

Armenian Companies in Talks with Azerbaijan to Import Azerbaijani Fuel

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Several Armenian companies are in talks with Azerbaijan to import Azerbaijani fuel, Armenian officials have said.

Armenian Economy Minister Gevorg Papoyan spoke about the negotiations in an interview with RFE/RL on Friday, December 12.

“They [Armenian companies] should announce it, it’s their trade secret,” Papoyan said, declining to disclose the names of the companies involved.

He said that publicizing them at this stage would be “very problematic.”

In the meantime, major Armenian fuel importers declined to provide any information in response to an RFE/RL inquiry.

Noting that the majority of Armenia’s fuel is currently imported from Russia, RFE/RL asked Papoyan whether Azerbaijani fuel would be competitive on the Armenian market.

“If it is competitive, it will enter the market; if not, it will not,” Papoyan responded.

He added that the state’s task is not to influence competitiveness, but to “create as many opportunities as possible”.

“The rest is for the private sector to negotiate and talk,” Papoyan concluded.

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Tbilisi-based Israeli House to Open Unofficial ‘Embassy’ in Armenia

By Larry Luxner

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

TBILISI, Georgia — Israel has no embassy in Armenia, but Yerevan will soon get the next best thing. In early 2026, Israeli House — a non-governmental network of cultural centers representing the Jewish state — plans to open its 28th branch worldwide in Armenia.

Local businessman Itsik Moshe, founder of both Israeli House and the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business, made the announcement December 14 on the last day of a conference in Tbilisi marking the 35th anniversary of Jewish immigration, or aliyah, to Israel from the former Soviet Union.

“Israel Week” attracted some 300 people, about a third of them from Israel. The rest were mostly Georgians, with delegates coming also from Armenia, Turkey, Tajikistan and Iraqi Kurdistan. A few hours before participants gathered to light a menorah for the first night of Chanukah, news

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ARMENIA

State Efforts to Take Possession Of Its Properties



German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, at left, meets Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Berlin, December 9, 2025

German Leader Slams Russia After Talks With Pashinyan

BERLIN (Azatutyun) — German Chancellor Friedrich Merz accused Russia of trying to “destabilize” Armenia in the run-up to its parliamentary elections after holding talks with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Berlin late on Tuesday, December 9.

“It has become an almost disturbing norm that elections are attacked by the enemies of democracy,” Merz told a joint news

conference. “Russia, in particular, is trying to instill fear in Armenian voters about too close a relationship with Western partners. It is spreading falsehoods about the goals and values of the European Union.”

“Disinformation, sabotage, drones: Russia is trying to destabilize not only Europe but also Armenia through hybrid tactics,” he

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US Rep. Luna Introduces Bill to End Aid Restrictions On Azerbaijan

By Nate Ostiler

US Rep. Anna Paulina Luna has introduced a bill in Congress to end the restriction on aid to Azerbaijan.

Luna’s bill, titled “To repeal a restriction on assistance to Azerbaijan,” was introduced on December 9.

The legislation will now be forwarded to the House Foreign Affairs committee.

The Freedom Support Act was initially designed to promote the establishment of democratic governance and a free market economy in Russia and other newly independent states after the collapse of the USSR. Separate clauses for humanitarian, security, and anti-terrorism support were later added.

In October 1992, Congress amended the Freedom Support Act — section 907 — prohibiting any form of direct US assistance to the Azerbaijani government in response to lobbying efforts by the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), which cited Azerbaijan’s blockade of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

According to the amendment, the US president “may not provide assistance to the government of Azerbaijan and local governments under this or any other law unless he determines and reports to Congress that the government of Azerbaijan

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US Repr. Anna Paulina

Pashinyan Violates Constitution: Should Global Armenian Church Ask for International Judicial Intervention?

In recent months, it is well known to all that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his government’s judicial bodies have been rapidly stepping up offensive actions against the high-ranking clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and in particular the Catholicos of All Armenians.

This unprecedented behavior began initially as a result of the “indignation” personally felt by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who asserts that he is a faithful follower of the Armenian Apostolic Church, as a result of the alleged moral failures in the personal lives of some of the clergy of our church. However, the measures being implemented very quickly began to take the form of clearly state-backed crude initiatives to directly and physically intervene in the life of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the clergy who serve it.

When the prime minister now goes to attend a liturgy

every Sunday in a different church, surrounded by a police squad, and the media beforehand announces, in violation of the basic rules of our church liturgy, that the liturgist will omit the mentioning of the name of the Catholicos of All Armenians on that day, when the unprecedented arrests of high-ranking clergymen, often with highly suspect facts, continue, for acts they supposedly committed several years ago, it has become obvious that this reprehensible behavior no longer has anything to do with disquietude felt by the prime minister personally as a regular Armenian church “believer.”

What is being done is a clear violation of the requirements of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, and a crude and unauthorized interference by the authorities in the life of the church.

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SOUTH AFRICA

Aronian Beats Carlsen, Wins Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Final



ANNUAL WINTER BREAK

The Mirror-Spectator’s last 2025 issue is dated December 27. After a week’s break we return with the issue of January 10. Happy Holidays!



ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Jailed Armenian Archbishop Hospitalized

YEREVAN (PanArmenian.net) — Jailed Archbishop Michayel Ajapahyan was transferred to the Izmirlian Medical Center on December 16.

His legal team reported that the archbishop was undergoing examination.

Earlier reports suggested that Ajapahyan needed surgery.

The archbishop has been sentenced to two years in prison on charges of calling for the seizure of power and overthrow of the constitutional order in Armenia strongly denied by him as politically motivated.

