of Former Artsakh Leaders Baku

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenian National Congress coordinator Levon Zurabyan has condemned the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair countries — the United States, France and Russia — for their “unacceptable silence and inaction” over the fate of former Artsakh leaders held in Azerbaijan.

In a Facebook post on November 4, Zurabyan reaffirmed support for former Artsakh Presidents Arkadi Ghukasyan, Bako Sahakyan and Arayik Harutyunyan, as well as other detained officials, calling them political prisoners persecuted for exercising the right to self-determination.

The politician stressed that the 2023 capture of the Nagorno-Karabakh leaders violated international norms and followed Azerbaijan’s ethnic cleansing and genocide against the Artsakh Armenians. He described the ongoing trials in Baku as a “farce devoid of legitimacy”, accusing Azerbaijani courts of fabricating evidence under torture.

Zurabyan criticized Armenia’s government for its “indifference” to the prisoners’ fate and urged it to make their release a precondition in any peace talks with Baku. He called on the international community, including the UN, OSCE and European institutions, to demand the prisoners’ freedom and denounce Azerbaijan’s violations of fair trial rights under the European Convention on Human Rights.



The Aznavour Tour of the Armenain State Jazz Orchestra

Changing Sound of Armenian Jazz

By Sona Mirzoyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — For more than a decade, Davit Melkonyan has been part of the Armenian State Jazz Orchestra, a musical institution deeply embedded in Armenia’s cultural fabric. Today, as its Artistic Director, Melkonyan stands at the crossroads of tradition and transformation, working to expand the orchestra’s reach while preserving its artistic heritage. Alongside him, music producer John Grigoryan, known for his work with the Armenian Navy Band and other landmark jazz projects, offers a broader view of the industry’s evolution — from the challenges of monetization to the impact of technology on creativity.



The Aznavour Tour of the Armenain State Jazz Orchestra

Founded in 1938 by composer Artemi Ayvazyan, the Armenian State Jazz Orchestra is among the oldest jazz ensembles in the former Soviet Union. In the Soviet era, it was one of the few orchestras permitted to perform jazz — a genre then considered Western and often restricted. The ensemble not only introduced generations of Armenians to jazz but also helped shape a unique Armenian jazz language that blended swing, folk melodies, and classical training. Today, it continues that legacy as one of the country’s leading state-supported musical institutions.

A jazz saxophonist and composer, Melkonyan strives to achieve a synthesis between academic jazz and the current exper-

imental sounds.

“The years in the orchestra have taught me a lot,” Melkonyan said. “Especially here in Armenia, where the orchestra has played a key educational role for generations. Those years helped me understand the patterns, the needs, and the opportunities for renewal.”

Building on Experience

Having joined the orchestra in 2012, Melkonyan grew within its soundscape, learning its rhythm and traditions from the inside. His journey mirrors the evolution of the orchestra itself — from Soviet roots to post-independence reinvention. Over the years, he witnessed its artistic growth and its quiet influence as both a performance ensemble and an educational institution for

hosts smaller ensemble performances in its hall. A series of educational events for young musicians — a first in the orchestra’s history — has become part of its ongoing activities.

“The repertoire has grown significantly — new compositions, reimagined classics, and collaborations with musicians outside the orchestra. As a result, our archive has expanded, and our audience has become younger,” Melkonyan shared.

One of Melkonyan’s most distinct innovations has been bringing Armenia’s underground jazz scene into collaboration with the orchestra’s academic platform. This move has invigorated both the ensemble and its listeners.

By “academic platform,” Melkonyan refers to the orchestra’s formal, conservatory-based foundation — its link to Armenia’s classical institutions — in contrast with the informal, improvisational energy of the city’s underground jazz community.

The idea was born from a desire to broaden the orchestra’s demographic. “Our audience used to be mostly 40 or 50 years old,” Melkonyan recalled. “I wanted to see younger faces in the hall. That’s how the idea of merging the academic and underground worlds was born.”

The collaboration began with the New Quintet — one of Yerevan’s most prominent experimental jazz collectives — and has since evolved into a recurring creative exchange. For Melkonyan, these projects create what he calls “positive stress” — an energy that drives artistic growth.

“Such partnerships force us to think bigger and organize better,” he said. “They make the orchestra’s daily life more dynamic and open up new ways to connect with audiences.”

Touring the World with Aznavour’s Legacy

In the summer of 2024, the Armenian State Jazz Orchestra embarked on an international tour with a program dedicated to Charles Aznavour’s centennial. The tour reaffirmed the orchestra’s dual identity: a bearer of national heritage and an ambassador of Armenian artistry abroad.

Developed under the initiative of Artyom Naghdyan and the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, the project took the orchestra to Latin America, Ethiopia, several European countries and Kazakhstan.

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The tour featured 12 newly-arranged Aznavour songs, adapted for full jazz orchestra by Arman Peshtmaljian and Vahagn Hakobyan.

“It was a unique joy,” Melkonyan said. “Not only because it was our project with the State Philharmonia of Armenia, but because during Aznavour’s lifetime, such orchestral jazz arrangements of his music had never been made.”

He noted that audiences abroad differed



Davit Melkonyan

from those at home. “During our Q&A sessions at on-site master classes, people were much more open and interactive,” Melkonyan observed. “At home, audiences can be a bit reserved, but that’s changing.”

The tour also featured acclaimed Armenian vocalists Inga Arshakyan and Gor Sujyan, both of whom brought distinctive artistry to the performances.

Jazz and the Armenian Music Ecosystem

While Melkonyan and his peers are expanding creative boundaries, the broader Armenian music industry faces systemic challenges. Music producer John Grigoryan, who has worked on numerous acclaimed projects including Armenian Navy Band, believes that the core issue lies not in talent, but in infrastructure.

“Armenia has musicians who can create and perform at a world-class level,” Grigoryan noted. “The problem is not talent, it is the pipes to the world. Monetization fails at the door with too few venues, in the cloud with tiny payouts, and at the lawyer’s desk with uncollected rights.”

He points to a combination of factors — a small domestic market, weak systems for intellectual property protection, and post-Soviet gaps in professional capacity — as the main barriers to creating sus-

tainable careers. “For years it ran on a bit from here and a bit from there,” Grigoryan added. “Music rarely became a sustainable business.”

According to Grigoryan, the global music industry now “lives inside the attention economy,” where success depends on how long listeners stay engaged.

“Retention time and skip rate sit at the center of the system,” he said. “So arrangement choices shift — choruses arrive sooner, intros compress, and production optimizes for the first few seconds and the phone speaker.”

Algorithmic and AI-driven playlists now shape listening habits, clustering audiences around familiar sounds and rewarding predictability. “Personalization brings both more discovery and more sameness,” Grigoryan observed. “Classical and jazz still reward patience, but they

risk becoming artifacts rather than living markets.”

For Armenian jazz, that risk is real. Long-form, improvisational works thrive in live settings, but often struggle for attention on digital platforms optimized for immediacy.

New Models and the Role of State Support

Grigoryan also highlights the shifting value of live performance in a digitized era. “Total digitization is changing the value of live performance, making the show a scarce, unrepeatable moment,” he said. “The challenge is upstream — to fill the room, you must first win the race inside the attention economy.”

He sees potential in AI tools, which lower production costs and shorten the creative cycle, enabling artists to reach broader markets. Yet, they also disrupt traditional service ecosystems — from recording studios to session work.

“In Armenia’s small market,” he added, “state support and sponsorship serve as cultural ballast. They preserve identity in the digital age while creating room to export work. Understanding the shifts in attention and distribution — and working fluently with AI tools — is now part of the craft.”

For Melkonyan, these shifts only underscore the importance of jazz as a living form of expression. “What’s happening in

Ruben Vardanyan Announces End of His Active Participation in Aurora Humanitarian Initiative

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, its co-founder, philanthropist and humanitarian Ruben Vardanyan — who is currently being held illegally in Azerbaijani capital city of Baku — has shared a message with the Leadership and Friends of Aurora through his wife, Veronika Zonabend.

His message is presented below.

Dear friends, supporters, and colleagues,

First and foremost — thank you. Your faith, generosity and trust have made possible what once seemed impossible.

On the eve of Aurora’s 10th anniversary, I would like to express my personal gratitude to all the friends and benefactors who believed in the vision — born in Armenia — of creating a global humanitarian initiative and who during all that period supported it through their generosity. It was their dedication that ignited the spark that grew into the Aurora movement.

When our family first envisioned the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity in 2014, we saw it as an eight-year journey — until 2023 — with the hope that Aurora would become an international movement with the mission of gratitude in action and would be carried forward by others. Due to the pandemic, this phase was extended through 2024, culminating in the unveiling of the Memorial to Aurora Mardigian and the Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide in Yerevan — as a symbol of gratitude and hope, and a milestone marking the completion of my active participation in Aurora.

I am deeply grateful to Noubar and Vartan, who supported the initiative as co-founders from the very beginning. I am especially thankful to Noubar and his family for taking the lead of Aurora after 2023 and guiding it into its next stage. I hope that, even as it is now based in the States, it will continue to preserve its Armenian roots. My sincere thanks go to all Board Members and Selection Committee Members for your commitment, hard work, and dedication to Aurora’s mission — and for helping to make it truly unique.

Gratitude — the founding notion of Aurora — is a fundamental human value. Interpreting the thoughts of St. Francis, I would like to emphasize that “the truest joy grows from gratitude.” Indeed, gratitude in action remains at the core of a healthy and compassionate community.

Being here in Baku, I am more inspired than ever by the Aurora Laureates and the broader Aurora community, whose tireless efforts to serve others — without seeking recognition or the limelight — embody the very spirit of Aurora. You are true heroes, and just as Aurora’s founders always hoped, many would follow your example.

We wish Aurora continued success as it celebrates its 10th anniversary, with the deep belief that gratitude in action will endure.

With gratitude and hope,

Ruben Vardanyan

our society today is mirrored in our music,” he said. “We’re giving new life to old works because we’re collectively trying to understand who we are and where we’re headed.”

He sees jazz as “freedom within structure” — a space where Armenia’s complex cultural story can be heard anew. Tracing the orchestra’s lineage, he honors pioneers such as Artemi Ayvazyan, Konstantin Orbelyan, Armen Martirosyan and Armen Hyusnunts, each of whom, he says, brought new colors to the orchestra’s sound and purpose.

“The orchestra still carries that ambition — to create an environment around us that reflects our identity. There’s potential, and

that’s our mission.”

Leadership, for Melkonyan, remains both a challenge and a source of inspiration. “At first, keeping the balance between administration and creativity was difficult,” he admitted. “But now it’s easier, because that’s where the beauty lies.”

As he continues to guide the Armenian State Jazz Orchestra, Melkonyan’s mission aligns with Grigoryan’s observations: sustaining artistic innovation in a world defined by algorithms and fleeting attention. Both agree that the survival of Armenian jazz depends not only on talent, but on adaptability, finding harmony between artistry, technology, and audience connection.

Brother, Nephew of Catholicos Arrested as Church-State Standoff Deepens in Armenia

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Apostolic Church begins, first of all, with the spiritual and moral renewal of each of us.” Again referring to Karekin II by his lay name, he said that before “freeing the Holy of Holies from Ktrich Nersisyan and his group,” Armenians must become “spiritually and morally worthy of the Holy of Holies.”

Pashinyan attended the service with members of his ruling Civil Contract party, including the parliament speaker, several ministers, regional governors, and lawmakers.

Vahe Ghalumyan, a ruling bloc lawmaker and former governor of Armenia’s Tavush province, told reporters that in their view, not only the Catholicos but also others in the Church had violated their vows of celibacy and “lost the right to be called ‘Reverend’.” When asked why these accusations were being raised years after the 2018 “velvet revolution,” Ghalumyan said

that “today the truth is known to a wider segment of the public.”

“These people at the Mother See are the ones who are sacrilegious - not us,” he said.

The Armenian Apostolic Church stated that the Hovhannavank Monastery is its property and that Asatryan’s refusal to vacate the site constitutes an “illegal occupation.” Echmiadzin said it has appealed to the police.

While Pashinyan attended the disputed service, the Mother See celebrated the 26th anniversary of Catholicos Karekin II’s enthronement at the Holy Echmiadzin Cathedral. The ceremony was attended by opposition lawmakers and representatives of various opposition political parties.

Artur Khachatryan, a lawmaker representing the opposition Hayastan alliance, reacted to Pashinyan’s earlier remarks that he might next attend a similar liturgy in Echmiadzin. “Anything can be expected from evil,” he said, calling for such actions

to be prevented. Khachatryan claimed that a “planned assault” on the Catholicosate last summer had failed because “the public had rallied in defense of the Church.”

“But, of course, he [Pashinyan] will try again until he sees that a popular wall stands in defense of one of the key pillars of our identity,” Khachatryan said.

During Sunday’s liturgy, Asatrian said that “the state and statehood must come first, and the Church second.” Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan, who was also present, said the process would continue. “Once again, with a benevolent heart, I urge him [the Catholicos] to realize that he should not bring this situation to a point where there is no alternative.”

At Etchmiadzin, Archbishop Haygazun Najarian, who conducted the liturgy, described the current disagreements between the Church and the State as “troubling.”

“The imprisonment of three bishops, the violent seizure of Hovhannavank, and the

encouragement of a defrocked cleric’s illegal ceremonies — these steps only deepen the crisis,” Archbishop Najarian said, referring to earlier arrests and prosecutions of senior Church representatives.

“To weaken Holy Etchmiadzin is to weaken the Homeland. The Church has always respected the laws of the land and is ready to accept fair and lawful decisions,” he added.

He said that while the Church has internal issues, “they cannot be solved in this way.”

“Our wish is that state leaders act with wisdom and prudence to resolve this situation,” the archbishop said, urging both sides to reach a constructive conclusion “beneficial for both Etchmiadzin and the State.”

Archbishop Najarian concluded by saying that it was time to put aside divisive issues. “The state should deal with its own matters, and the Church with its spiritual mission.”



ARMENIA

Too Beautiful to Die: Armenia's House Museums

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Cultural memory as “Resistance to Erasure” has been a recurring topic in the Armenian press lately. The tragedy of Artsakh and the fear of further loss of our ancestral land has made the focus on erasure inevitable. It could be argued that if we cannot hold on to the land, we can at least hold on to the memory of the place by preserving its cultural heritage and by keeping alive our identity as Armenians.

One such recent attempt is the “House Culture” series on Armenia's House Museums produced by CivilNet, one of the leading media outlets in Armenia. There is indeed something unique about visiting a House Museum. Immersing oneself in the everyday life of an artist, while experiencing the richness and the beauty of a lived history, creates a strong desire in the viewer to protect the legacy and to pass it down to future generations.

The series comprises five short films hosted by writer and filmmaker Christopher Atamian who was invited to Armenia by CivilNet to write, narrate and to co-produce the films. These films take us into the most intimate space, the home, of five of our most revered poets and artists. The stories, written by Atamian in his signature elegant style, are packed with fascinating details about the artists and the times they lived in. These narratives resonate with us



The Yeghishe Charents House Museum

for the successful outcome of the series. “Ultimately it is thanks to the team in Yerevan that they turned out so well,” he affirms.

Perhaps closest to my heart is the footage depicting the anthropologist and artist Lusik Aguletsi, displaced from her village

The dim lighting, the reds, the gold, and the shades of brown and maroon that dominate the interior of the Aguletsi Museum evoke a certain spirituality. Lusik believed that cleansing one's spiritual world was important. The soul needs to be pure, she said. And to learn that she actually wore the beautifully displayed traditional dresses — the daraz — and the jewelry as her everyday attire adds yet another layer of otherworldliness to the viewer's experience of this remarkable woman.

Aguletsi's story also evidences that peaceful coexistence is possible. Lusik's grandmother, we learn, taught Armenian needlepoint techniques to her Azeri neighbors in her village in Nakhichevan. One can only hope that a woman's more compassionate and gentler nature—attributes historically regarded as feminine—will help steer mankind away from the mentality that makes wars possible.