National Assembly Approves 18-month Military Service

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia this week adopted, in the second reading, a draft law reducing the term of compulsory military service by six months.

Under the law, the duration of compulsory military service will be reduced from 24 months to 18 months (1.5 years). The changes will apply to citizens drafted for compulsory military service after January 1, 2026.

The reduction will not apply to servicemen who are already performing compulsory military service as of January 1, 2026.

Russian Diplomats Last Visited Karapetyan in December

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on December 16 stated that the issue of detained businessman Samvel Karapetyan is consistently raised in contacts with Armenian officials. Mikhail Kalugin, director of the Fourth CIS Department, said that Russian embassy staff in Yerevan have access to him.

“Through our embassy in Yerevan, we have ensured consular access. The last visit by our diplomats took place in early December.

We receive all necessary health updates about Karapetyan, including via lawyers and family members. He reports being in satisfactory health, is optimistic, and remains in good spirits,” Kalugin told RIA Novosti.

He noted that Russian officials continue to emphasize in discussions with Armenian counterparts that Karapetyan has been in detention for six months without a court decision.

Karapetyan has made major financial investments in Armenia’s development for many years. His Tashir Charitable Foundation focuses on preserving and restoring historical heritage, renovating religious sites, and advancing healthcare and medicine.

Armenia’s Writers Union Resists State Efforts to Take Possession of Its Properties

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

YEREVAN — Back in the Soviet era, intellectuals and artists belonged to various “creative” associations or unions through which the state used to support and control their activities. These included the Writers Union of Armenia, the Artists Union, Composers Union, Architects Union, Journalists Union, Composers Union, Theater Workers Union, Cinematographers Union, and various others. After Armenian independence, they continued their activities in reduced circumstances shorn of state support but usually retaining the buildings they controlled in the Soviet era. The Armenian state now is attempting through court action to take control of some of these properties which have become very valuable due to their locations. Currently there are ongoing claims on the three properties of the Writers Union in Armenia and the properties of the Artists Union, while the most recent legal process began this November concerning the property of the Journalists Union.

The Writers Union has its headquarters in the heart of Yerevan in a picturesque building at 3 Baghramyan Street. It has a writers’ resort at Lake Sevan composed of a guesthouse built in 1932-1935 and a restaurant and lounge built in 1963-65. The latter is considered by some a masterpiece of Soviet modernism. The Union also has a writers’ retreat at Tsaghkadzor.

In 2023 it had over 620 members including over 100 living abroad. At present, according to its president, it has about 540 members in Armenia. It also has honorary members as well as young writers with whom the Union works who are not yet members.

History

The 72-year-old writer and painter Edvard Militoniyanyan has been president of the Writers Union since 2013. In October



The headquarters of the Writers Union of Armenia at 3 Baghramyan Street, Yerevan (photo Aram Arkun)



Edvard Militoniyanyan at his desk at the Writers Union headquarters in Yerevan (photo Aram Arkun)



The Writers Union retreat at Lake Sevan in 2010, with then Writers Union president Levon Ananyan and Armenian-American writer Peter Sourian, at left, in the foreground (photo Aram Arkun)

of this year, he held up a stack of legal documents that he has to keep up with pertaining to the state lawsuits as he explained how the Writers Union came into possession of its three properties.

Militoniyanyan said that the buildings of the creative unions were built in the Soviet era, with the three Writers Union buildings being built specifically for writers. The Writers Union of Armenia was founded in 1934. The USSR Literary Fund was also established in 1934 to provide material support to writers throughout the Soviet

Union. The state took 10 percent of the proceeds from the sale of books writers wrote and published as well as from the publication of classic works and transferred it to this fund.

Aside from providing salaries to writers, the fund aided in the creation of buildings and their maintenance and repairs. In other words, Militoniyanyan said, the writers themselves also contributed to the construction and maintenance of the Writers Union’s buildings.

The first secretary of the Central

Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia Grigor Arutinov (Harutyunyan) upon the 75th birthday of the famous poet Avetik Isahakyan (1875-1957) agreed to the latter’s request to construct a nice building for the Writers Union, according to Militoniyanyan. Isahakyan’s grandson Avik affirmed this in his writings. Indeed, the first part of the building was built in 1950, and the roof later was added through the money Isahakyan received as honoraria for his literary works. Militoniyanyan said that a large portion of the building was built through the USSR Literary Fund in later years.

The Tsaghkadzor rest home was also built in this way, he said, and repairs and renovations were done in this fashion too, but with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990-91, the financial support of the Literary Fund ended.

Post-Soviet Era

The creative unions had to work autonomously after the independence of the Republic of Armenia and the buildings they used were considered their own property. Militoniyanyan said: “The state said ‘take them and do as you please to preserve yourselves.’ There were no documents and the situation continued just as it was before.”

In the Soviet period, because all land in theory was considered the property of the state, there was no formal system of registration of the rights of users or owners. In 1990, the Armenian government decided that those structures or production units that came from the Soviet Union to the Republic of Armenia were all considered state buildings or structures, but the creative unions were not mentioned, Militoniyanyan recalled. He said, “I have met with [President] Levon Ter Petrossian, who had himself signed that decision at that time, and he said that we had considered that they [the buildings] were yours. He himself was a member of our union and knew our history and situation well.”

Then in 1998-99, the Cadaster Committee of the Republic of Armenia (at that time called the Department of State Unified Real Estate Cadaster of the Republic of Armenia) acknowledged that the buildings of the creative unions, including the Writers Union, were the property of the latter.

Despite all this, almost 25 years later, the prosecutor’s office of the government of the Republic of Armenia initiated a set of multiple lawsuits in early 2024 claiming that the right to the three Writers Union buildings and the buildings of the Artists Union accepted as private property in

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ARMENIA

Armenian Artists Project Celebrates 5th Anniversary

YEREVAN — Armenian Artists Project (AAP) this August as it celebrated its fifth anniversary, continuing its mission to bring Armenian art to a global stage.

When AAP first started, there were skeptics but the late philanthropist Jim Mouradick, founder of AAP, managed to bring together a dedicated group of people who believed in his dream and were able to turn it into a living, thriving project.

What began as an online platform: armenianartistsproject.org, grew into something even more powerful: the Mouradick Art Center, a physical, authentic art space in Yerevan built to celebrate Armenian art and keep Jim Mouradick's memory alive.

Today there are more than 150 artists represented on the platform, with more than 150 original works sold overall, including sales from more than 50 Armenian artists to around 70 patrons.

Over the past two years, more than 30 artists have had group and solo exhibitions at the Mouradick Art Center.

On August 17, the organization celebrated the fifth anniversary of AAP and the second anniversary of the Mouradick Art Center. Director of AAP Narine Kochar recently reflected on AAP's beginnings and accomplishments.

She said, "From the very first moment I



5th Anniversary Celebration at the Mouradick Art Center

heard about the Armenian Artists Project, the idea felt life changing. The mission, supporting the arts, uplifting Armenian artists, and giving back to our beautiful homeland, has been the most meaningful part of this journey. Being able to contribute to something that combines art, community, and philanthropy has truly been a blessing. I'm proud that over these five years we've grown into a reliable, trusted organization for artists, for our customers

and art collectors, and for the charitable sector in Armenia. That trust means everything to me."

She said that AAP is one of the most popular platforms among contemporary artists in Armenia.

"We rarely need to search for new talent, every month new artists join based on referrals and positive experiences shared by their colleagues. That shift means a great deal to me. It tells me we are on the

right path," she said.

She further explained, "The Armenian Artists Project is not just for art lovers or collectors. One of our core missions is our charitable commitment: supporting Armenia and its people by directing a portion of every sale to reputable charity organizations in the country. When someone buys art from our website, they are not only becoming an art collector, but they are also becoming a philanthropist. It's a true win-win: the artist benefits, the buyer gains something meaningful, and Armenia receives support."

She added that previous sales have been mainly in the US. The organization plans to expand further into Europe and other parts of the world.

"In addition to our strong online presence, we also want to organize more physical exhibitions in Armenian communities around the world. Recently, we held an exhibition of 30 works and presented our project in Prague, Czech Republic. It was a wonderful and successful event, attended by both locals and members of the Armenian diaspora. We hope to continue this model and bring touring exhibitions to many more cities in the coming years," she said.

For more information about AAP visit <https://www.armenianartistsproject.org>.

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1998-99 in fact was unlawfully given by the Cadaster Committee. Instead, the office argued that the 1998-99 acts be considered as void and the buildings as state property.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan explained in a National Assembly meeting in April 2024 that his attention was drawn to this issue by the sale of Spartak Stadium in fall 2023. The problem, he said, is that during the Soviet Union, the property of the sports and creative unions was automatically considered to belong to those unions, though in fact it was the property of the state, so he said it was transferred without proper procedures and decisions.

He said that the unions would not be deprived of their buildings but it would be possible that they would be deprived of the opportunity to put those buildings up for sale.

Notwithstanding Pashinyan's statement, the ongoing lawsuits at present do claim those buildings as the property of the state.

The prime minister added at the same meeting that tens of properties of sports and creative associations similarly have been sold. This of course implies that there

accused of this). However, she pointed to the Artists Union as an example of possible corruption through selling its property at artificially low prices to individuals who later sell it much more expensively.

Pashinyan at this session said the government's legal efforts were about the proper management of "property belonging to the public" — meaning the property held by the unions at present — but were not intended to hinder the activity of the creative unions.

Militoniyana addressed the issue of potential sales of property earlier in a February 2025 article in *Grakan Tert* [Literary Newspaper] where he noted that the Writers Union and the Artists Union each had added a clause in their respective bylaws stipulating that their buildings will never be sold. According to the lawyer representing the Writers Union, Levon Baghdasaryan, the Writers Union voted 7 or 8 years ago to never allow the sale of the three Writers Union properties.

In September 2024, the Department of Protection of State Interests of the Prosecutor General's Office wrote about the lawsuits on its website, reiterating the claim that in 1990 the properties of the two creative unions were transferred to the Armenian state.

Another argument it made is that the Writers Union of today is not the same as that of the Soviet period, but was created in 1993, which in fact is the date that it was registered as a nongovernmental organization. Militoniyana in a February 2025 article in *Grakan Tert* points out the absurdity of this statement, as it had the same address, same individual writers and

officials, including the same president Vahagn Davtyan, and published the same *Grakan Tert* and other periodicals. Its bylaws of 1993 were largely based on an outline published in 1990, still in the Soviet period. The only change besides its registration is that it used to be called the Writers Union of

Soviet Armenia and this name was changed to Writers Union of Armenia.

A third argument made by the prosecutor's office during the lawsuits specifically about the Writers Union Yerevan headquarters is that the Writers Union only came to 3 Baghramyan Street in 1954 and prior to that the building had individual residents living there. Militoniyana in a different article points out that not only was the building built specifically for the Writers Union but that there are publications from 1951 in the Literary Newspaper indicating that it already was being used by the Writers Union.