In the context of our current reality of endless wars and of the historical exclusion of women from public life, it is no coincidence that women have been at the heart of the conversation. There are studies of the experiences of women in Medieval Armenia who, while underrepresented, had valuable insights to offer their communities. The newly published *Last Night on Earth: Stories from Armenia, Georgia*

and Ukraine utilizes the graphic format (comics) to look at “war through women's gaze.” Especially significant is the research into the transformative role of women in their society's survival, both in times of war and of peace.

Bringing women in would in fact dismantle the male-female opposition and the ensuing system of domination and subordination that inevitably leads to wars. In a strikingly bold essay, “The Role of Armenian Women in War and Peace: From Artsakh to the Present,” human rights activist Nurisa Erismis from Denizli, Turkey, with maternal roots in Yerevan, portrays women as “an invisible frontline that kept life going.” “The story of Armenian women is, in truth, the story of all women who carry the burden of wars they did not start. . . . Perhaps the greatest political revolution of our time will be when women become not the casualties of war but the strategists of peace,” writes Erismis.

Women have also been making headlines with their award-winning documentaries. Emily Mkrtichian's *There Was, There Was Not* portrays four women in Artsakh as unique forces in their community, in her words, “carrying its spirit forward in their daily lives, even after losing everything material that once defined home.”

Nonetheless, as powerful as storytelling can be in helping us survive, the connection to one's land remains. Who can forget the thrill of that special feeling of belonging and of security that setting foot on one's native soil gave one? We may build new homes in every corner of the world, but we still fight to keep our land. That our ancestral land, Artsakh, is no longer ours to claim deeply saddens us. That sadness must



A room inside the Avetik Isahakyan Museum

because they make our tragic past relevant to our current reality of loss and displacement.

Each video in the series excels with its beauty and is a favorite in its own unique way. The elegance of the original furnishings in the Yeghishe Charents House Museum, kept as they were arranged in the poet's lifetime, is unmatched. The peaceful picturesque village of Zangakatun, where Paruyr Sevak was born and where he spent his youth, brings one even closer to the purity and the beauty of the poet we all adore. Avetik Isahakyan, whose poems have become the lyrics of many of our popular songs, lures us with his lyricism and his insights into the truths of life.

All five stories touch the viewer deeply. The in-depth knowledge of the museum directors and the researchers interviewed in the films, their articulateness and their passion for what they do jump out at the viewer and evidence that the memory is still alive. Beautiful cinematography also greatly enhances the stories. Atamian credits the camera persons (Tigran Margaryan, Gevorg Haroyan, Ani Balayan), the editor (Ani Balayan) and the producers (Hasmik Hovhannisyan, Maria Yeghiazaryan, with Salpi Ghazarian as supervising producer)

of Verin Agulis in Nakhichevan, the enclave in Armenia ceded to Azerbaijan by Soviet Russia in the early nineteen twenties. One would think that the portrait of an unknown woman — unknown to me at least — would fade against the startling originality of the visionary filmmaker Sergei Parajanov or the energy of every Armenian's beloved poets Charents and Sevak. Yet, Lusik stands tall amongst these giants of enormous power and influence.

In fact, the Aguletsi segment introduces a distinctly new dimension into the series. It adds a charm that is feminine in the subtlest and the most beautiful sense of the word. Atamian's story evokes the mystique of a woman who risked her life to make sure that the threatened artifacts from her native Nakhichevan survived when so much was being lost and destroyed. The display in the Museum of the more than one thousand precious recovered objects, the colorful carpets with their exquisite designs, and Lusik's own beautiful paintings adorning the walls totally captivate the viewer. The delightful wood and straw puppets symbolizing religious and various other holidays further lure the viewer to the ethnic Armenian lore the ethnographer dedicated her life to preserving and to promoting.



The exterior of the Aguletsi Museum

and Ukraine utilizes the graphic format (comics) to look at “war through women's gaze.” Especially significant is the research into the transformative role of women in their society's survival, both in times of war and of peace.

Bringing women in would in fact dismantle the male-female opposition and the ensuing system of domination and subor-

be the strongest evidence that the memory is still alive, and that we shall overcome all challenges and endure. The twenty-seven House Museums in the Republic of Armenia, “celebrating the creators who shaped the soul of this extraordinary nation,” to borrow Atamian's words, are a living tribute to the Armenian people's ongoing creativity.



INTERNATIONAL

‘Western Azerbaijan’ Campaign Exposed in Leaked Documents

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While the campaign is publicly presented as cultural or humanitarian, independent experts have identified clear irredentist undertones. Thomas de Waal, a UK-based regional analyst, described the initiative as ‘simply irredentist’ in a 2023 article for Carnegie Europe.

Leaked documents from the Azerbaijani Government, obtained by OC Media, show that the discourse is closely coordinated and supported by the Presidential Administration of Azerbaijan, despite being fronted by the Western Azerbaijan Community (WAC).

“The Azerbaijani government seeks to keep nationalist fervor constantly alive,” Altay Goyushov, a visiting scholar at Paris Institute of Political Studies and expert on the Azerbaijani civic space, told OC Media.

“It serves as a tool to mobilize public opinion and distract people from social issues and their deprived rights. Moreover, it acts as a kind of Damocles’ sword to intimidate Armenia.”

Messaging through Foreign Legitimacy

The documents show that the Presidential Administration directly financed and supervised the campaign — organizing conferences, hiring communications consultants, and producing messaging materials. The names, dates, and contracts in the files align with publicly available records.

At the center of the effort was a high-profile international conference, held in Baku December 5-6, 2023, titled “Ensuring the Safe and Dignified Return of Azerbaijanis Expelled from Armenia: Global Context and Just Solution.” Azerbaijani state funds — over 109,000 manats (\$65,000) — covered hotel accommodations, audiovisual production, branding, and the creation of a digital platform to distribute pro-return content.

At least 34 foreign participants from across Europe, Asia and the Middle East were hosted. Guests included academics from Italian and Greek universities, analysts from Russian institutions, and a representative and former advisor of Russian President Vladimir Putin from Donetsk, a Russian-occupied territory in Ukraine. Some participants were already based in Baku, including foreign scholars from the state-governed ADA University.

Just days before the conference, the Strategic Communications Centre, a government-funded public union, was contracted to upload narrative content to the state-supported Virtual Western Azerbaijan portal. Their role: to ensure that the conference’s discussions and conclusions reach international media channels.

Despite these efforts, a post-event review by OC Media showed little follow-up. Few participants publicly referenced the conference or its themes after returning home, and international coverage was sparse. On-site in Baku, however, most participants were quoted in state media endorsing the message.

Still, the organizers considered the event a success and held a similar one the following year. Many participants returned, joined by new attendees from Western universities and media outlets. During the event, a ceremony was held to grant them symbolic “memberships of gratitude” for their role in promoting the WAC.

‘A Fascist State’

Although the WAC was originally registered as a refugee initiative in the late 1980s, it remained largely inactive until 2022,

when the Azerbaijani government reactivated it. That August, the organization was formally rebranded with updated charters and a new name. In October the same year, Azerbaijan’s parliament created a working group focused on policies of return to “Western Azerbaijan.”

“[The discourse] was reinforced during the brief military clashes in 2022,” Goyushov explained. “The Azerbaijani government has long employed irredentist rhetoric toward Armenia, declaring Yerevan and Zangezur as historically Azerbaijani territories.”

Just weeks after the Lachin Corridor blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh began in late 2022, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev invoked such a narrative during a nationally televised address. He referred to Armenia as “historical Azerbaijani land,” and linked the September 2022 Armenia-Azerbaijan clashes, when Azerbaijan took control over strategic positions on Armenian territory, with the newfound visibility of “historically Azerbaijani cities.”

By January 2025, as peace treaty talks intensified, Aliyev doubled down. In a lengthy interview with Azerbaijani state media, he described Armenia as a “fascist state” due to

Vafa Naghiyeva, a doctoral researcher at the University of Leipzig, who studies post-imperial and militarist narratives in post-war Azerbaijan, shared Goyushov’s view.

“Beyond its geopolitical function, the discourse of Western Azerbaijan serves as a symbolic extension of the post-war state narrative,” she told OC Media. “It transforms the memory of displacement into a form of moral legitimacy and collective identity, allowing the government to preserve a sense of permanent post-war normality.”

She added that the discourse could be used for multiple purposes.

“This strategy keeps society emotionally mobilized around the idea of unfinished justice and strengthens the state’s communicative control both at home and abroad.”

State-sponsored Events Continue

But the discourse didn’t disappear entirely. When an unverified news story appeared in Azerbaijani opposition media in August claiming that the parliamentary group would be dissolved, the WAC issued a denial — accusing Armenia, without presenting evidence, of planting the story.

In early October, ADA University funded the publication of a book on “Western Azer-



“THE AZERBAIJANI GOVERNMENT HAS LONG EMPLOYED IRREDENTIST RHETORIC TOWARD ARMENIA, DECLARING YEREVAN AND ZANGEZUR AS HISTORICALLY AZERBAIJANI TERRITORIES.”

its failure to accept the return of Azerbaijani refugees.

“We live as neighbors to such a fascist state, and the threat of fascism persists. Therefore, fascism must be eradicated. Either the Armenian leadership will destroy it, or we will. We have no other choice,” Aliyev said at the time.

The interviewer subsequently noted that Aliyev had added a third strategic goal to his previous two: (1) the liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh and (2) its reconstruction. The new addition: ensuring the return of the Western Azerbaijan Community to Armenia.

Still, after a US-brokered summit in Washington on 8 August 2025, where Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders initialed, but did not sign, a draft peace treaty, the Western Azerbaijan rhetoric softened. The treaty includes a clause prohibiting territorial claims by either side, and another on the withdrawal of legal claims against each other in international courts — including the issue of the right of return for Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh.

“The Azerbaijani government uses the discourse as a bargaining chip vis-à-vis the more than 100,000 Armenians who left Karabakh after the war,” Goyushov concluded.

bajan,” and during an OSCE conference in Warsaw, Azerbaijan organized a side event focused on the theme. An Armenian NGO, the Union of Informed Citizens, and part of the Armenian delegation accused the panel of promoting renewed irredentist claims.

Later the same month, the WAC organized an event together with state-linked diaspora groups in Germany on the topic. The aim of the event was to raise awareness regarding Western Azerbaijan. A similar event was organized in Brussels the following day — Azerbaijani state-media claimed that there were more than 120 participants.

Aziz Alakbarli, chair of the WAC and a ruling party MP, noted on 26 October that Armenia had “no other choice but to reckon with Azerbaijan and its President,” otherwise it could “jeopardize the existence of the Armenian state.”

He concluded by saying that Armenia, in order to prevent this, must accept all of Azerbaijan’s conditions, including ensuring the return of the Western Azerbaijan Community.

Neither the WAC nor the Presidential Administration of Azerbaijan responded to OC Media’s requests for comment.

(This article originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on November 3.)

INTERNATIONAL

Analyst: Authorities Need to Listen to Public Opinion in Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (news.am) — Despite the narratives circulating in Armenia or outside Azerbaijan that everything in Azerbaijan is decided from the top and implemented at the bottom, things are different in reality, Rusif Huseynov, the co-founder and director of Topchubashov Center, a Baku-based think tank, told reporters on November 4 on the sidelines of the Orbeli Forum.

“The [Azerbaijani] authorities also need to listen to public opinion. As my colleague has noted, and you, by the way, can check this on various social networks, the comments are countless. And they are varied. Not everyone can be satisfied with the fact of reconciliation. Many still have fresh wounds and injuries. Yes, the Washington meeting inspired optimism. In that sense, a positive dynamic is observed between the two countries. But both societies need to be prepared through our actions, behavior, and statements. I think, for us, especially for me, reconciliation is not the ultimate goal. It is a journey. We need to learn during that journey,” said the Azerbaijani analyst.

Armenia, Iran Mull Joint UNESCO Nomination

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia is preparing to submit two cultural heritage nominations to UNESCO, one of which may be presented jointly with Iran, Education, Science, Culture and Sports Minister Zhanna Andreasyan said at preliminary debates on the 2026 state budget on Tuesday.

According to Andreasyan, the two applications include “The Wine-Making Tradition in Areni Community” and “The Tradition of Worshipping Water and Rain.” The latter is under consideration as a joint nomination with Iran.

“We expect UNESCO to reach decisions on these nominations in 2026,” the minister added.

Patriarch Expresses Support for Catholics

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Archbishop Nourhan Manougian, Patriarch of Jerusalem, on November 3 issued a statement expressing solidarity with the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II.

The patriarch voiced concern over recent “painful and troubling” developments surrounding the Hovhannavank Monastery, condemning the state-supported liturgy officiated by a defrocked priest. He stressed that such acts violate church law, damage the Armenian Apostolic Church’s reputation and offend the spiritual feelings of the Armenian people.

He warned that the Armenian leadership’s interference in the church affairs and support for defrocked clergy seeking to seize church property were unacceptable.



INTERNATIONAL

Armenian Church Representatives Participate in ‘Daring Peace’ Conference in Rome

ROME — The International Meeting “Daring Peace,” organized by the Community of Sant’Egidio, convened in Rome from October 26 to 28, drawing religious leaders, dignitaries, and more than ten thousand participants from Europe and other continents, among them many young people to promote dialogue and peace among nations.

Representing Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Pontifical Legate of Western Europe and Representative of the Armenian Church to the Holy See, along with Father Garegin Hambarzumyan, Director of Ecumenical Relations of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, actively participated in this important conference. The Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul, Archbishop Sahak Mashalyan was also invited to join this gathering.

Guests included the president of Italy and the queen of Belgium, both of whom addressed participants at the inauguration ceremony. A highlight of the conference was a Christian Prayer Service held at the historic Colosseum, presided over by Pope Leo XIV, who also attended the closing ceremony.

On Monday, October 27, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian addresses one of the forums on the theme: “Standing Against Evil: The Martyrs of Our Time.”

In his presentation Barsamian empha-



A scene from the “Daring Peace” conference

sized that for Armenians, martyrdom is not merely an abstract concept but a powerful testament to faith and witness. He stated, “To remember our martyrs is not to glorify suffering, but to honor a life freely offered in fidelity to God and love for one’s neighbor.”

The archbishop recounted the tragic history of the Armenian Genocide, which saw the loss of 1.5 million lives, underscoring the enduring spirit of hope and resilience that defines the Armenian Church. He highlighted the canonization of the Holy Martyrs of 1915, asserting that “love is stronger than death” and that genuine memory serves as a form of justice.

Focusing on contemporary issues, Barsamian recognized the ongoing suffering of Christian communities in the Middle East and other parts of the world, as well as marginalized groups facing persecution worldwide. He called for united action across faiths, emphasizing that “evil isolates and divides; the martyrs call us to solidarity.”

The archbishop outlined six dimensions of standing against evil, urging attendees to remember truthfully, witness together, choose spiritual weapons, bind wounds, unite mercy with justice, and form consciences for peace. His reflections called for practical steps, including

providing shelter and education for the vulnerable, and fostering dialogue and reconciliation.

He concluded with a powerful prayer from St. Gregory of Narek, encapsulating the conference’s spirit of hope and commitment to peace. “May the memory of the righteous be a blessing, and may their witness make us worthy of the name Christian,” he prayed.

The conference served as a platform for dialogue among diverse faith traditions, reinforcing the importance of compassion, humanitarian action, and the pursuit of justice in an era marked by conflict and division.

Armenia Is Finalizing Multi-Billion Defense Deal with India

Armenia is reportedly close to finalizing a landmark defense agreement with India for the purchase of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited’s Su-30MKI multirole fighter jets.

The estimated value of the deal lies between \$2.5 billion and \$3 billion, and the first batch of between eight and twelve aircraft is expected for delivery starting in 2027, with completion by around 2029, Indian Defense News reported.

The previous Indian-Armenian arms deals have also been reported by the website and were followed with confirmations from both governments.

This procurement takes place amid Armenia’s broader effort to diversify its defense-industry partnerships away from traditional reliance on Russia. Although Armenia acquired four Russian-made Su-30SM jets in 2019, those aircraft have seen

limited operational service due to difficulties sourcing compatible munitions and technical support. The new Indian deal comes atop a string of recent agreements between Yerevan and New Delhi — including the purchase of Pinaka multiple-launch rocket systems, Swathi counter-battery radars and ATAGS 155mm howitzers.