An initial lawsuit was rejected by an administrative court for being presented

from the Cadaster [to the legal hearings]. They are being accused of doing something wrong but they do not come there. They do not present what they have done, how they have done it, and so forth. Whether they consider it right or wrong we do not know. Only we come [to court]. We have our own lawyer."

The reason, he said, was the following: "The Cadaster is a state institution. A state institution will not go against the state, against the prosecution."

When asked if there could be a political motivation in the actions of the government, Militoniyana responded, "No. We have around 600 members, and the Artists Union has around 1000. We are not small



A meeting of writers in one of the rooms of the Tsaghkadzor Writers Union retreat, 2013 (photo Aram Arkun)

past the legal deadlines for such a suit, but the prosecutor's office appealed to a higher court which overturned the decision and returned the case to be tried by the administrative court, Militoniyana related.

Militoniyana considered the situation Kafkaesque because the lawsuits by the prosecutor's office are all directed against the Cadaster Committee, not against the Writers Union itself. He said, "We are actually only involved as a third party but our buildings are the ones at stake and we will be the ones to suffer."

Moreover, he said, "They don't come

organizations. There are members belonging to various different political parties. We are not political structures that would be considered opposition, or not opposition."

The court hearings are scheduled to continue in 2026 and it seems likely that new suits will be directed at more of the creative unions.

(Full disclosure: The author has participated in several of the workshops of the Writers Union while editor of the literary quarterly *Ararat* more than a decade ago and is an international member of the Union.)



Statue of poet Yeghishe Charents outside the Tsaghkadzor Writers Union retreat, 2007 (photo Aram Arkun)

may be some corruption.

At a government meeting of December 4, 2025, however, Chief Prosecutor Anna Vardapetyan said that so far the investigations of the creative unions have shown that few properties have been sold (and the Writers Union does not seem to be



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broke of the terrorist attack in Sydney, which killed 15 Australians doing the same thing.

“This is yet another painful reminder of the rising antisemitism that we all need to fight. We live in a very complicated world where facts are often blurred and the truth is hijacked,” said Yitzhak Shmuli, director-general of the Israel office of United Jewish Appeal-Federation of New York.

“Your presence here is refreshing, and it gives us hope,” Shmuli, whose organization is funding the expansion of Israeli House, told attendees. “I want to thank you for bravely standing with Israel and the Jewish people. We don’t take this for granted.”

In November 2022, Moshe was the target of a foiled terrorist attack when agents affiliated with al-Qaeda and sent by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Quds Force attempted to assassinate Moshe on the street, in front of his own office. Fortunately, the plot was discovered by local security officials, who arrested several

suspects including two Georgian-Iranian dual citizens.

Moshe, a Georgian Jew, was a key figure in the massive wave of Soviet Jewish emigration that began in 1989 and continued well into the 1990s. The first representative of the Jewish Agency in the USSR, he opened the first Israeli House in 2013, in Tbilisi. Since then, branches have been established throughout former Soviet republics including Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Moldova, as well as Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and even India, Japan and Sri Lanka.

“With the rise of antisemitism, the growing concerns about the security of Jewish communities and the declining standing of Israel in many places, this model has really proven itself and could be part of the solution,” said Shmuli.

The most recent country to host an Israeli House is Colombia, whose leftist president, Gustavo Petro, is among Latin America’s fiercest critics of the Jewish state and Zionism in general.

“We have been working for 26 years



A menorah is lit on the first night of Chanukah in Tbilisi, against a backdrop of Israeli and Georgian flags, at a December 14 event organized by Israeli House (photo Larry Luxner)



From left, Armenian scholar Andranik Arakelyan; Hayk Margarian, chair of the Trade and Investment Commission of Armenia’s International Chamber of Commerce; Itsik Moshe, founder of Israeli House; Tel Aviv-based journalist Larry Luxner; and Nairi Margari, deputy chair of the ICC’s Trade and Investment Commission, at a December 14 conference in Tbilisi (photo Larry Luxner)



Georgian students attend a December 14 conference in Tbilisi to promote Israel and counter antisemitism. The event was organized by Itsik Moshe, founder of Israeli House. (photo Larry Luxner)

in Colombia fighting antisemitism,” Viviana Valbuena, of Bogotá’s Comunidad Mesiánica Yovel, said in a videotaped message to the delegates in Tbilisi. “We defend the people of Israel, the land of Israel and the state of Israel, giving talks in schools and universities, holding marches to support Israel, and standing on the right side of history.”

Armenia and Israeli House

Andranik Arakelyan, one of three Armenians invited to the gathering, said that in the absence of an official embassy, the planned Israeli House in Yerevan will facilitate public diplomacy.

“Our two nations have a very similar history, and we share the same values,” Arakelyan said in an interview, discounting suggestions that Armenians are by nature antisemitic. “There is a small minority who think Israelis aren’t pro-Armenian because they haven’t yet recognized the Armenian Genocide. But that’s just a small minority. A much bigger majority wants to see our two states work together and cooperate.”

Georgia and Armenia are home to about 1,000 Jews each, though the Jewish presence in Georgia dates back to the fifth century B.C. That presence nearly disappeared after the Soviet collapse, with nearly all Georgian Jews emigrating to Israel. Today, Israel is home to roughly 120,000 “gruzinim,” as they’re known in Hebrew. They originally settled in Ashdod, Ashkelon, Haifa and Beersheba, though they’ve since spread throughout Israel — and a few have even returned.

Links between the two countries remain strong. In 2024, said Moshe, about 310,000 Israelis visited the Caucasus nation, and Georgia’s Black Sea resort of Batumi is now among the world’s top 10 tourist destinations for Israelis.

In fact, Israel now ranks fourth in foreign tourist arrivals to Georgia after Russia, Turkey and Armenia, with Israelis staying longer and spending more — an average \$1,400 per visit — than any other nationality. It’s not uncommon to hear Hebrew in the streets, and one of Tbilisi’s top tourist attractions is the Museum of Georgian Jewish History, which chronicles 2,600 years of Jewish life in this

country.

By contrast, Armenia never had a sizeable Jewish community, and very few Israelis visit. No direct flights link Tel Aviv and Yerevan, and before Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, maybe 200 Jews lived in the entire country — and they were served by a single synagogue. The war brought an influx of Russian Jews into Armenia, dramatically altering the community’s profile.

On October 7, Yerevan Jewish Home, an organization led by Nathaniel Trubkin, hosted a photo exhibit marking two years since the 2023 Hamas attack that sparked Israel’s invasion of Gaza. And last month, Armenia’s deputy foreign minister, Vahan Kostanyan, visited Jerusalem to meet Eden Bar-Tal, director-general of Israel’s Foreign Ministry. The talks focused on cooperation in agriculture, high-tech, medicine and tourism — fields where each country sees clear benefits.

Arakelyan, who has a PhD in Middle Eastern studies, currently advises the director of Yerevan’s National Polytechnical University. Among other things, he’s fluent in Arabic and studied in Syria for three months, but hasn’t yet traveled to Israel. He hopes that will soon change — especially now that Armenia and Azerbaijan have officially ended their decades-long state of war, paving the way for regional international investment.

“Israelis aren’t very visible in Armenia,” he said. “Armenians need to feel their presence, and I believe one of the first steps will be the opening of this Israeli House. People would like to get in touch with Jewish culture and learn Hebrew.”

Arakelyan said other countries have similar institutions in Yerevan. Two examples are Spain, which has a three-story building where Armenian can take Spanish language courses and learn about Spanish culture, and Russia, which has maintained a Moscow House for nearly 20 years.

“I have a vision of seeing cooperation, and I want to break through the silence between our two countries,” he said. “Honestly, I think we Armenians have much to learn from the Jewish people — and hopefully Jews can learn things from us as well.”



INTERNATIONAL



Aronian Beats Carlsen, Wins Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Final

By Carlos Alberto Colodro

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (Chess News) — Levon Aronian won the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Finals in South Africa after defeating Magnus Carlsen in a controlled 1½–½ match, securing the event's \$200,000 top prize. The final brought the four-day competition to a close, with Vincent

Keymer taking third place against Javokhir Sindarov. Further down the table, Fabiano Caruana beat Arjun Erigaisi to finish fifth, while Hans Niemann prevailed over Parham Maghsoodloo in the match for seventh place. (Pictured: Levon Aronian with wife Anita Aivazyan and their daughter | Photo: Freestyle Chess / Lennart Ootes)

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charged without giving concrete examples.

While not explicitly echoing the claim, Pashinyan spoke of “hybrid threats” facing democratic nations. But when pressed by a reporter on the issue, he declined to say whether he sees Russian interference in the Armenian elections due next June. He said only that his government will continue to counter “flows of disinformation” with “active dialogue with our people.”

Last week, the European Union's foreign and security policy chief, Kaja Kallas, similarly accused Russia of spreading election-related “disinformation” in Armenia. The Russian Foreign Ministry angrily denied the accusation.

“Their statements once again prove that

Brussels' only goal in interacting with Yerevan is, in fact, to damage Armenia's relations with Russia,” said the ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova.

Moscow has sought to downplay its heightened tensions with Yerevan in recent months. Russian President Vladimir Putin said in September that Russian-Armenian relations are growing “in all areas.”

Underscoring those tensions, the Armenian government pushed through the parliament this spring a law declaring the “start of a process of Armenia's accession to the European Union.” Pashinyan mentioned the law after his talks with Merz.

“In this context, I highly value Germany's support for deepening the Armenia-EU partnership, expecting continued political

support on our difficult and lengthy path to the European Union,” he said.

Merz welcomed Pashinyan's desire to move his country closer to the EU. But he stopped short of voicing support for Armenia's membership in the EU. He noted that countries seeking to join the 27-nation bloc have to meet “quite a few conditions.”

Russian officials have repeatedly warned Yerevan of severe economic consequences of an EU membership bid. According to official statistics, Russia accounted for over 35 percent of Armenia's foreign trade in the first half of this year, compared with the EU's 12 percent share. Armenia also buys the bulk of its natural gas from Russia at a price that is set well below international market-based levels.

Armenian Companies in Talks on Importing Azerbaijani Fuel

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Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan, who also serves as Armenia's representative on the border demarcation commission with Azerbaijan, again in response to an RFE/RL inquiry, confirmed that during his visit to Gabala, Azerbaijan, in late November, the issue of importing Azerbaijani fuel was discussed with the Azerbaijani side.

“There are opportunities for cooperation,” Grigoryan said, while declining to provide further details.

Grigoryan also said that the discussions were ongoing regarding the mutual trade of other goods.

The announcement came amidst speculation that Georgia may be hampering efforts to establish trade between Armenia

and Azerbaijan.

Earlier in December, the Armenian Economy Ministry confirmed it held discussions with Georgia on the possible first transit of Azerbaijani fuel through Georgian territory.

Georgian authorities said they had approved requests from “partner countries” for a one-time transit, charging no tariffs.

This came in response to an article on Minval.az, a pro-government Azerbaijani media outlet, suggesting that Georgia was demanding exorbitant tariffs for Azerbaijani oil and petroleum products bound for Armenia. They called this an example of Tbilisi trying “to break the peace” in the region, adding that Georgia “cannot afford the luxury of ignoring” the interests of Azerbaijan.