The Su-30MKI itself is a heavy twin-engine platform originally developed for India in collaboration with Russia, and known for advanced avionics, dual-engine thrust-vectoring and significant weapons-carrying capacity. In the Armenian variant, it is expected to be fitted with Indian-made upgrades such as the Uttam AESA radar, Astra MK-1 and MK-2 beyond-visual-range missiles and an advanced electronic-warfare suite. These enhancements are intended to provide Armenia with a

significant boost in situational awareness and air-combat endurance — capabilities countering Azerbaijan’s recent induction of forty Pakistan-manufactured JF-17C Block-III fighters.

For India, the contract represents one of the largest defense-export successes of recent years, and marks a strategic push into the South Caucasus region.

Should the deal be finalized as projected, it will represent Armenia’s most ambitious air-force modernization initiative since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

India’s growing military-technical cooperation with Armenia is coming into sharp focus with recent arms sales, notably the export of the Akash-1S surface-to-air missile system. Armenia reportedly signed a deal in 2022 valued around \$720 million for fifteen Akash systems, becoming the

first foreign buyer of the platform. In November 2024 India shipped the first battery of the system, with a second batch planned for mid-2025..

Beyond air defense, India has also delivered its Pinaka multiple-launch rocket systems to Armenia. The Pinaka system offers long-range strike capabilities and aligns with Armenia’s broader effort to modernize its ground-based and artillery assets in cooperation with India.

Strategically, India’s expanded exports to Armenia are viewed as part of its effort to increase global influence through defense diplomacy, while for Armenia they signal a move to access advanced diverse sources of weapons supplies and reduce dependence on Russian supply chains.

(This article originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on October 31.)

Georgian Parliament Slams Euronest’s “Anti-Georgian” Resolution, Blames Armenian MPs

The Georgian Parliament has strongly criticized a resolution adopted at the recent Euronest Parliamentary Assembly session in Yerevan, calling it “anti-Georgian” and accusing Armenian lawmakers of undermining Georgia’s government.

Georgia’s Deputy Parliamentary Speaker Nino Tsilosani, from the ruling Georgian Dream party, said Armenian MPs had effectively gone against their own prime minister by supporting the resolution, which questioned the legitimacy of Georgia’s leadership and elections.

“By supporting such a resolution, they are showing a lack of trust in their own prime minister,” Tsilosani said, describing the document as meaningless and designed to harm Georgia.

The resolution, adopted during the assembly’s twelfth session in Yerevan, labelled Georgia’s 2024 parliamentary elec-

tions fraudulent and accused the ruling Georgian Dream party of being self-appointed. It also condemned the violent suppression of protests in Tbilisi and called for the release of political prisoners, warning that Georgia could face a suspension of its visa-free regime with the EU if reforms were not made.

Georgia had refused to send its delegation to the session in advance, citing what it called “hostile and biased rhetoric” from some members of the European Parliament. Officials in Tbilisi said those actions violated the spirit of partnership and mutual respect underpinning the Eastern Partnership initiative.

Armenia’s delegation to Euronest later rejected claims that it had voted against Georgia. Maria Karapetyan, the head of the Armenian delegation and a member of the ruling Civil Contract party, said Armenian MPs ei-

ther abstained or did not take part in the vote on amendments concerning Georgia.

The only exception, she said, related to terminology about one of Georgia’s break-away regions, where Armenian lawmakers supported replacing the term “South Ossetia” with “Tskhinvali region.”

Karapetyan noted that Armenia’s delegation ultimately supported the wider resolution because it included key provisions concerning Armenia — among them, support for the peace process with Azerbaijan, the continuation of border delimitation based on mutual sovereignty, and a call for the withdrawal of Azerbaijani forces from Armenian territory.

Since the drastic decline in Georgia’s democratic reforms and the turn towards Russia, Yerevan has found itself at odds with the need to keep friendly relations with Tbilisi and its own newly-established

EU aspirations. Brussels has repeatedly criticized Tbilisi for democratic backsliding and its treatment of opposition figures, while the Georgian Dream government has accused EU officials of interference and double standards. Georgia’s leadership has warned that the Euronest platform risks becoming politicized and detached from the principles of equal dialogue that underpin the Eastern Partnership.

Armenia, by contrast, has sought to deepen its cooperation with European institutions, signing a comprehensive partnership agreement with the EU in 2021 and beginning an accession process in 2025. Hosting the Euronest session in Yerevan was seen by Armenia as a signal of its growing engagement with the European Parliament along with other EU institutions.

(This article originally appeared on www.OC-Media.org on November 4.)



Community News

Saints Vartanantz Parish Celebrates Pastor’s 20th Anniversary of Ordination

CHELMSFORD, Mass. — Parish-ioners of Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church recently gathered with joy and thanksgiving to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Father Khachatur Kesablyan’s Ordination to the Priest-hood. The evening began with a spe-cial “Hrashapar” worship service to welcome Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate, who was invited to bless and present Father Khachatur with a floral pilon (cope), and share a pro-camation from His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians in recognition of Father Khachatur’s magnificent ministry. Participating clergy in the procession into the sanc-tuary were Very Rev. Father Nerseh Khalatyan, Rev. Father Tateos Ab-dalian, Rev. Father Arakel Aljalian, Rev. Father Tadeos Barsamyan, Rev. Father Krikor Sabounjian, Rev. Fa-ther Vart Gyozaian, and Rev. Father Stepan Baljian. At the conclusion of the worship service, the chairpersons of four parish organizations pre-sented Father Khachatur with a new set of liturgical vestments for celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

Just prior to the worship service, Father Khachatur was wonderfully surprised to enjoy the presence of



Rev. Khachatur Kesablyan and Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan

long-time friend and the Godfather of his wedding, the Very Rev. Father Nerseh Khalatyan, the Abbot of Holy Martyrs’ Church, who flew in from Armenia to participate in the 20th anniversary event.

Over 250 parishioners and friends packed the beautifully decorated Ka-zanjan ballroom for the dinner-pro-gram that followed the Hrashapar Service. Thanks to the generosity and artistic talents of committee member, Elizabeth Hzor, a beautiful tapestry featuring Holy Etchmiadzin, which was prepared in Armenia, was hung behind the head table as a reminder of Father Khachatur’s birthplace in Armenia. Following dinner, greetings were offered by Parish Council Chair, Bruce Kayajanian, who expressed gratitude for Father Khachatur’s en-during spiritual leadership, which has been responsible for the growth and vitality of the parish. Sandra Boroyan, see ANNIVERSARY, page 8



Catholicos Aram I of the Great See of Cilicia at the Tavlian Preschool (Photo credit: @FourFlashPhotography)

Catholicos Aram I Visits Tavlian Preschool and Kindergarten, Blesses New Property

PASADENA, Calif. — Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, arrived at the Levon and Hasmig Tavlian Preschool and Kindergarten this week as part of his pontifical visit, where he toured both the school and its newly acquired adjacent property. The Catholicos was greeted by students, teachers, administra-tion, the School Board, members of the Board of Regents of Prelacy Schools, St. Sarkis Church Board members, the founding benefactors of the school Vahe and Nora Tavlian, and community leaders, who gathered with great enthusiasm to welcome him.

Aram I was escorted by Archbishop Kegham Khacherian, Prelate of the West-ern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church; clergy; members of the Western Prelacy Executive Council; and the Central Executive Board of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. Upon entering the school, the Catholicos was greeted by kindergarten students who offered the traditional bread and salt: symbols of hospitality and blessing.

“The presence of His Holiness Aram I is a profound honor and a lasting source of inspiration for our school and community. His vision, rooted in the principles of education, justice, and the preservation of Armenian identity, continues to inspire us to pursue our mission with greater dedication and purpose: to prepare new gen-erations who will proudly carry forward the enduring legacy of our people,” stat-ed Dr. Garine Joukadarian, director of Tavlian Preschool and Kindergarten. “This blessing ceremony stands as a testament to our shared determination, not only to build physical structures, but also to nurture dreams. It reaffirms our unwavering commitment to the Armenian school as a foundation of enlightenment, faith, and patriotism, where each generation is nurtured to become conscious, faithful, and devoted Armenians.”

During his tour, Catholicos Aram I visited classrooms, spending time with the students and engaging them in conversation. The atmosphere was warm and up-lifting, allowing the pontiff to personally connect with the students and hear their heartfelt patriotic songs and poems.

“The expansion of Tavlian Preschool and Kindergarten reflects our shared commitment to providing more opportunities for our children to learn and thrive while staying deeply connected with their heritage,” said Patty I Aposhian Kas-parian, member of the Board of Regents of the Prelacy Armenian Schools. “It is an immense honor that His Holiness Aram I was able to witness this moment of progress and bless the new property. His presence affirms the vital importance of strengthening and expanding Armenian schools to meet the needs of future generations.”

“Today’s visit by His Holiness Aram I to the Levon and Hasmig Tavlian Pre-school and Kindergarten has blessed our community with divine inspiration and unity. On behalf of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, I extend my heartfelt see VISIT, page 9

Abezetian Retires Leaving a Lasting Impact on Triton College Athletics

RIVER GROVE, ILL. (Triton Ath-letics) — With a reach in sports that extended from Hall of Fame baseball player Ron Santo’s Park Ridge house in the mid-1960s to the NFL replay office in New York in 2025, it’s amazing Garrick Abezetian had time for the classic “day job.”

But in a manner best suited for the affable Abezetian, he was able to in-tertwine all his sports sensibilities to the more mundane job of managing money for Triton College. And in the process, Triton’s athletic program is all the much better for Abezetian’s special melding process as he takes his retirement at age 70 as Associate Vice President of Athletics on Sep-tember 30.

Always a team player, whether as an athlete or a 50-year member of high school football officiating crews in Illinois, Abezetian would never claim major credit for the construc-tion of Triton’s state of the art ath-letic fields, renovation of the Jorndt Athletic Complex main building or emergence of the men’s basketball program as a consistent national championship contender. Still, his fingerprints are affixed to the prog-ress Triton has enjoyed in both facili-ties and competitiveness over the last decade.

Recreational and athletic pro-grams’ loss of Abezetian as a full-time administrator or director surely has been Triton’s gain. Coming out of college, he discovered the Park Ridge Park District’s top job paid just \$24,000 annually. His mother pestered him to go to law school. With a master’s degree from DePaul University, a job in his father’s textile firm beckoned. He put on a coat and tie while running the youth football and baseball programs in Park Ridge and spending his late summer and fall weekends officiating high school football.

A subsequent 21-year run work-ing for W.W. Grainger, Inc. preceded his hiring at Triton as Associate Vice President of Finance in 2010. He kept his title with the last word changed to “athletics” when he moved across Fifth Avenue early in 2020. But he already had put his stamp on Triton athletics in a role of which he be-lieved had the most impact in his ca-reer at the school.

“The improvements were on the drawing boards,” Abezetian said of the new athletic fields. “The facilities were getting older. But Triton had never issued bonds before.”

Raising property taxes in the Tri-ton district to pay for the new fields would have been a tough call. With his financial training, Abezetian con-vinced the Triton Board of Trustees to go the bonds route, without raising property taxes to the District’s resi-dents.

Abezetian helped ensure lights at the complex, costing \$100,000, in-cluding getting lights for the softball field. The \$38 million project ended see ABEZETIAN, page 8

COMMUNITY NEWS

Saints Vartanantz Parish Celebrates Pastor's 20th Anniversary of Ordination

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20th Anniversary Committee Chair, welcomed all those in attendance and expressed deep appreciation to a highly energetic and dedicated committee for helping prepare a well-deserved tribute to Father Khachatur. The program continued with a narrated slide presentation, "Celebrating Our Shepard's Ministry," by Deacon Ara Jeknavorian, who shared some of the lighter and lively



Father Khachatur Kesablyan with other members of the clergy from the region.

highlights of Father Khachatur's ministry. Sub-deacon Michael Kasparian, Parish Council Chair of the Cape Cod Mission Parish, thanked Father Khachatur for his guidance and efforts to grow the mission parish. Recitations in Armenian were offered by

Elizabeth Hzor and Elen Aghazarian, and a piano musical interlude was provided by Narek Kesablyan and David Arustamyan. ACYOA members prepared a heart-warming video which underscored how Father Khachatur has impacted the spiritual development of each member. Maria Kesablyan offered an insightful tribute as a "P-K" (priest's kid) to her father's priestly service to the church. Following the cutting of the anniversary cake, Yn. Anna was presented with a large bouquet of flowers thanking her for her devotion and support to Father Khachatur's ministry.

Kesablyan, filled with great emotion, shared his journey to the priesthood highlighting the role of his parents and grandparents. "Having the opportunity to serve God's people has been one of the greatest honors of my life. These past twenty years have been a life-changing blessing and a testament to God's faithfulness and grace. I am humbly grateful to His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II and His Grace Bishop Mesrob for this honor."

Bishop Mesrob expressed his joy in witnessing such a wonderful parish tribute to Father Khachatur's remarkable ministry. He offered prayers that his service to the church continues to grow and strengthen. "I am blessed to join the faithful community of



Rev. Khachatur Kesablyan and his family

Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church to celebrate two decades of Father Khachatur's devoted service, pastoral care, and spiritual leadership. His ministry has touched countless lives with faith, wisdom, and love for our Armenian Church." The Primate went on to congratulate wonderful work by Father Khachatur in the Saints Vartanantz and

Cape Cod mission parishes, and in his Saint Vartan Camp ministry.

Members of the 20th anniversary committee included: Sandra Boroyan, Chair; Peter Bogosian; Dara Hagopian; Elizabeth Hzor; Marky Juknavorian; Bonnie Chayes Youssefian; and Deacon Ara Jeknavorian, Advisor.

Abezetian Retires Leaving a Lasting Impact on Triton College Athletics

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up a win-win for all involved. He is proud that the fields are used by other athletic programs in the surrounding community. Both Fenwick and St. Patrick High School's play their home football games at Triton.

The re-done facilities were crucial in athletic recruiting. "Ten percent of the full-time student population are athletes," Abezetian said.

Going into his first Triton role, the school was mostly known athletically for its baseball program under the legendary Bob Symonds. True to his athletic long reach, he had a connection here. He had been a pitcher at neighboring Oakton College in Des Plaines under Rich Symonds, Bob's brother.

Abezetian gives former head coach Steve Christiansen all the credit in building up the men's basketball program in the 2010s, culminating with the NJCAA Division II National Championship in 2018. Now the men's program is self-perpetuating, with three berths in the NJCAA Division I Final Four in the past four years under Christiansen successors John Clancy and Brian Burns. Amar Augillard was named 2024 National JUCO Player of the Year.

But with the new facilities and Triton's location in the third-largest market helping, the women's basketball program is now a consistent regional contender with higher aspirations. The softball program also has developed into one the top in the region.

While wrestling has maintained their standard of producing All-American's on a yearly basis.

Imagine what Abezetian could have done if athletic jobs had paid more in the late 1970s. Then, again, he would have done some of it for free. That was his compensation in his first sports "job" – babysitter for Santo's children at his home, a gig he got because the Cubs third baseman lived across the street from Abezetian's aunt and uncle. Santo's second Chicago home was in Park Ridge, as was his Pros Pizza restaurant, before moving to Glenview in 1969.

Abezetian has been involved in Park Ridge youth football and baseball since 1972. His reputation helped get sponsorship from the Chicago White Sox for the baseball program.

In football, Abezetian has officiated three Illinois High School Association (IHSA) championship games. He and his crews do not have the luxury of falling back on replay as do the pros and colleges, so they have to sharpen their interpretation of rules. "I still go to officiating meetings every week," he said. "Guys reffing high school football don't do it for the money."

But one Abezetian does get decent compensation for officiating. Son Martin Abezetian is working in his first season as an NFL replay assistant at league headquarters in New York. Meanwhile, daughter Jessica Caplis is an assistant softball coach at Maine South High School.