According to Minval.az, Georgia was demanding payment of \$0.82 per ton per kilometer for the transit of fuel to Armenia.

They compared this to \$0.02 per ton per kilometer charged by Azerbaijan for shipments from Russia to Georgia, and the \$0.04–\$0.05 per ton per kilometer charged by Georgia for fuel heading to ports on Georgia's Black Sea coast.

The reopening of transport routes has been one of the key and most sensitive issues in ongoing peace negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In November, Armenia received wheat by rail through Azerbaijan and Georgia — first from Russia, then from Kazakhstan — a historic development as the two countries continue moving forward in their peace process.

INTERNATIONAL

Iran Opposes Trump Plan for Caucasus

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Ali Akbar Velayati, Senior Advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution for International Affairs, says Iran opposes US President Donald Trump's Caucasus plan as it poses a serious threat to its security.

Velayati made the remarks in a meeting with Armenia's ambassador Grigor Hakobyan on December 15, MNA reported.

“The so-called Trump plan regarding the Caucasus is no different from the Zangezur Corridor, and the Islamic Republic is absolutely opposed to it,” he said.

Velayati explained that the corridor creates “conditions for NATO's presence north of Iran” and poses a serious threat to the security of northern Iran and southern Russia.

He noted that the US militarily enters a region under the guise of conducting economic activities.

“Experience has shown that the Americans first enter sensitive regions with seemingly economic projects, but gradually their presence expands to military and security dimensions,” he said, adding that “The opening of US presence at Iran's borders in any form has clear security consequences.”

MP: Armenia Has No NATO Aspirations

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Sargis Khandanyan, head of the Armenian Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee and MP from the ruling Civil Contract party, stated on December 16 that “NATO cannot have any presence in Armenia.”

“Armenia has no aspiration to become a NATO member,” Khandanyan said during a media briefing, as reported by Aysor.am.

He explained that Armenia maintains a certain framework of cooperation with NATO, but this does not involve NATO's physical presence in the country.

Baku Holds Conference On ‘Western Azerbaijan’

BAKU — The *Gulf Observer* publication covered a recent conference by the “Western Azerbaijan Community” convened the third international conference titled “Cultural Heritage and the Right of Return: Restoring the Cultural Heritage of Azerbaijanis Displaced from Armenia as a Path to Justice, Reconciliation, and Peace.”

In his opening remarks, Aziz Alakbarli, Chairman of the Western Azerbaijan Community, stressed that the Community's central mission is to ensure the return of Azerbaijanis who were expelled from Armenia.

Other speakers and panelists included Professor Yaşar Sarı of Ibn Khaldun University, French historian Maxime Gauvin, Harvard University Research Fellow Mark Nathan Kramer, and Professor Carlos Uriarte from a Spanish pan-European organization, UK representative Klaus-Peter Ralph Jürgens and American academic Michael Martin Gunter.



INTERNATIONAL

Pashinyan in Berlin Meets Leaders, Answers Questions from Public

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's recent two-day visit to Germany signaled a major advance in bilateral relations, but grave concerns about his domestic and regional agenda dimmed the glow of this achievement. His official German hosts rolled out the red carpet for him, but as his motorcade was approaching government quarters, Pashinyan could not avoid seeing a group of 30 demonstrators protesting his domestic and regional policies. They represented German and international human rights organizations, Society for Threatened Peoples (GfbV), Working Group Recognition, Against Genocide, for International Solidarity (AGA), Christian Solidarity International (CSI), and also the Central Council of Armenians in Germany (ZAD). And they had a different message of welcome.

Arriving on December 8, Pashinyan had a packed schedule of high-level meetings, which began with a private session with Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and was followed by a discussion and joint press conference with Chancellor Friedrich Merz. On December 9, he delivered a keynote speech at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), and a round table discussion with international experts, then spoke at the German Chamber of Commerce (DIHK) in Berlin. The third day took him to Hamburg, where Mayor Peter Tschentscher received him, followed by a session with the local Chamber of Commerce. In conclusion, he met privately with the Armenian Community in Hamburg. (See related story on Page 1.)

A Strategic Partnership with Germany

Although the content of Pashinyan's private meeting with President Steinmeier, followed by an extended format, has not been made public, topics covered included bilateral relations and the ongoing peace process with Azerbaijan. The centerpiece of the visit was the ceremonial signing of a joint Declaration on the Strategic Agenda for Bilateral Partnership between Armenia and Germany. As part of the introduction, the document states that the parties share a positive assessment of the Armenian-Azerbaijan peace agreement and promote normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as Armenia and Turkey. As detailed in the points, the agreement covers political and diplomatic cooperation, economic and trade relations with emphasis on developing capacities in the energy, climate, and water sectors, as well as rule of law and constitutional reform. A key item relates to the cultural and educational realm, with cooperation in academic work, research and scholarship, as well as in science and technology. The last item, significantly, relates to security and defense.

After the two heads of government had signed, and exchanged the documents, Merz officially welcomed his guest. He cited Steinmeier's recent visit to Armenia and his own planned visit next May, to attend the European Political Community Summit in Yerevan, as examples of rapidly developing bilateral relations. Merz focused in the press conference on the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace talks which he characterized as "a great achievement" and seemed to link a successful outcome to chances for EU membership, for "Armenia and Azerbaijan." Merz also warned of Russian destabilization efforts through cyber-attacks and drones, an oblique reference to the geopolitical thrust of the matter.

His Armenian guest lauded the strategic partnership as "truly historic." Pashinyan thanked Germany for its continuing support, also regarding the peace talks.

Like Merz, Pashinyan then moved to the issue of EU membership, referencing the National Assembly's vote last March for launching the process, and thanking Germany for its support.

Contentious Issues

If the discussion in the opening ceremony proceeded calmly, in his subsequent encounters Pashinyan also had to address controversial aspects of issues, and his attitude ranged from euphoric to ambiguous, nervous to evasive. The points of contention included constitutional change, territorial concessions, church and state relations, and political prisoners in Azerbaijan.

At the German Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)

gathering, hosted by its vice president Rolf Nikol, Pashinyan delivered a keynote detailing the terms of the peace agreement with Azerbaijan and expressing hope for normalization of relations with Turkey as well as EU membership.

His address was greeted with great favor, the peace process hailed as a "breakthrough" and "example for resolution of other conflicts." Pashinyan was congratulated by one participant from Georgia for providing a "great example of personal leadership," and was asked about his role and legacy. Pashinyan attributed the agreement to a change in perceptions: after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, there was a "new situation but not new perceptions." Now, there is a new perception of regional relations.

Several participants referred to reports that the peace

and that of almost all his government members. "I have Jesus Christ in my heart," he said.

It should be underlined that none of these questions were hostile; on the contrary, they were often prefaced with words of praise. One questioner told Pashinyan, "You are the only hope for democracy in Armenia and the region," and others expressed desire to contribute positively to the 2026 elections. The Azerbaijan ambassador had warm words for Pashinyan as well. He quipped that, although his German friends have often stressed the significance of Franco-German reconciliation as a model for overcoming conflict, that process took 18 years, whereas his country and Armenia had taken only 5, within a 13 year process.

And the Political Prisoners?

The last question raised at the DGAP event was an exception and was most relevant. A young Armenian woman asked about "the prisoners being held hostage in



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Chancellor Friedrich Merz

agreement included Armenia's commitment to change its Constitution. Without any polemical intentions, one questioner simply asked; could this be an obstacle? Pashinyan, referring to accounts of critical public opinion in his country, said that in a democracy, leadership involves "changing public opinion." As for the Constitution itself, he denied Azerbaijani claims that the Armenian Constitution contained territorial claims on Azerbaijan.

Regarding the view among some in Armenia, that Azerbaijan has territorial claims on Armenia, he said the issue was not raised, because it has already been addressed. He said, Article 1 of the agreement asserts mutual recognition of territorial integrity, therefore no claims exist.

He continued to explain that international agreements have precedence and that the peace document would be examined by Armenia's Constitutional Court to determine whether it is compatible and consistent; if it is, it will be ratified; if not, he would initiate constitutional changes. He stated that there was no obstacle in the Constitution, then added that in 2018 there was an agenda for a new Constitution, which, according to a recent party congress decision, would be discussed following the 2026 elections. An "internal" issue, it was not for public discussion.

A related question dealt with the "historical narrative," a reference to genocide recognition and how it is dealt with in the classroom. Pashinyan's response seemed to argue that the issue is not what happened, "suffering, genocide..." but the need to ensure history is not repeated, to create a new, optimistic history.

Another touchy question concerned the "hostility of the Church" to Pashinyan's government. In addressing this "sensitive topic," Pashinyan called for compliance of the Church with its own rulings, and accountability, lest the clergy become a tool of foreign influence. He questioned the origin of financing of the Church, the contrast in living standards among clergymen, and their integrity. He cited his own membership in the Armenian Apostolic Church

the country you are making peace with," and stressed that legal measures were necessary. In his response, Pashinyan referred to the "detainees" and said this very "sensitive issue would be addressed more easily in the atmosphere of cooperation and peace than in an atmosphere of conflict."

How should Pashinyan's visit be evaluated? By any measure, the strategic partnership with Germany is a plus, especially in its economic, trade, and scientific-cultural dimensions. One question it raises is, what are the hitches? Is it a reward for Pashinyan's willingness to sacrifice territory, the Constitution, and the defense of illegally imprisoned Armenians – and thereby the rule of law, touted so self-righteously by Europe? Is it enticement to play the pawn in a geopolitical chess game? What might have, should have resulted from Pashinyan's high-level visit?

The group of human rights activists whom Pashinyan passed en route to his reception, had issued an appeal to Merz, in which they outlined the issues to be addressed. They called on him to ensure that the "urgent human rights and humanitarian questions in the region not be relegated to side issues but rather be treated on the same level as bilateral cooperation and economic policy." Furthermore, they reiterated an earlier call on the chancellor to pursue a "just and durable peace" between Azerbaijan and Armenia, for which the "immediate release of illegally held prisoners in Azerbaijan as well as the members of the former political leadership of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) would be confidence-building measures." The appeal calls for prisoner release as an "urgent precondition" — not a result, as Pashinyan would have it — for any "credible peace process." Furthermore, the group stresses the need to address problematic and destabilizing developments inside Armenia: limitations on freedom of opinion, "politically motivated imprisonment of government critics" as well as the "arrest of four archbishops" — measures that "raise questions about the rule of law and protection of religious and civil liberties."

Community News

Assembly Observes UN Human Rights And Genocide Commemoration

WASHINGTON — As the United Nations this week marks both the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and the Prevention of This Crime (December 9) and Human Rights Day (December 10), the Armenian Assembly of America reaffirms the urgent responsibility of the international community to uphold human rights and ensure accountability for violations wherever they occur.