However, Abezetian's backbone has been his wife of 45 years, Diane Abezetian, who frequently attends Triton games with her husband.

Abezetian's football officiating and stewardship of youth sports will continue – as will involvement in Triton athletics after his formal retirement. He will have a different office as a consultant for the college and athletic department in the months ahead.

"I'll be around when if they need me," he said.

Abezetian proves there's no substitute for a passion for your work. Triton athletics and youth sports have enjoyed the benefits of that quality.

Follow Triton Athletics on Twitter @TritonTrojans1 or on Instagram @Triton_College_Athletics

(Story by tritonathletics.com contributor George Castle)



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Kevork Oflazian to Speak on Experience of the Musa Dagh Armenians in Anjar, Lebanon

FRESNO — Kevork Oflazian will present a talk on “Homeland vs. Home: When a Call to Return to the Homeland is Not Answered” on Friday, November 14, at 7 p.m., in the University Business Center (5245 N. Backer Ave.), Alice Peters Auditorium, on the Fresno State campus.

Oflazian’s presentation is part of the Armenian Studies Program Fall 2025 Lecture Series and is supported by the Ralph Shabazian Armenian Memorial Fund. The lecture is free and open to the public.

When an invitation to repatriate to a homeland was made, why did some diasporic Armenians accept the invitation and migrate to Armenia, and some did not? This presentation aims to answer that question. The research is focused on Anjar, a town in Lebanon, populated almost entirely by immigrants that were originally from Musa Dagh, a group of villages in Eastern Turkey. The research methodology included oral interviews with townspeople, published and unpublished memoirs, contemporary newspaper articles, and secondary sources such as conference papers, scholarly articles and dissertations. The historiography of the Armenian repatriation of 1946 is minimal, especially in regard to the majority of the diaspora Armenians that chose not to repatriate. By using oral histories as the main source for this thesis, Oflazian will be adding to the historiography with



new and hitherto unpublished information. Oflazian argues that a return to a homeland, or repatriation, as the historiography calls it, is a complex decision with many factors unique to both subaltern groups within a population, to individuals. For the Armenians of Anjar, political ideology, party affiliation, religious denomination, material conditions, familial ties and perceptions or imaginings of homeland all played a part in this complex decision. The episode of the

repatriation, or “Nerkakht,” took place during rising Cold War tensions in the late 1940s. This East-West confrontation, with its ideological polarization and attendant intense propaganda, also played an important role in the decisions made by the townspeople.

Oflazian was born in Beirut. After graduating from Melkonian High School and the American University of Beirut, he immigrated to the United States to continue his higher education, pursuing an MBA at Fresno State University. Oflazian worked in the finance and banking industry for over 35 years. Prior to retirement, he completed a master’s degree in history from Fresno State to pursue a potential second career in researching and, writing and teaching history, which has been a lifelong passion.

He has been involved in the community by serving on the boards of various organizations, including Charlie Keyan Armenian Community School, the Fresno Philharmonic, AGBU, the Rotary Club and Knights of Vartan.

The lecture is free and open to the public.

The presentation will also be live-streamed on YouTube at: <https://bit.ly/armenianstudiesyoutube>.

For information about upcoming Armenian Studies Program presentations, follow on Facebook @ArmenianStudiesFresnoState or at the Program website, <https://fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies>.

Catholicos Aram I Visits Tavlian Preschool and Kindergarten

VISIT, from page 7

congratulations to the school on its expansion,” said Tro Krikorian, member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Western United States Central Committee. “This milestone, graced by the presence of His Holiness, strengthens the cultural vitality of our people and enriches the entire Southern California Armenian community with renewed hope and pride.”

Following a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the entrance of the new property, community members gathered in the backyard for a celebratory program and luncheon in honor of His Holiness, marking the very first event held on the new campus.

After a moving performance by the kindergarten students, Archbishop Kegham Khacherian formally welcomed the Catholicos, expressing the community’s profound

joy for his presence and leadership. Among the distinguished guests was California State Assemblymember John Harabedian, who presented a certificate of recognition to His Holiness and conveyed his deep honor in sharing this momentous occasion with the Catholicos.

“The pontifical visit of His Holiness to Tavlian Preschool and Kindergarten is a moment of spiritual and educational renewal. It is a blessing that inspires our children and educators and reaffirms the vital role of our faith in shaping the next generation,” stated Khacherian.

In his message, Catholicos Aram I reflected on the profound spiritual and national importance of Armenian education. His Holiness emphasized that the Arme-

nian school stands at the heart of national preservation and renewal, highlighting how vital it is to continue building and expanding our schools; and that it is within the walls of the Armenian school that we blossom; and through education, we grow and become deeply rooted in our heritage.

“Armenian schools are a powerful affirmation of our national identity and collective belonging,” His Holiness said during his remarks. “The Armenian school is a sacred place where our identity is nurtured and our sense of belonging strengthened. It is a constant struggle and a firm commitment not only to be Armenian, but to remain Armenian; our Armenianness is an inseparable part of who we are as human beings.”

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OBITUARY

Sophie (Baharozian) Tolajian

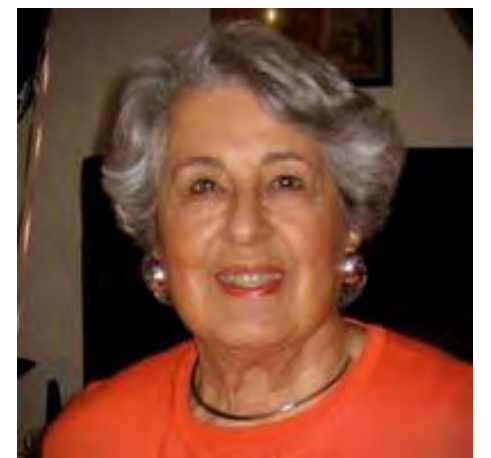
Devoted Mother

WATERTOWN — Sophie (Baharozian) Tolajian of Watertown passed away peacefully on October 31, 2025, at age 99. Sophie was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts on August 15, 1926, to the late Manoog and Zaghig (Assarian) Baharozian.

Sophie was the wife of the late Aram Tolajian, who passed away in 1995.

She is survived by her children Suzanne Fabrizio and her husband Lou of Watertown and Michael Tolajian and his wife René of Moraga, Calif. She was grandmother of Christopher, David and Daniel Fabrizio and Lela and Vivian Tolajian. She was sister of the late Lillian Garbouchian and Rose Aslanian and aunt of her niece and nephews: Vartan Garbouchian, Jan Mikitarian and family, Bradford Yacobian and family and the late Robert Yacobian.

Funeral Services will be held at Armenian Memorial Church, 32 Bigelow Ave., Watertown on Saturday, November 8th at 11:30am. Relatives and friends are respect-



fully invited to attend. Interment services will be private.

Memorial donations may be made in Sophie’s memory to Armenian Memorial Church.

Arrangements were made by the Giragosian Funeral Home.

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA Hold Historic Gathering at Holy Trinity Armenian Church

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — It was a historic week for the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, (NCC) as their 37 Member Communions gathered in the greater Boston area for the NCC’s 75th anniversary celebration and annual Christian Unity Gathering centered on the theme Christ is Risen: A Transforming Witness from Generation to Generation.

From October 13 through 16, NCC representatives and guests participated in numerous plenary sessions and worship services in various Boston area Houses of Worship, including: The Huffington Ecumenical Center of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, the African Meeting House and Museum of African American History, and the Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge.

Events included the 75th anniversary Celebration and Dinner at the Boston Newton Marriott Hotel on Monday evening and the installation of the new NCC Governing Board Chair, Archbishop Elpidophoros, during the evening vespers service hosted by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese on Tuesday. On Wednesday, guests traveled to the Boston Common to visit the Embrace statue and Museum of African American History. The day’s plenary sessions included His Eminence Archbishop Vicken Aykazian sharing his experience during the NCC Past Presidents & Board Chairs Panel and being honored during the Anniversary Celebratory Public Worship Service and awards presentation.



From left, Yn. Arpi Kouzouian, Eve Edwards, Aline Mikaelian, Alina Kouzouian, Lori Dorian, Stephen Hollisian, Armina Manoukian, and Gregory A. Kolligian, Jr.

In a historic moment, in recognition of Holy Trinity Church’s 100th anniversary and the significance to the Armenian Church of the importance of passing faith from generation to generation, the final day of the CUG was hosted by the Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge.

Guests enjoyed fellowship before being invited into the sanctuary for an interactive Armenian Orthodox Morning Service. Fr. Vasken Kouzouian, Holy Trinity Church pastor, welcomed those gathered, offering greetings from Diocesan Primate, Bishop Mesrob Parsamyan, and sharing the 100-year history of Holy Trinity Armenian Church.

“Witnessing religious leaders of various

Christian traditions come together for worship and to discuss similarities and ways they can grow closer on such a high level was a blessing and beautiful to see, and it was rewarding to share our story after celebrating our 100th anniversary,” said Fr. Kouzouian.

Following the traditional Armenian hymn and prayer-filled morning service enhanced by the voices of Yeghishe Manucharyan and Victoria Avetisyan, the program continued in the parish’s Charles and Nevart Talanian Cultural Hall with an intergenerational panel.

Panel moderator Yeretzgin Arpi Kouzouian set the stage, stating “For centuries the Armenian church has witnessed and

shared her faith from generation to generation. This passing of faith is ingrained into our souls – it is integral to our existence. We have indeed heard a great deal this week about the importance of storytelling. We have heard how each of our stories can be viewed as tiles, and when these individual tiles come together, they create a beautiful mosaic. We invite you to sit back and hear our story.”

Guests watch a video presentation featuring testimonials of multigenerational Holy Trinity parishioners, interviews with two families of faith, and a message from Rev. Kouzouian. Following the video, an intergenerational panel featuring seven Holy Trinity parishioners, the youngest being 10 years of age, shared with those present their motivation for staying connected to the Armenian Church. Each panelist added to the story, shining a light on the mosaic that makes up the Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston.

It was a week full of fellowship, ecumenical dialogue, thought-provoking conversations and uplifting worship.

Representing the Armenian Church in America were NCC Governing Board members Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Diocesan Ecumenical Legate, and Yeretzgin Arpi Kouzouian, Director of Youth Ministries of Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge. Additional CUG attendees included Holy Trinity Church pastor Fr. Vasken Kouzouian, St. Stephen’s Church pastor V. Rev. Fr. Hrant Tahanian, and St. Nersess Seminarian Dn. Arin Parsanian.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Panel Sheds Light on Domestic Violence

PANEL, from page 1

Serving as moderator was Lenna Garibian, who has been working with the Women's Support Center in Armenia, an organization offering shelter and support services for battered women there. At the start of the program, she explained that the WSC's 24-hotline gets calls from around Armenia, and even outside the country. One recent case, she recalled, involved a 70-year-old woman who was regularly being battered by her daughter.

"It's unfortunately everywhere. It affects everyone, which is why we are here today," she said. "Our hope is to foster an open dialogue."

Nackel, whose organization provides domestic violence intervention and support in 27 municipalities in Massachusetts, defined domestic violence.

She said, "At REACH we think about domestic violence as a pattern of behavior one person uses to gain and maintain power and control over another person within the context of another person. ... We often think of someone hitting their partner. We call that physical abuse and that is part of the conversation, as is sexual abuse, which we hear about. What we don't do as well as a job discussing or acknowledging is the other forms those behaviors take, often around emotional, psychological or verbal abuse, things that are targeting one's soul, one's sense of well-being; that could be insults, isolation, threats around different behaviors isolating them from friends or family members."

Financial abuse is another component, she added, which can take the form of either preventing a spouse from working or forcing them to work but taking the paycheck of the spouse, leaving them without funds.

"Financial abuse can be particularly challenging especially in suburban communities because we have a misconception that a survivor would be easy to identify, that they would have low income and not have access to resources," she added. "That's true for some the folks we work for," but for others, they might present as well-dressed, with luxury cars and expensive clothes and handbags, but no access to money.

Nackel noted that with today's smart phones, it is easy for an abuser to keep tabs on the victims.

Wendy Murphy spoke next. Murphy began her career as a prosecutor in Middlesex County, handling legal cases related to child abuse and sex crime. Then, she switched to her private practice to focus on violence against women and children. She is an adjunct professor of sexual violence law at New England Law Boston. She did not mince her words.

"Women do suffer more domestic abuse than any other category of people. It matters that women are targeted and matters that women are targeted by men and it matters that our legal system enables that to happen. ... Civil law gives men legal supremacy over women and one of the ways that supremacy is expressed is through abuse," Murphy said.

"The solution is not just to provide resources, although that is important," she said, "on the way to revolutionary reform — revolutionary of the mind, of the law."

She noted that the laws in the US have "never recognized women as equal persons under the law. We have never had equal protection of the law."

"The Supreme Court made clear in the aftermath of 1868 [the 14th Amendment] in all of its decisions that women are not persons. If you are not a person, you don't

have any rights, much less quell rights. Women became persons in this country in 1971. The supreme court said we will give you personhood but only unequal personhood," she said.

"That is the current status of women in this country," she said.

Koutoujian was the sole man on the panel. Now the sheriff of Middlesex County, he is a former prosecutor, member of the State House who served on the REACH board. For decades he has been an advocate for bringing in men into the domestic violence conversation.

Koutoujian said that "As a man, it is important that men speak about this and example and model good behaviors. It's not for us to come and take over the situation, which is sometimes a tendency that men have."

He spoke about the cycle of abuse. "The first time I learned about it was at the DA's office. I came to understand the cycle of abuse. It is so similar case after case after case."

He then went on to describe the four different phases in an abusive relationship. Those include "tension, to explosion, to honeymoon, to calm. It is important to understand how it happens over and over again; aside from the power people exert to keep people in relationship, how this cycle can keep people in relationships," he said.

He explained that in the first phase, there



Wendy Murphy

is a sense of walking on eggshells, leading to an explosion in the form of physical or sexual abuse, followed by the reconciliation phase, where the abuser apologizes, says they will never repeat the behavior followed by a period of calm. "Eventually the tension builds up" and the cycle begins again, Koutoujian said.

Garibian asked the panel why survivors or victims chose to stay in such relationships.

"People stay in relationships because that honeymoon period or even that calm period was something they wanted so much and they didn't understand why everything else was happening," Koutoujian said.

Nackel explained, "In the years I've been doing advocacy, I hear more and more reasons. I think love is by far the most common reason. I think it's important to add to that every relationship, especially abusive relationships, start in the honeymoon phase. If any of us went on a date with someone and they punched us, would there be a second date?"

She said often survivors stay in relationships because "they're trying to get back to that relationship. They describe that to me as the real relationship. The problem is that abusive relationships are done very intentionally. They move gradually so you have a buy in, whether you have children together, move in together or have a house together."

Another aspect is immigration status, with some people being sponsored by their

spouses, who fear that if they leave them, the spouse could revoke their status.

"In the current environment, it is a particularly scary time" for those with their citizenship in limbo, Nackel noted.

Another issue victims feel is "who will believe me" or even some who shared their situations with friends and family but who in turn were either not believed or their suffering was minimized, she added.

Cleary, the activities coordinator at the Brahma Kumaris Meditation Center, spoke about the spiritual lack many victims feel. She said, "Without that kind of self-respect and self-love, people will stay anywhere, doing anything, to have the feeling 'I belong somewhere.'"

Murphy, in a similar vein, noted, "In addition to all the other reasons women stay, they stay because they feel hopeless. 'I can't imagine that anyone is going to help me.'"

Added Koutoujian, "For many of the people, they don't understand what a healthy relationship is. What they want is the best parts of that relationship, but that relationship can never be partitioned into the good parts or the bad parts," he said.

He said that is why it is so important to monitor their children's first relationships to make sure that they understand the dos and don'ts and don't fall into an abusive relationship, which can be a model for all future relationship.



Lauren Nackel

Murphy was even more blunt. "We raise girls to be obedient, to be nice, to be the peacekeeper. And that has got to stop. We don't raise boys to feel those same things. We are creating the imbalance."

She then offered some startling conclusions. "The number-one crime in every city and town in Massachusetts is domestic abuse. The number-one crime in every district court in Massachusetts is domestic abuse. When Peter and I were prosecutors 40 years ago, that was not the case, I promise you," Murphy added.

Many times they might call the police and the man would be arrested, but in a revolving door, the charges would be dropped, again and again. "What happens after the third or fourth call? She stops calling because she has learned that there is no hope, that she has to choose between living with abuse and homelessness," she said.

"And then we try to blame them for not speaking up," she added.

Koutoujian said that when he first got involved with the issue, he would often be the only man in the room, though that has changed now. "There is a much greater place for men in this conversation," he said. He was involved in the White Ribbon group.

Garibian said tight knit communities have a hard time acknowledging domestic violence. In addition, many may want to help but not know how. She asked what bystanders can do when they see violence.

Replied Murphy, "I try to train myself by

going to trauma therapists who teach how to deal with victims."

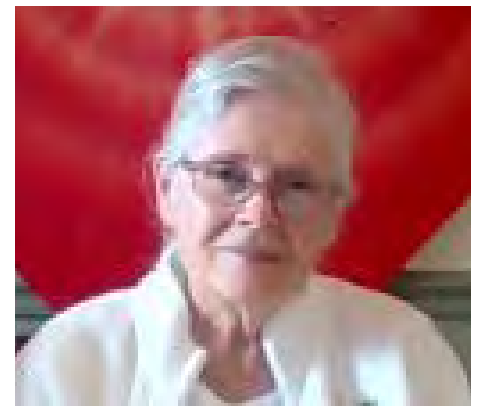
She said "There is no shame, there is no stigma. The only one who deserves shame and stigma is the abuser. End of discussion."

"Family privacy is a huge problem because culturally we think things that happen behind closed doors are not our business. That is true some of the time but none of the time when it comes to abuse. There is zero confidentiality in crime that happens behind closed doors," Murphy added.

The panelists stressed that abuse happens just as often in wealthy towns as in poorer cities. "It happens just as much," Koutoujian said.

Koutoujian recalled that when he was a prosecutor, there would be an arrest following a call to the police after a domestic violence incident. "The victim would ask for the case to be dismissed. Happens a lot. It could be because they love the person or could be because they are afraid or they've got a child at home or they have no place to go or their partner has no place to go. It could be completely financial," he said. "There are a lot of different reasons."

Often, it takes many times for a victim who reports their abuser to be willing to go through with pursuing charges. Those in law enforcement may get frustrated, he said, but at that point, they have to make sure they extend a hand to those victims.



Rita Cleary

Nackel concurred, adding it could take between seven to 13 calls to the police before a victim leaves an abusive relationship.

Murphy further explained that there are many reasons victims stay, including a fear of being alone, but stressed that instead of asking why they stay, observers should judge the abuser for their actions.

Offering empathy and a receptive ear were stressed again and again.

Cleary suggested that meditation would help victims to "calm the mind."

"Meditation invites you to step away from what is going on outside and you turn your attention inward, in the sacred space within. You begin to recognize that you are more than the body, there is a soul," she said. That can lead to "a power that comes from a connection with what me may call a divine source."

She stressed, "Healing is an important step no matter where we are in the process. I know this because I had this situation early in my life. I turned to that space when I turned inward and I began to realize that I had the same rights to a peaceful, loving, happy life as anyone else. When I was willing to do the inner work to heal the heart from the experience, then everything began to change."

A question-and-answer session followed the discussion.

Victims of domestic abuse can contact any of the institutions mentioned or call the national hotline at 1-800-799-7233.



Arts & Culture

Bayrakdarian Embarks on East Coast, Canada Tour

NEW YORK — Soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian will be presenting an innovative program at her upcoming concerts in New York City (November 13), Boston (November 15), and Toronto (Nov. 22).

Titled “Ancestral Songs, Prayers and Lullabies,” the collection of songs encompasses the tradition of an art form heralded by Komitas and continued by his students Parsegh Ganatchian and Mihran Toumajan. In an informal interview with Lisa Terrizzi of the Friends of Armenian Cultural Society, the presenter of the Boston performance, Byarakdarian offered some perspectives on her journey from a choir girl to an internationally renowned artist, and her keen interest and “mission” in discovering, probing and presenting Armenian musical gems.

In a way, this program is a return to her musical roots.

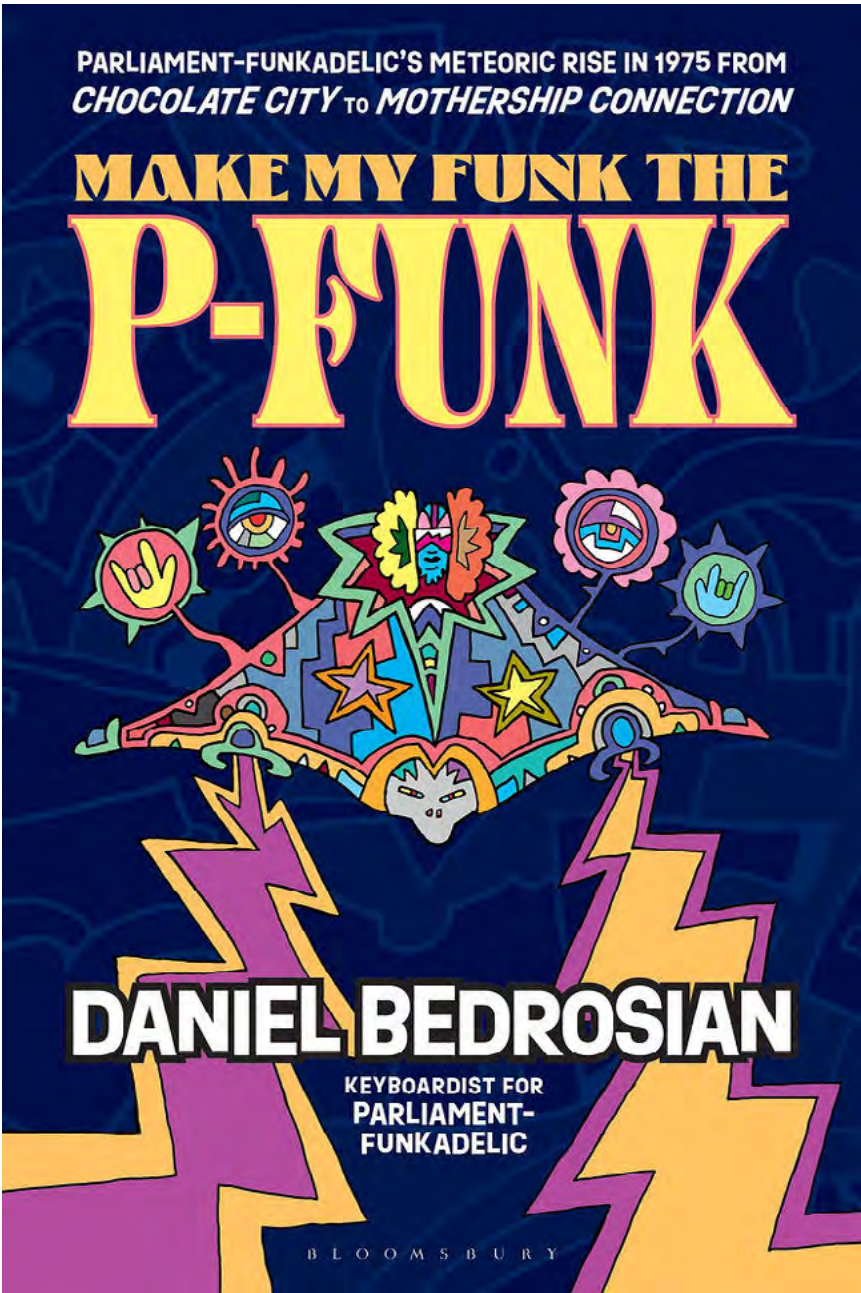
“My first love was, and continues to be, Armenian sacred music. Throughout my life, singing and discovering our beautiful and ancient hymns has been a path forward, path inward, and always a path upward for me, making for a uniquely personal journey. I grew up playing the piano and singing in our Armenian church choir in Lebanon. The only reason I wanted to take voice lessons in my late teens in Canada, was to be able to communicate freely with God



Isabel Bayrakdarian

through fearless singing that comes with a solid technique. I wanted to do justice to the beautiful melodies of our *sharagans*, without having the limitations of the body dictate my spiritual expression, hence the long legato that I had to develop early on in my technique,” she explained. “Classical Armenian (or *Krapar*) which is the language of our prayers, challenged me to work on my breath control to meet the demands of the prayers, where sometimes half a page of music (and many, many bars of music) are placed on a single word. The believer and the perfectionist in me couldn’t bring herself to interrupt a sacred word such as “Asdvadz”/ God, or Surp/Holy to take a breath and break the energy of the word!”

see TOUR, page 13



Danny Bedrosian Continues Writing on P-Funk, Performing Music, Creating Armenian Comics

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Armenian-American musician Daniel “Danny” Peter Bedrosian has just published a second book on George Clinton’s Parliament-Funkadelic (P-Funk) collective, a group which is one of the standard bearers of funk music and the longest running popular music band of all time. Bedrosian is a longstanding member of this group as well as the author of an Armenian-themed comic book series, *Sons of the Sun*, or *Arevorti*.

His new book is titled *Make My Funk the P-Funk: Parliament-Funkadelic’s Meteoric Rise in 1975 from Chocolate City to Mothership Connection* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 288 pp.). New England native Bedrosian said, “It wasn’t my plan from the get-go to do this. In fact, I wasn’t even sure if the first book was going to be published or made into a book.” However, that book, *The Authorized P-Funk Song Reference: Official Canon of Parliament-Funkadelic, 1956-2023*, published at the end of September 2023 by Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, became the latter’s best seller that year, according to Bedrosian, despite only having 2 ½ months of sales. In fact, it went on to become the company’s best seller, or at least one of its two best sellers, in its whole publishing history, he added. This recent success also caught the eye of Bloomsbury Press, which bought out Rowan and Littlefield.

Before the sale, Roman and Littlefield encouraged Bedrosian to write a second book, and the latter suggested writing it about the band’s successes and related developments in 1975. Why? Bedrosian said: “I make the argument that it is almost the most important year in the 70-year history of this band.” That year, the band put out three albums, “Chocolate City” and “Let’s Take It to the Stage,” while its third, “Mothership Connection,” achieved platinum status. “So in the course of a year,” Bedrosian said, “they go from still riding around in a station wagon to landing this massive \$275,000 prop [the Mothership, a space vehicle prop] at sold-out stadiums and arenas all around the world.”

An additional reason for choosing 1975 for his study is that 2025 is the fiftieth anniversary of the three albums which were issued that year.

In his new book, Bedrosian details not only the history of the band up to that point but all the historical happenings in the year 1975, and how they influenced band leader George Clinton and the group to write the type of music they did. This is the first proper monograph about P-Funk, Bedrosian said, with endnotes and footnotes. However, unlike his first book, which was an encyclopedic reference book, this book also is a good read, he said, even for people with only a casual understanding of this band, as it is in a more narrative style.

see BEDROSIAN, page 13

Music for Future Foundation’s Young Musicians Give First US Concert

BOSTON — On October 18, the Music for Future Foundation presented its first concert in the United States, in the culturally rich city of Boston. The concert, featuring the Foundation’s scholarship recipients, took place at the Scottish Rite Museum & Library, giving the audience a unique opportunity to experience the talent of young Armenian musicians. Organized in collaboration with the Friends of Armenian Culture Society (FACS), the event became an exceptional evening of classical music, showcasing the brilliance of Armenia’s young artists and uniting the Armenian diaspora community in support of their achievements and future development.

The concert opened with welcoming remarks by FACS Vice President Dr. Armineh Mirzabegian and Music for Future Foundation Director Anna Ter-Hovakimyan, who greeted the audience and highlighted the importance of education and supporting young talent.

see FUTURE, page 14



Edvard Sargsyan, Robert Seyranyan, Aren Toplaghalsyan, Lilit Stepanyan, Mikayel Harutyunyan Music for Future Foundation scholarship recipients in Boston



Lilit Stepanyan, Aren Toplaghalsyan, Robert Seyranyan, Edvard Sargsyan, Eduard Dayan, Lida Arshakyan | Music for Future Foundation scholarship recipients enjoying the view from the Prudential Center, View Boston Observation Deck, Boston.



ARTS & CULTURE

Danny Bedrosian Continues Writing on P-Funk, Performing Music, Creating Armenian Comics

BEDROSIAN, from page 12

When Bedrosian had joined the band, fortunately the bulk of the people originally involved were still around, and he had unique access to them as an insider himself. He was able to do dozens of informal interviews with them which became invaluable to him much later when he became an author.

Make My Funk the P-Funk will actually be one in a series of books covering different periods of time of P-Funk, and Bedrosian already has developed the idea for a book about the band in 1978, when the group had the largest number of charting singles, the most platinum albums and the most platinum hits. While the book covering 1975 had the difficulty that at least half of the people involved in making the group's albums at that time are now deceased, there is a larger swathe of musicians, artists, engineers and others involved in the 1978 period who are still around, and even some are still in the band. This makes obtaining source information from members much more easy. This volume hopefully will come out in 2027. He will then choose other years to write about, but not necessarily in chronological order, he said.

Prior to completing the 1978 book, how-

the doowop era? It is very hard to place it within any one era or pigeonhole it."

Thus he concluded, "In a lot of ways, my studies and just my existence as an Armenian gave me a lot of interesting insight into this sort of 'underdoggy' but extremely epic and masterful kind of historiography. It gave me a definite one-up in that."

He also noted a somewhat coincidental Armenian connection as there have been other Armenians involved in the band and supporting organization. He was not the first band member who was Armenian: that was Bruce Nazarian, who, he said, was a proud Tokatsi (Yevdokia in Armenian) from Detroit. And there were others on the management and publicity side. The reasons were many, he said, such as "sheer geography. The band started out in New Jersey and there is a prominent Armenian population there. The largest output of their discographical material was done in Detroit where there is a large Armenian population, and one of the first cities to envelope the P-Funk sound and to really take them in was Boston, which has a large Armenian population. Then of course they moved the office to Los Angeles in later years which again ... [laugh]."

Meanwhile, Bedrosian is working on



What's Next

Bedrosian is constantly traveling. He is on tour with George Clinton and the P-Funk Band frequently, and also does book signings. For example, on his last major tour, he traveled for 38 days involving 25 flights and 25 shows, and the average flight was 9 hours. He left August 27 and did 11 days in Japan, 2 days in Singapore, 8 days in Malaysia, 8 days in Australia and another 7 days in Hawaii. He flew home to Florida for 16 hours and then flew to Boston and did an interview for "All Things Considered" there. After 3 hours in Boston he drove to Bangor, Maine, for a book release show, and then another book release show at his alma mater at the University of New Hampshire, which included a lecture, book signing and curated concert. Then at 3 a.m. he left for the airport to fly to Arcata, Calif. for a show. He then flew home two days before he did this interview in October, very jetlagged.

He exclaimed: "Unfortunately, everywhere I go could be a vacation, but it is a working vacation — it is very much not a vacation! I travel so much that by the time I get home I don't want to go anywhere."

One place he wants to go is Armenia, where he has never been, but said he needs a fairly substantial free block of time, which he so far has not had.

At present, he continues to promote his new book, doing appearances at shows, at community centers, at schools, at universities and book fairs. He is also releasing his own music frequently. He said that his old New England Band, Sweet Mother Child, which was an 18-piece funk band operating out of Massachusetts and New Hampshire for about 6 or 7 years, when Bedrosian was in high school and college, has reconvened. It is doing an anniversary album which is coming out in December.



ever, Bedrosian is finishing an update of The Authorized P-Funk Song Reference for a paperback edition that is planned to appear at the end of 2026.

The Armenian Connection

Bedrosian, who has studied Armenian history, as always brings an Armenian perspective to his work. He made a parallel between Armenian history and the history of P-Funk, stating that Armenian history intersects with so many of the important developments of world history from ancient times to modern, while in his view, he said, "at the same time maintaining this strange otherness away from everything — a sort of isolated and lesser told history."

In this context, he said, "the interesting thing is P-Funk is almost like the Armenia of the music world, because it is this long-running thing. It has been around seemingly forever. It activates and absorbs influences, while also hugely influencing the world around it. And yet it is largely misunderstood and dealt with in a very cursory way, dealt with in a way where historians have trouble accurately placing it within the context of a music history lexicon. You know, where do we fit the Parliament Funkadelic? It starts in the doowop era, but does it belong in a history lesson in

finishing new issues of his comic book series devoted to Armenian mythology. The first three issues were later combined into a trade paperback which, said Bedrosian, sold so well that secondary and tertiary print runs had to be issued. Bedrosian appears at various comic book conventions to sell his comics.

Issue no. 4 was completed at the begin-

ning of this year, which is devoted to Asdghig and the children of Asdghig. This current issue is more female centric, as it focuses on goddesses. He also has finished the script for issue number zero (having a zero number issues is a type of prequel book), which deals with the creation of the world and the god Ar. After that, numbers 5 and 6 will deal with King Aram and King Ara the Handsome.

Bedrosian explained that after he writes a book, an art team works on the illustrations. He himself can draw and do breakdowns and layouts, but the team does some of the back covers and other parts. The team includes a separate colorist and a separate letterer, and part of the process, Bedrosian said, is giving the team members a crash course in Armenian mythology, as well as architecture, cuisine and clothing. Each story is really a story within a story, set in two different time periods and disparate locations

The majority of the audience for the comics are non-Armenians, Bedrosian noted, so it is a way for the latter to learn about Armenian studies, plus it is something different and fantastical for readers who already know about Greek and Norse mythologies.

He added: "It is great to have Armenian kids that are buying the comics. I didn't have an Armenian comic when I was a kid. I would have killed to have had an Armenian comic when I was a kid, something that had any kind of Armenian representation. I would have killed for an Armenian character, just one, one Armenian character — let alone an entire plethora of good, bad, great, mighty, wonderful, powerful, beautiful and different authentic characters that are not of my creation but come from our great traditions."

Bayrakdarian Embarks on East Coast, Canada Tour

TOUR, from page 12

It was not just music in which the young Isabel excelled in; she received her bachelor's degree in biomedical engineering (with honors) from the University of Toronto.

"I took singing lessons and kept singing in our church choir in Toronto during my undergrad years. The 'aha' moment for me came between my 2nd and 3rd year of engineering, when I took one year off to do an internship at IBM. That year gave me the time and resources to pursue my singing lessons more regularly,

rigorously, and with more dedication, which of course meant that my vocal growth shot up to a completely new level. I was hooked and I wanted more! I must admit returning to my junior year of engineering was very difficult, because the passion wasn't there anymore, and I couldn't wait to finish my degree and jump into music-making," she explained.

Bayrakdarian is currently Professor of Voice, Director of Opera Theatre, and Head of Voice Area in the Music Department for the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB).

And as for future plans?

She said, "I have a very curious mind, which has meant a diverse and interesting discography, and obscure projects too. I'm still curious, but now I contemplate a lot too! It's very important for me to choose projects that resonate with me now, and which align with my identity and ever-evolving mission. I have 2 different passion projects that I've been curating as part of my ongoing research and both of them share the common denominator of having the Armenian essence. Stay tuned!!"

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Jenan Zammar’s Lebanese Spiced Rice

“If you thought rice was boring, you haven’t tried this Lebanese spiced rice. It’s easy enough to make on any weeknight but fancy enough to serve at special celebrations and dinner parties. I grew up with this rice and I have to admit, my favorite part are the crunchy toasted nuts on top. It’s the perfect match for the soft rice underneath,” says Jenan Zammar, an Ottawa-based content creator and food blogger. “I grew up with my mother making this rice for Thanksgiving dinner or for Eids and other special occasions. It’s easy to make but full of flavor everyone will love.” (Eid means “festival” or “feast” in Arabic, and both are times of joy, feasting, communal prayer, visiting family and friends, exchanging gifts, and acts of charity, particularly the donation of food or money to the needy.)

“I’m a busy Lebanese mother of three and I love to share my recipes,” says

Jenan. “Years ago, I had no idea what I was doing in the kitchen but with lots of trial and error, I can now whip up a meal with little effort. I’m all about simplifying meals while still enjoying the delicious tastes and flavors that food has to offer. From my family’s kitchen to yours with love is my motto. This dish is a one-pot meal — rice is mixed with ground beef (or lamb), Lebanese 7 spice and cinnamon. It’s a popular dish in many Middle Eastern countries.”

“You’ll want to start by washing the rice really well until the water runs clear. Some people like to soak the rice depending on the rice but there’s no need to soak the rice for this recipe. In a pot you’ll cook the ground beef and spices first then add butter until everything is well combined. Then the rice goes in. It’s important to mix the rice for a minute or two with the ground beef to ensure every grain of rice has some of the butter coating it. This will result in perfect fluffy rice that doesn’t stick together.”

- INGREDIENTS:**
- 1 pound ground beef (or lamb)
 - 2 cups basmati rice
 - 3 1/2 cups chicken broth or water
 - 1 teaspoon cinnamon
 - 1 teaspoon 7 spice (or allspice)
 - 1 teaspoon salt, to taste
 - 1 tablespoon olive oil, to taste
 - 2 tablespoons butter (for the rice), to taste
 - 2 tablespoons butter (for the almonds)
 - 1/2 cup slivered almonds or any nut of your choice
 - Fresh chopped parsley

PREPARATION:

Heat the olive oil in a large pot. Add the ground beef, mix, and cook until the ground beef is just about cooked. Add the butter, rice and spices, and mix again. Stir the rice to ensure each grain has some oil/butter coating it. Add the broth or water and bring to a boil. Cover and reduce heat to low. Cook for roughly 10-15 minutes (if using basmati rice).

Set aside the rice keeping the lid in place. In a skillet, melt 2 tablespoons of butter with the 1/2 cup slivered almonds. Stir often to brown on all sides. (Do not burn the almonds.)

Transfer the rice to a Bundt pan pressing down to compact the ingredients together. Place a platter over the top and flip the pan onto a serving dish. Garnish with slivered almonds and chopped parsley (optional).

Serves 5-6

For this recipe and more, go to: <https://jenanzammar.com/spiced-rice/>
@JenanZammar, Foodie & Baker | Content Creator | Wife & Mom of 3 | Lebanese-Canadian



Jenan Zammar, winner of the 2022 Ottawa Foodie Influencer Award (Photo courtesy <https://jenanzammar.com/>)

Music for Future Foundation’s Young Musicians Give First US Concert

FUTURE, from page 12

Among the guests was violinist/violist Ara Gregorian, chair of the String and Piano Chamber Music Department at the New England Conservatory of Music. In his remarks, he emphasized the vital role of music education and the significance of supporting young musicians, noting the dedication, time, and effort it takes to become a musician. He also highlighted the extraordinary potential he sees in the foundation’s young musicians, recognizing their commitment and love for their art, and expressed his gratitude to the Foundation for its contribution to the development of the next generation of musicians.

Performances at the concert featured the foundation’s young musicians: cellist Aren Toplaghalsyan, violinist Eduard Dayan, clarinetist Lilit Stepanyan, saxophonist Mikayel Harutyunyan, violinist Robert Seyranian, and pianist Edward Sargsyan, a scholarship recipient from the Born in Artsakh program.

The program included works by Saint-Saëns, Ravel, Rachmaninoff, Garson, Bach, Komitas, Khachaturian, Chopin and Beethoven. The Boston audience also heard the U.S. premieres of two works by Armenian composers: Yuri Gevorgyan’s Sérénade for saxophone and Arno Melkonyan’s In Memory of Artsakh for piano, performed by the composer himself.

During the U.S. educational trip, violinists Robert Seyranian and Eduard Dayan had the opportunity to meet and participate in a masterclass with renowned Armenian-American violist/violinist Kim Kashkashian, while pianist Edward Sargsyan attended a masterclass with the celebrated pianist Lilit Karapetyan-Shugaryan.

Throughout the trip, the young musicians enjoyed exceptional educational and cultural experiences. They per-



From left, Vartan Arakelian, Arno Melkonyan, Lilit Stepanyan, Aren Toplaghalsyan, Mikayel Harutyunyan, Eduard Dayan, Robert Seyranian, Edvard Sargsyan, Lilit Zakaryan | Music for Future Foundation scholarship recipients after their concert

formed for the students of St. Stephen’s Armenian Elementary School in Watertown. The musicians also toured the New England Conservatory, visited Boston’s museums and landmarks, and immersed themselves in the city’s rich cultural life. Additionally, they attended a Boston Philharmonic Orchestra performance at Symphony Hall.



ARTS & CULTURE

TCA Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group Presents 'The Marriage Proposal' in Watertown

THEATER, from page 1

The one-act play was originally written in 1888-1889. In the current version, Armenak Kurusyan performed as the main character, Ivan Vassilevich Lomov, a young man who wanted to propose to Na-

Ani Chatmajian, and wardrobe, stage design and props specialist Marie Zokian, all came to the Boston area from New Jersey for the performance. Local members of the sponsoring organizations meanwhile prepared the set and the food and drinks. Arda Cam

was hired to set up the sound system and projector while BYO Events handled drinks.

Youth volunteers included Jacob Naroian, Ara Naroian, Lucy Simonian and Liana Shememian, while adult volunteers not formally in the sponsoring organizations included Hagop and Marsha Alabashian, Susan Adamian Covo and Sarkis Antreasian.

The organizers greatly appreciated the kind permission of St. James Armenian Church and Fr. Arakel Aljalian for the use of the church kitchen and hall.

At the end of the event, TCA of the US and Canada Executive Director Aram Arkun thanked all involved and asked any people in the audience or among their acquaintances who might be interested in acting locally to contact the TCA Boston chapter.



Armenak Kurusyan as Ivan Vassilevich Lomov, left, with Harout Chatmajian playing Stepan Stepanovich Chubukov (photo Aram Arkun)

talia Stepanovna, played by Talar Zokian. The director of the play, Harout Chatmajian, also acted the role of her father, Stepan Stepanovich Chubukov, a landowner.

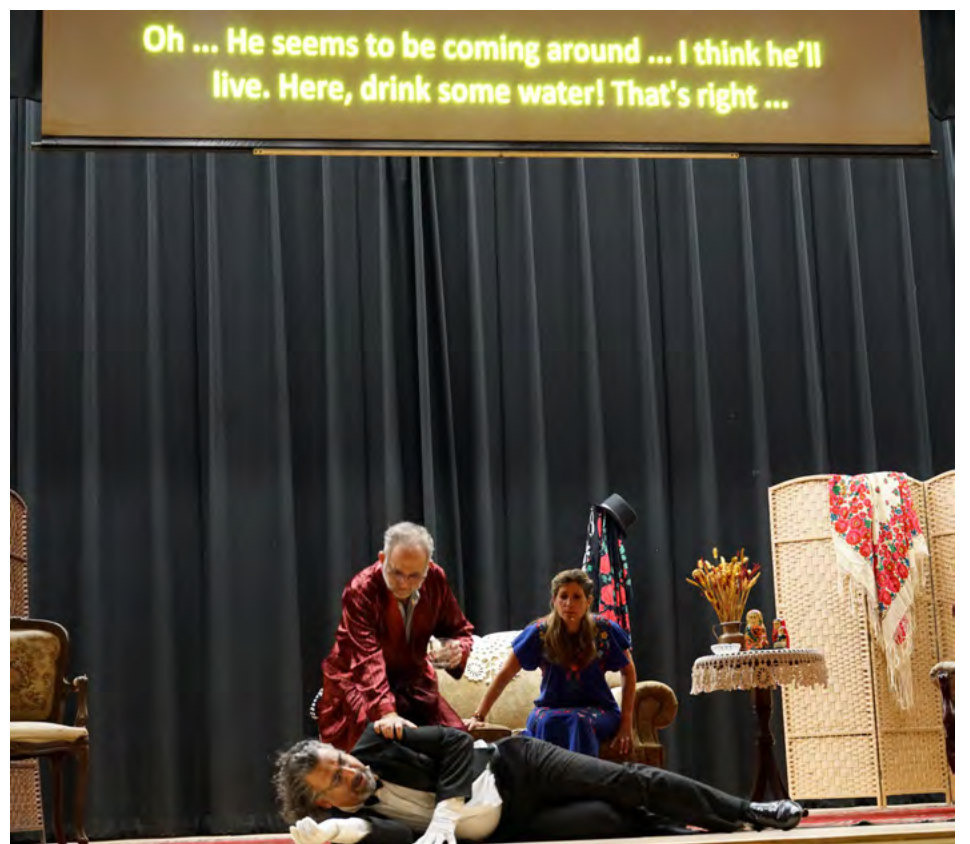
The three actors, along with subtitles operator Elizabeth Akian, subtitles designer



Harout Chatmajian as Stepan Stepanovich Chubukov, reading his newspaper (the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*) (photo Aram Arkun)



From left, actors Talar Zokian, Harout Chatmajian and Armenak Kurusyan, are applauded at the end of the play (photo Aram Arkun)



An example of the English subtitles above the stage (photo Aram Arkun)



The three actors with their flowers with the other TCA Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group members plus local organizers



TCA Boston Chapter Recording Secretary Maral Der Torossian introduces the program (photo Aram Arkun)



Books

Book on Operation Nemesis Telling the Story to Broad German and Austrian Audiences Now Available in Armenian

By **Aram Arkun**
Mirror-Spectator Staff

YEREVAN — Operation Nemesis, the effort to assassinate the organizers of the Armenian Genocide, continues to attract attention and periodically new books are published about it. Birgit Kofler-Bettschart is the most recent author of such an effort, entitled *I Killed a Man But I Am Not a Murderer*. Her book was first published in German last year and in Armenian translation this May (Yerevan, Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation, 2025). She was awarded a Vahan Tekeyan Award this October for her efforts.

Kofler-Bettschart was born in Tirol, a mountainous part of Austria, and lives in Vienna. After graduating the University of Innsbruck with a law degree and working at UNESCO in Paris (1988-1990), she came back to Austria to work for the Austrian foreign service. She went on field missions to gather testimony about the Yugoslav war and the crimes carried at that time, preparing lists of perpetrators.

She changed course in career when while in New York at the UN for the Austrian foreign service, she was asked to serve as chief of staff of a minister of health in Vienna. She worked at this position from 1994 to 1996 before creating several companies with her partner and husband Roland Bettschart. She said that at first, they created a journalistic agency – a pool of freelancers who worked for newspapers, while the two of them prepared a lot of books together. Then they created a pr agency which worked mainly in the medical field and a publishing house also in this field. She said that selling this agency a couple of years ago gave her the time to dedicate to writing books such as the one under discussion here.

Why Nemesis?

Several factors motivated her to write this book. When she was living in France, where there is a large Armenian community, she had the opportunity to make Armenian friends with whom she had many discussions. She said, “I was made very much aware of how few people knew in Germany and Austria about the Armenian Genocide and how many misconceptions there were concerning it. I tried to understand why that was the case.”

On the one hand, Germany and Austria were allied with the Ottoman Empire in this period and their archives are full of reports of what was taking place. However, there is a countervailing factor. She said, “I think part of it is

due to the fact that we have very big Turkish communities in these countries which started to come in the 1960s to work, and even the second and third generations [of immigrants] have this incredible thing about the ‘Armenian lies.’ I found presentations of schoolkids who were born in Austria or Germany, who live there, and who present at their school. When they do the usual presentations, they do presentations on the ‘big Armenian lie,’ and things like this. This is one thing that really motivated me. I wanted Austrians and Germans to understand the Armenian Genocide.”

Another factor was that early in her career, she was confronted with the breakup of the former Yugoslavia and the ensuing Kosovo genocide, as well as the concurrent Rwandan genocide in Africa. She said, “For me the big thing was always, how can you get justice after such an event. How can you arrange it so that ... perpetrators don’t get away with this kind of enormous crime against humanity?”

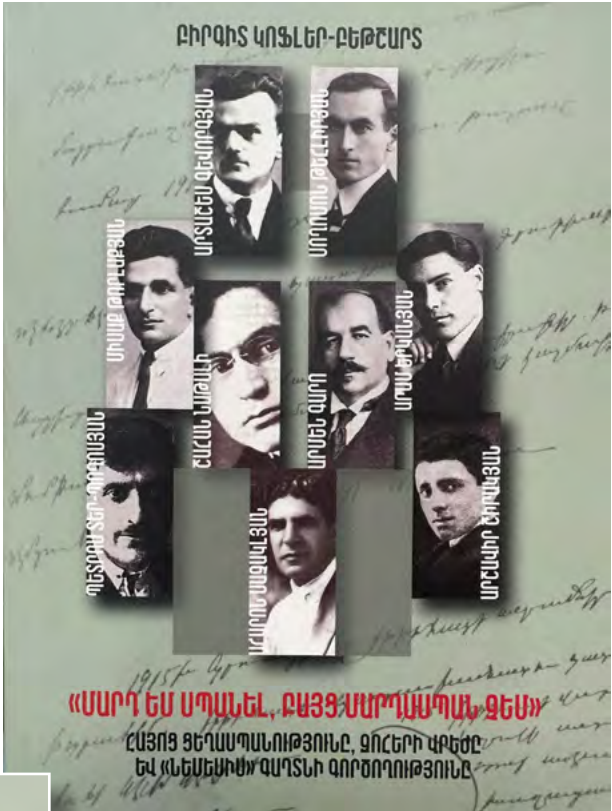
When she began to dedicate herself more to writing, she thought she therefore wanted to do a book about the Armenian Genocide, but, she said, “I didn’t want to add another academic book. I wanted to make it accessible to people who were not academic. When I came across this Nemesis story, I knew that this would provide a possibility to tell the story in a way that would also be interesting to people who are not at all into this topic.”

While not working as an academician, nevertheless she sought out as many sources as possible, including biased ones, in order to give the full picture. She said, “When I started to get into the story of Nemesis, my impression was that it is not one story. It is several stories. There is the one told by the ARF [Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the party that initially organized the operation], which of course has a certain bias. There are the other ones told by those who did their autobiographies, particularly the Nemesis members who lived in the US, because they had a chance to do so. The other ones that stayed in Armenia didn’t have a chance to do so.”

She went to the Mkhitarist library in Vienna and the Austrian archives, and used Austrian, German and French old newspapers of the time. She sought out descendants of Nemesis members, not only in the US but in Yerevan. She said she lucked out when she was doing research in Yerevan at various institutions and libraries, including the Genocide Museum-Institute, because she was present at the inauguration of a memorial to Nemesis two years ago in April, and there met some of the descendants’ families. She said they were very helpful, including the Gevorgyan and Yerganian families. In fact, Armen Gevorgyan later did the fundraising for the Armenian translation of her book.

Kofler-Bettschart pointed out that in many of the other books about Nemesis, the story is told through the lens of Soghomon Tehlirian and the others who ended up in the US in later years, but she wanted to show the lives and the terrible fates of those members who came to Yerevan and suffered a lot and were killed in the years of Stalinist oppression there. They could not talk at that time about their experiences, but her book incorporates their points of view.

She found some Russian sources but noted that she was not given access to the materials held by the descendants of Shahan Natali unfortunately, though they are no doubt extremely important and interesting.



Spreading the Word

Kofler-Bettschart said that the German edition of her book received some positive reviews in Austria and Germany, in which often writers exclaimed that it was incredible that they were not aware of the events of the Armenian Genocide. Meanwhile, members of the Armenian diaspora communities in these two countries expressed their thanks that a non-Armenian would write about this topic.

There were no real attempts to prevent the publication of the volume though there were attacks online, with threats and people calling what was written the “big lie,” she said.

There were several radio talk shows in Austria and Germany which highlighted the book and the author continues to accept invitations to talk, even to schools or small groups. There will be an exhibition on Armenians in Austria in December in an Austrian museum, and Kofler-Bettschart will be present at the inauguration and also do a workshop for young people in January there.

She said that aside from informing audiences that Austria and Germany knew what was going on during the Armenian Genocide and did not help, she highlights that some of the Nemesis attacks took place in Berlin. References to the Shoah or Holocaust, which people are much more aware of, are useful, she said. For example in book talks, many people were surprised to find out that there are public places in Turkey and Azerbaijan that would be parallel to a Hitler Place or Himmler Square in Germany today. She asks them to imagine if there was a law not allowing people to talk about the Holocaust because it did not happen anyway (whereas actually there are laws in both countries forbidding denial).

A third “angle” she uses for audiences is the general human rights approach, as Austria in particular has a long tradition of being very active in the field of international human rights, such as after the Yugoslav war in the creation of a war crimes tribunal. She points out that people like the members of Nemesis were put in a difficult position to pursue justice when perpetrators of genocidal crimes were allowed to get away with it. Instead, she says that the answer must be mechanisms on an international level to make sure that this type of crime is punished.

Kofler-Bettschart expressed surprise at the great interest the Armenian public has shown in her book, which she prepared initially to educate the Austrian and German public. She said that perhaps it was because a non-Armenian is writing on this topic, making sure that her writings are not biased as she does not have any direct Armenian interests.

She hopes that translations of her volume into other major languages, including English, may be possible in the future.

Meanwhile, despite her faith in international law, Kofler-Bettschart concluded: “The terrible thing to see is that we live at the moment where international law is totally losing its importance to many countries, where we see things like 120,000 Armenians driven from Artsakh and the rest of the world is just silent. In particular European doesn’t do anything – no sanctions, nothing.” On the contrary, it is working with dictators for the sake of their oil.



Birgit Kofler-Bettschart (photo Aram Arkun)



ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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

NOVEMBER 15 — Annual Fall Bazaar 12-6 PM. Holy Archangels Armenian Church, St. Michael & St. Gabriel. Delicious Armenian Food! Chicken Kebab, Losh Kebab and Kheyma Dinners; Delicacies & Pastries; Cuisine Table, Hayastan Table & Anoush Honey. Gift Baskets Raffle. 1280 Boston Rd., Haverhill, MA 01835 Phone (978) 372-9227 or email ArmenianChurchAtHy-ePointe@verizon.net for additional information.

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

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

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 — 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 Atinikian Hall, 200 Lexington St., Belmont.

DECEMBER 14 — Celebrate Valentine's Day, Saturday, February 14, Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, Nishan and Margrit Atinikian Hall, 200 Lexington St., Belmont. 7 p.m. An evening of love, laughter, and entertainment (surprise!). Details to follow.

SEPTEMBER 24, 2026 — Save the Date! Celebrating Contributions! Gala to benefit the Armenian Heritage Park at the InterContinental Boston.

NEW JERSEY

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

NEW YORK

NOVEMBER 14 — AGBU and the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America invite you to the New York screening of "On the Path of Identity: The Patriarchal See of Constantinople Through the Ages." The event will be held at the Diocese's Haik & Alice Kavookjian Hall starting at 7:30pm. The documentary will be screened in English, followed by a Q&A with co-producer Ara Kocunyan, editor in chief of Jamanak daily in Istanbul. A light reception will be served. Admission is free but RSVP is required - <https://agbu.org/new-york-screening-path-identity-2025>.

RHODE ISLAND

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

DECEMBER 12 — The Cultural Committee of 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.

Daniel Varoujan Hejinian's Art Celebrated in Yerevan

YEREVAN — On October 17, a program at Imperium Plaza took place, dedicated to the creative legacy of artist and poet Daniel Varoujan Hejinian. The event, bearing the symbolic title "Varoujan – A Journey Through the Years," celebrated his decades-long artistic mission devoted to humanity and peace.

The evening featured congratulatory addresses, musical and poetic performances, and documentary presentations highlighting the artist's works. Violinist Sona Sohikyan enchanted the audience between speeches with her gentle and inspiring violin melodies. The event was organized and sponsored by the international educational and humanitarian organization Peace of Art, Inc.

The event opened with remarks by Jozefina Musakhanyan, director of Projects at Peace of Art, Inc., who noted: "Daniel Varoujan Hejinian's life journey is as luminous as his artistic heritage. For him, peace is not merely an idea but a way of life — expressed in every canvas, every sculptural symbol, and every artistic initiative."

She presented the history of Peace of Art, emphasizing that it was founded in 2003 as a platform free from political and religious influence, uniting artists and educators worldwide in using art as a universal language of peace.

Actress and master of both Western and Eastern Armenian recitation Aida Asaturyan recited selected poems including "My Angel," "Mother Mine," and "Enough Al-



From left, Sona Sohikyan (violinist), Jozefina Musakhanyan (Director of Projects), Daniel Varoujan Hejinian (Founding President), Aida Asaturyan (beloved actress and master of both Western and Eastern Armenian recitation), Gohar Aselesyan (poet), Viken Sharoyan (Digital Director), Arsen Aslanyan (movie director)

ready." She said, "Varoujan Hejinian's poetry is a fusion of a mother's memory, the light of childhood, and the power of faith. He speaks not with words, but with the breath of the heart."

A short documentary followed, tracing Hejinian's artistic journey from his studio in Boston to the Mother's Hands monument installed before Lowell City Hall — a symbol of remembrance, motherhood, resilience, and rebirth for the victims of the Armenian Genocide.

Poet and honorary member of the Writers' Union of Armenia Gohar Aselesyan deliv-

ered an insightful and evaluative speech, stating: "Daniel Varoujan Hejinian creates not for glory, but for ideals — justice and humanity. His art speaks in the language of silence about the highest truth." She reflected on Varoujan's childhood, his mother's enduring influence, and the spiritual legacy that continues to inspire his artistic vision.

During the evening, official proclamations from the Massachusetts State Senate and House of Representatives were presented, recognizing Hejinian's contribution to promoting peace and humanitarian values.

Art critic and candidate of art studies Ar-

tur Avagyan described Hejinian's work as transcending traditional aesthetics: "His art is a moral and spiritual message addressed to all humanity." He characterized Hejinian as a versatile artist whose works intertwine classical and modern styles, with recurring themes of peace, motherhood, national identity, and harmony.

Avagyan highlighted the triptych "The Crime of the Century", comparing it to Picasso's "Guernica" as a universal symbol of suffering.

"Daniel Varoujan Hejinian's art is a prayer — a communication with the Creator. His brush speaks where words fall silent," concluded Avagyan.

Writer, publicist, and honorary member of the Writers' Union of Armenia Tatios Yessayan began his address with lines by Vahan Tekeyan: "Who can read the heart?" "Varoujan's heart," he continued, "is an infinite sea filled with doves of peace and pearls of light."

He emphasized Hejinian's creative uniqueness: "Though Varoujan was not born in Armenia, Armenia was born within him." Yessayan highlighted the poems "Hayastan" (Armenia) and "Yerevan, My Love, My City," which became emotional high points of the evening.

"Tonight," he concluded, "we honor not only Daniel Varoujan Hejinian, but the Armenian people as a whole — for he reveals to the world the nobility of the Armenian soul and art."

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE
UNITED STATES

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

Baikar Association, Inc.

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

U.S.A.	\$100 one year
Canada	\$150 one year
Other Countries	\$230 one year

© 2014 The Armenian Mirror-Spectator
Periodical Class Postage Paid at Boston, MA and additional mailing offices.

ISSN 0004-234X

Postmaster: Send address changes to The Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472

Other than the Editorial, views and opinions expressed in this newspaper do not necessarily reflect the policies of the publisher.

Patterns of Engagement in US–Armenia Defense Relations

From Strategic Engagement to Diplomatic Stagnation

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The defense relationship between Armenia and the United States has evolved over the past two decades, marked by periods of active engagement and more passive phases. While the early 2000s saw an increase in high-level meetings and tangible military cooperation, recent years, particularly under the tenure of Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan, have been less fruitful, raising questions about the direction and depth of the bilateral relationship.

Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan recently made his third visit to the United States since taking office. His October 12 visit was his first under the Trump administration. There were no high-level meetings, and, in particular, no meeting between Papikyan and US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth. Papikyan's only official meeting was with Undersecretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby at the Pentagon. No concrete results from that encounter are known. The Armenian and US military cooperation agenda generally revolves around existing programs.

One outcome that Armenia might get from Papikyan's recent trip is a change of the Armenian military uniform, as during his visit Papikyan met with the leadership of the American company Milliken in Washington, which specializes in the design and development of military uniforms.

It appears challenging for the current Armenian authorities to maintain productive relations with the Republican administration rather than with the Democrats. One possible evidence of this is that Papikyan's only high-level meeting with a US Secretary of Defense took place during his December 2024 visit, which was in the final days of the outgoing Biden administration. On December 5, Papikyan met with Lloyd Austin.

The meeting commenced with an official welcoming ceremony at the Pentagon. During the meeting Austin emphasized the historic significance of the visit of the defense minister of the Republic of Armenia. Though the US Democratic administration had shown an increased interest in Armenia and the region since 2018, there were no prior high-level meetings between the heads of defense agencies and the timing of this meeting is significant, with only a bit more than 40 days left till the Trump administration came to power.

There were no essential cooperation projects proposed by Armenia to its US counterparts at this meeting either. The agenda largely revolved around US assistance provided to Armenia. The meeting was historical in the sense that it broke the two-decade hiatus in high-level meetings but the lack of concrete results or proposals raises questions about its impact for Armenia and Armenian interests overall.

Some years earlier, on September 5, 2022 Armenian Defense Minister Papikyan visited the US for the first time to meet with US Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kah. The focus of this trip appeared to be cooperation in education and analysis as evidenced by three meetings held at educational institutions, including the Kansas training center, the National Guard, and the University of Washington.

When analyzed in the broader context of high-level US-Armenia defense relations, it becomes evident that Papikyan's visits have been notably less productive in terms of outcomes compared to those of his predecessors as Armenia's minister of defense.

Overall, the 1990s and early 2000s represented one of the most active periods of military cooperation between the United States and Armenia. While this was undoubtedly influenced by the historical, political, and security dynamics of the time, it was also a

critical moment to capitalize on a strategic window of opportunity in the country's best interests. As outlined below, there were several high-level meetings between Armenian defense ministers and US secretaries of defense. Moreover, new areas of cooperation were established during this period, many of which continue to this day.

Under President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, back in 1994 during their visit to the United States, Armenia's Minister of Defense Vazgen Sargsyan had a high-level meeting with his American counterpart Secretary of Defense William J. Perry. The two signed a memorandum on military cooperation in the Pentagon, which was of fundamental importance for US-Armenian defense relations. The memorandum was unprecedented, as no similar document had been signed with any of the former Soviet republics back then. This was particularly notable given that Armenia was engaged in war at that time and it was expected that if such an agreement was signed with Armenia, a corresponding one would also be concluded with Azerbaijan. However, even under the logic of false parity, this did not occur.

Later, under Kocharyan administration, the first meeting of the 21st century took place between Armenian Defense Minister Serzh Sargsyan and US Secretary of Defense William Cohen on July 24, 2000 in Washington.

During their meeting Sargsyan and Cohen signed an agreement on ending the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which included a provision of \$300,000 of equipment and training for Armenia. That was a significant visit representing an important step in the deepening of military relations between Armenia and the United States in the post-Soviet era.

Two years later, on March 20, 2002, Defense Minister Sargsyan made his second visit to the US capital. Sargsyan met with US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at the Pentagon. This was the second meeting between the two since Secretary Rumsfeld had made a visit to Armenia back in 2001. Sargsyan considered this meeting as the "start of US-Armenian military consultations." Secretary Rumsfeld thanked Armenia for supporting the war on terror.

Apart from meeting with the Secretary himself, a number of other high-level meetings were also organized for Serzh Sargsyan, including with US Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. His

negotiations were quite fruitful, leading to significant outcomes such as the establishment of the Humanitarian Demining Center of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia in 2002. Moreover, in 2003, the Kansas state and the Republic of Armenia were linked under the National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program facilitating cooperation between the Kansas National Guard and Armenian governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Health, Rescue Service, etc.

Only one month after Sargsyan's visit to the US, another visit of Armenian officials was organized. From October 31 to November 5, 2004, First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia and Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Mikael Harutyunyan (who became Minister of Defense 2007-2008) was in the United States. Harutyunyan visited the Central Command in Florida, the Kansas National Guard, and held meetings in Washington. Meetings were also organized with almost the entire American military leadership, such as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Wagner, and other high-ranking military officials. This further solidified Armenia's commitment to strengthening its military ties with the US.

In 2005, just one year later, one more visit of Armenian Defense Minister Sargsyan was organized. In October, 2005, Sargsyan held separate meetings with Stephen Hadley, national security advisor of the United States and US Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld assessed the prospects of development of Armenian-American military relations as "very good" and the visit of Sargsyan as "positive." He also stressed that he appreciated US-Armenian relations and declared that "events organized in the course of the visit are an evidence of it. We do not have the right to miss these good opportunities of reforming our army."

The next minister of defense, Mikael Harutyunyan, did not make any official trips to the US, as he held his position for just one year. But he did visit the US while first deputy minister of

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COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

With European Rabbis' Convention in Baku, Armenia Misses a Strategic Opportunity

A significant development took place last week involving Azerbaijan, Turkey and Israel. While we are focused on the domestic crises in Armenia, we must not overlook important events involving neighboring countries — particularly hostile ones — because of their major impact on Armenia's security and sovereignty.

This week, the 33rd convention of the Conference of European Rabbis, scheduled to take place in Baku, from Nov. 3-6, 2025, was cancelled at the last minute. It was to be attended by hundreds of rabbis from dozens of Jewish communities worldwide, including Europe, the United States, and Israel. This would have been the first conference of Rabbis held in a Muslim country. Israel's Chief Rabbis David Yosef and Kalman Ber, along with the Minister of Diaspora Affairs Amichai Chikli and Minister of Heritage Amichay Eliyahu, had planned to attend. Since the conference was to be held at the invitation of the Azerbaijani government, Pres. Ilham Aliyev would have delivered the keynote address, using the occasion to boast about Azerbaijan's alleged tolerance for Jews and alliance with Israel.

Prior to the cancellation, the Conference of European Rabbis had announced that Baku convention's participants "will explore Azerbaijan's growing relationship with the global Jewish community with a central focus on its potential inclusion in the Abraham Accords.... Azerbaijan stands at the crossroads of dialog, diplomacy, and Jewish continuity."

News sources gave a variety of reasons for the cancellation:

— Objections from Turkish political leaders such as Dogu Perincek, Chairman of the Vatan (Homeland) Party, who sent a letter to Pres. Aliyev urging him not to host the Jewish conference.

— Alarming security alerts and credible threats from Azeris living in Iran and Turkey intending to harm the conference participants.

— Threats from the Iranian government. The Jerusalem Post published an article with the following headline: "Iran threatens Azerbaijan into cancelling European rabbi conference."

As a result, Israel's Foreign Intelligence Agency (Mossad) imposed travel restrictions on the high-ranking Israeli officials and religious figures.

Azerbaijan relies heavily on Israel for the purchase of billions of dollars in advanced weapons, which played a critical role in the 2020 Artsakh War — killing and wounding thousands of Armenian soldiers, and occupying most of Artsakh's territory. In return for these weapons, Azerbaijan sells over one billion dollars of petroleum to Israel (43% of Israel's total oil imports) which is used for military actions in Gaza and elsewhere.

Israel National News reported that "hostile posts by Azerbaijanis residing in

Turkey and Iran, who oppose the conference being held in Baku, have begun circulating on social media." Following these threats, the Rabbis decided to cancel their convention and hold it later in another country.

Prior to the cancellation, the Conference of European Rabbis had announced that the participants would discuss "Abraham Accords, the promotion of freedom of religion, and the fight against antisemitism in Europe." Rabbi Pinhas Goldschmidt, President of the Conference of European Rabbis, stated that his organization aims to promote dialog, interfaith activity and public engagement.

Azerbaijan would have exploited the holding of the Rabbis' convention in Baku as a propaganda coup, falsely representing itself as a tolerant country for all religions and races.

Interestingly, in June of this year, the Conference of European Rabbis' Standing Committee meeting, which was to be held in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina's capital, was also cancelled. Bosnia's Federal Labor and Social Policy Minister banned the meeting, objecting to the mass killings of Palestinians by Israel in Gaza. In response, the European Union Commission issued a statement criticizing the cancellation: This "was a deliberate act of exclusion targeting Jewish religious leaders in the heart of Europe."

The leaders of Azerbaijan and Turkey who describe their countries as "one nation, two states," are close allies that share similar ethnic, religious and cultural ties. Therefore, it is rare for the two countries to publicly disagree. Nevertheless, disputes have occurred from time to time.

Back in 2009, Armenia and Turkey were on the verge of ratifying Protocols which would have resulted in opening the Armenian-Turkish border. Azerbaijan's government criticized the Protocols and accused Turkish leaders of going back on their promises not to open the border until the Armenian government made concessions on Artsakh. Baku threatened to retaliate by cutting off oil exports to Turkey. Azerbaijan even shut down a number of Turkish mosques on its territory. Pres. Erdogan finally succumbed to Azeri pressure and instructed the Turkish Parliament not to ratify the Armenia-Turkey Protocols.

This would have been an opportune time for Armenia to drive a wedge between Azerbaijan and Turkey. Regrettably, as always, Armenian officials "never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity."

The second dispute between Azerbaijan and Turkey occurred in 2024, when Pres. Recep Tayyip Erdogan repeatedly stated that Turkey played a decisive role in Azerbaijan's victory during the 2020 Artsakh War. An Azeri Defense official countered Erdogan by falsely claiming that no foreign troops were involved in Azerbaijan's military conquest.

The scheduling of the convention of the Conference of European Rabbis in Baku, once again put Azerbaijan and Turkey in disagreement. Azerbaijan is a close ally of Israel, while Turkey is taking an extremely hostile position against Israel — so much so that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Israel will not allow Turkish forces in Gaza on a peacekeeping mission.

Armenian officials again failed to exploit the conflict between Armenia's enemies. On the contrary, Armenia's leaders seem hell-bent on appeasing Azerbaijan and Turkey — even when the two are at odds with each other.

It appears that Stalinism is alive and well in Armenia!

Replace Russian Soldiers in Armenia with Greek Observers?

By Michael Rubin

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

American critics and Turkish propagandists in the Washington think tank and lobbying world continue to criticize the Russian troop presence in Armenia as evidence that Armenia is a Russian satrapy and hostile to Western interests.

It is an argument false on its face and ignorant of history. The Red Army established a military base in Gyumri, Armenia's second largest city, at the end of World War II to house the 261st Rifle Division. After the Cold War began, Soviet Armenia and Nakhichevan's border with Turkey, was one of only two the Soviet Union shared with NATO. Moscow redesignated the unit, first as the 37th Rifle Division and then the 127th Motor Rifle Division. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia redesignated the Gyumri facility as the 102nd Military Base. Its mission remains to guard the Armenia-Turkey border.

To ignore history and suggest that Russia's presence means Armenia is a Russian puppet is analogous to insisting that the US base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, makes Cuba's communist regime an American puppet. Such an argument would be factually wrong.

Armenia today is less in Russia's orbit than either Georgia or Moscow's oil-and-gas partner Azerbaijan. Armenia's 2018 Velvet Revolution undercut Russia's traditional influence in Armenia. Russian failure to protect Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians against Azerbaijan's attacks in 2020 and 2023 solidified distrust for

Russia at a popular level. Meanwhile, the Russian base in Gyumri is particularly unpopular among city residents due to the misbehavior of Russian troops that culminated in the January 2015 murder by Valery Permyakov of a local family of seven. Armenians resent that Russian forces did not hand Permyakov over to their custody, but instead insisted any Armenian court try him on the base. Armenians resent that he serves his life sentence in Russia rather than in Armenia. While Permyakov's crime was the worst, such criminality is the rule rather than the exception. Armenians complain that Russian soldiers engage in disorderly conduct and petty crime with impunity. In August 2025, Armenian protestors demonstrated outside the base calling for its closure and Russia's complete withdrawal.

That withdrawal seems only a matter of time given Armenia's pivot westward, Russia's troop shortage and its military needs elsewhere. While the Russian lease is set to end in 2044, it appears unlikely that Russian troops will remain so long.

While Armenians want little to do with Russia, they do worry about their borders. Turkey is an irredentist power, seeking to redraw boundaries and rewrite century-old treaties. Turkey's refusal to recognize the Armenian genocide, meanwhile, means that far from delegitimizing Turkey's drive to erase Armenia and Armenians, the Turkish government nurtures such beliefs.

As Russia leaves, Armenia should turn toward Greece to replace it. As a NATO member, Turkey's complaints about a Greek deployment would fall flat outside Ankara.

Turkey's effort to deploy troops to Gaza undercut any argument it might have about historical baggage or the inappropriateness of Greek troops on its borders. As a fellow victim of Turkish-perpetrated genocide, Greeks approach Armenia with sympathy and understand their fears. While Russia would resent any replacement, Greek Orthodoxy's ties to the Armenian and Russian church would bypass cultural incongruity.

Nor should an Armenian government committed to its country's security and defense stop with Greece. As President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio seek to advance Armenia-Azerbaijan peace, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has opposed any role for European observers to monitor the border and lines of control.

Trump and Rubio might sidestep the letter if not the spirit of Aliyev's contrived concerns by contracting Indian peacekeepers to help observe and patrol the Armenia-Azerbaijan frontier. If Aliyev prizes peace, he will have little cause for complain about Indian presence: Indians are among the most experienced peacekeepers, and their military is adept at patrolling mountainous, harsh terrain. Azerbaijan's own contracting of Pakistani mercenaries makes any complaint about Indian observers hypocritical.

Azerbaijan's invasion, the cynicism of Russian peacekeepers, Turkey's willingness to shred precedent, and Azerbaijan's demand for the dissolution of the Minsk Group may seem like hindrances to peace and security, but they do also open new opportunities should Armenian diplomats and Armenian diaspora abroad demand them. The future for Armenia's border security lay less in peace with Ankara and Baku, and more with assistance from Athens and Delhi.

(Michael Rubin is director of policy analysis at the Middle East Forum and a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.)



International Orbeli Forum Convenes in Yerevan

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan struck a cautious tone on Tuesday when asked by the media to comment on recent statements by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, who renewed calls for Azerbaijanis to be allowed to return to Armenia and again made claims regarding historical place names.

Speaking earlier at the opening of a two-day international conference in Yerevan, which was also attended by Azerbaijani experts, Pashinyan said that while the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan had been politically resolved, it remained unresolved on a social and psychological level.

In his remarks on Monday, the Azerbaijani leader, in particular, referred to Lake Sevan, Armenia’s largest body of fresh water, as Goycha, stressing that this Azerbaijani name appeared on early 20th-century Russian imperial maps.

He also suggested that the return of ethnic Azerbaijanis who left Armenia amid ethnic tensions in the 1990s should not frighten the Armenian people or state because “Azerbaijanis have never pursued separatism.” Aliyev added that Azerbaijan is would be returning to Armenia “in auto-

mobiles rather than on tanks.”

Pashinyan hesitated to answer the journalist’s question straightforwardly, saying that before doing so he would need to clarify what exactly the Azerbaijani president had said.

“If we are to look at Tsarist-era maps, well, let’s take a look... I already mentioned Kirovabad and Kirovakan, but did not mention Yelizavetpol and Alexandropol. In other words, we must make a choice,” Pashinyan said, referring to the historical names of cities in modern-day Azerbaijan and Armenia used during Soviet and Tsarist times.

The Armenian leader added that he had largely answered the question in his speech at the forum where he spoke about the state of relations between the two South Caucasian nations.

“A 30-year social and psychological reality cannot be stopped simply by turning off a switch or applying the brakes,” he said. “This logic is expressed from time to time both in Azerbaijan and in Armenia - in the media, in public and expert circles, and even at the leadership level of our countries. We need to find the right formulas for dealing with this phenomenon.”

Pashinyan reiterated his view that, politically, the conflict with Azerbaijan is over. “This peace is a peace created by our own hands — by Armenia and Azerbaijan —



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan delivers a welcoming speech at the two-day international conference “Orbeli Forum: Building Peace and Multilateral Cooperation.” Yerevan, Armenia, November 4, 2025.

and this is the first shared value the two countries have created together,” he said.

At the same time, the Armenian prime minister emphasized the need to treat history carefully. “If the Greeks start recalling Alexander the Great, or Italians the Roman empire, where would we all end up? We have read that history, and in my view, we have already created a new one. Even two

years is already history. We must be able to distinguish the past from the future,” Pashinyan said.

He also described Baku’s agenda of pursuing the return of Azerbaijanis to Armenia with just one word. “dangerous.”

During the same event, Pashinyan also revealed that he had formally invited Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to attend the European Political Community summit, which is scheduled to take place in Yerevan next spring. He said he extended the invitation to Erdogan during his working visit to Turkey earlier this year and expressed hope that the Turkish leader would accept it.

Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan recently said that invitations to attend the event in Yerevan had been sent to both Erdogan and Aliyev.

Erdogan’s administration said last week that a decision on whether the Turkish leader will visit Yerevan will be made closer to the date, while Hikmet Hajiyev, an aide to the Azerbaijani president, said he did not think that Azerbaijan’s participation in the Yerevan summit at the highest level was possible “under the current circumstances.”

Patterns of Engagement in US–Armenia Defense Relations

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defense of the Republic of Armenia and chief of the General Staff as presented above.

Meanwhile, Seyran Ohanyan, who followed Harutyunyan in this position, continued the tradition of high-level meetings with US officials under Sargsyan administration. In March 2012 Armenian Defense Minister Ohanyan had an official visit to the USA during which he met with his counterpart Leon Panetta, who expressed gratitude for Armenia’s participation in NATO missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Ohanyan also had meetings with David H. Petraeus, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Assistant Secretaries of State Philip H. Gordon and Andrew J. Shapiro. Thus, the Armenian defense minister managed to secure meetings with his counterparts during those years.

Despite the fact that a declaration on strategic partnership has been signed between Armenia and the United States, relations in the field of defense are not deepening. Moreover, during the Trump administration, the assistance provided to Armenia — including in the security sector — was reduced. High-level meetings, however, indicate the presence of important issues on the agenda. And despite the fact that the TRIPP (Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity) program is soon to be launched in the region, military cooperation between the two countries is not expanding, and no new programs are being developed.

(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.)



Among the people in the audience was former member of the Turkish Parliament Garo Paylan.

Armenia Launches Police Guard As Part of Domestic Security Reform

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia has officially launched the Police Guard, a new division within the national police structure, the government announced over the weekend.

The Police Guard is one of four branches of the country’s police force and is designed to strengthen Armenia’s domestic security system through what officials describe as more targeted and specialized tools. According to the government, the new unit is equipped with modern weaponry that meets international standards and staffed by specially trained personnel.

The Police Guard will be responsible for maintaining public order and ensuring public safety. Its duties will also include protecting facilities of strategic importance that are under state protection, assisting in the protection of individuals under special state security, supporting law-enforcement bodies conducting criminal proceedings, and participating in civilian protection efforts during emergencies.

Officials emphasized that members of the Police Guard will not be authorized to use force without undergoing the required special training.

The government said the formation of the Police Guard is also intended to better organize and facilitate the exercise of the

right to freedom of assembly.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan attended the inauguration ceremony on Saturday, describing the launch as a significant step in the ongoing reform of the country’s domestic security system.

“Today, we are opening a new page in history, and our expectation is that the Police Guard will become a qualitatively new service - for the Republic of Armenia, for its citizens, and for its own personnel,” Pashinyan said.

Opposition groups in Armenia have long claimed that the Pashinyan government is turning the country into a police state, using security structures to serve its own political interests — an allegation the prime minister and his political team have denied. The opposition, which has repeatedly raised concerns about police brutality during political demonstrations, has stepped up its criticism of the current administration’s security reforms ahead of next year’s parliamentary elections.



The Police Guard, a new division within the national police structure, has been introduced in Armenia