This year’s observance coincides with the tenth anniversary of the UN’s genocide commemoration day, a reminder that innocent populations continue to suffer the consequences of unchecked aggression and impunity. These principles resonate deeply with the Armenian people in the wake of the ethnic cleansing of 120,000 Armenians from their ancestral homeland of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) in 2023, carried out by the Aliyev regime of Azerbaijan.

As Members of Congress and expert witnesses testified at the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, the deliberate blockade that deprived Armenians of food, medicine, electricity, and fuel constituted an act of genocide. Armenian Assembly of America Co-Chair Talin Yacoubian also testified on these issues before Congress earlier this year, emphasizing the urgent need to enforce Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act and the critical steps required to support Armenia and the people of Artsakh. “Armenia has been negotiating under extreme duress, with Azerbaijani soldiers illegally occupying Armenia and Armenian hostages still unjustly held,” stated Yacoubian. “Aliyev has said, ‘we have destroyed Armenia,’ and warned that the ‘iron fist is in place and always will be.’ Preventing further genocide requires securing the release of all hostages and upholding the fundamental human rights of the people of Artsakh, including their fundamental right of return.”

Azerbaijan’s Aliyev regime continues to commit serious human rights violations, including the unlawful detention of Armenian civilians and prisoners of war, the destruction of Armenian cultural and religious heritage, the illegal occupation of sovereign Armenian territory, and the suppression of fundamental freedoms within Azerbaijan, as highlighted by human rights experts. These actions require a firm and principled international response.

“This week, as we mark the International Day of Genocide Commemoration and Human Rights Day, we are reminded that preventing future atrocities requires confronting present abuses. Human rights begin with the most basic of freedoms, and today, Armenian hostages held in Baku by the Aliyev regime are still deprived of both,” stated Co-Chair Oscar Tatosian. “Their unlawful

see COMMEMORATION, page 9



Products from women-owned small businesses in Armenia on display

FAR Hosts DC Event showcasing Business Accelerator Alumni to Support ‘She Can’ Initiative

WASHINGTON — The Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) recently held a pop-up holiday shopping event in the nation’s capital, showcasing products from women-owned small businesses in Armenia that were founded by alumni of FAR’s “She Can” business accelerator program. Proceeds from the fundraising event will provide scholarships to encourage other women to explore entrepreneurship as a way out of the economic struggles many displaced Artsakh natives face as a result of the conflict with Azerbaijan.

The Yerevan Café D.C., in the vibrant Adams Morgan neighborhood, known for its eclectic mix of restaurants, lively nightlife and diverse culture, was an ideal location to showcase the talent, style, and artistry of these upstart Armenian brands.

D.C. locals crowded the café to shop for holiday gifts and learn more about the creative forces behind these authentic Armenian brands and products. “The craftsmanship displayed was a wonderful showcase of Armenian culture and spirit,” said shopper Alexander Ateshian.

The Women Behind the Brands

All the brands and products showcased at the event were founded by women from Artsakh who have been displaced from their homeland. With help from the She Can business accelerator, these women helped change their life stories by starting new businesses in Armenia. These included:

Nen Artsakh showcased a variety of hand-crafted and vibrant pillows, bags, and wall art using an intricate tapestry technique.

A passion for crocheting helped Frisson to build a thriving online business selling intricate handmade clothes, tablecloths, ornaments, and bespoke custom orders.

Voskeham offered a variety of artisanal dried fruit and vegetable products, including fruit and vegetable chips, dried vegetable mixes for soups and other recipes, and fruit leather. All Voskeham products are sugar and preservative-free.

Min Takun Tegh (“My secret place”) is an art-inspired brand that produces shirts, hats, pillows, and scarves that reflect both the designer’s experience as well as the unseen beauty of Artsakh.

100% natural spices were featured from Hamov who sell Artsakh-authentic blends made from fruit, berries, and greens.

She Can Movement

The #SheCan women’s economic empowerment accelerator program is designed to provide the tools and confidence for Armenian women to help them realize their entrepreneurial dreams. Program participants learn everything from business planning, marketing, and social media to product launch strategies and much more. They also receive support from a strong group of mentors who help them take on the real challenges of starting a business in the modern economic climate.

Many graduates receive seed money through FAR’s economic development arm to help them get their ideas off the ground.

“It meant so much to come together with friends and celebrate the artistry of women from Artsakh. After spending time with the artists in Armenia this year, being able to share their work and support them through these sales feels truly special,” said Laura Boyajian, Development Manager for FAR, who coordinated

see FAR, page 8

Armenian Christmas at St. Vartan Cathedral On Jan. 6, 2026

NEW YORK — The Nativity and Baptism of Jesus Christ will be observed at New York’s St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral on Monday and Tuesday, January 5 and 6, 2026.

On Monday, January 5, there will be an Evening Service (the Jrakalouyts or lamp-lighting service) at 5:30 p.m. The Divine Liturgy will immediately follow, beginning at 6 p.m., celebrated by the Rev. Fr. Davit Karamyan, Vicar of St. Vartan Cathedral.

On Tuesday, January 6—the Feast of the Nativity and Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ—the Divine Liturgy will be celebrated by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese, who will also deliver the homily.

The Morning Service begins at 9 a.m., and the Divine Liturgy follows at 10 a.m.

The sacred music will be sung by the St. Vartan Cathedral Choir, under the direction of Hasmik Mekanejian, with Kris Kalfayan on the organ.



In Armenian tradition, this feast day commemorates not only the birth of Christ, but also his baptism by John the Baptist. The latter is remembered through the “Blessing of Water” ceremony, which will follow the Divine Liturgy. This year, the Godfather of the Cross will be Haig Arian.

A Christmas reception will take place following services, in Haik and Alice Kavookjian Auditorium of the cathedral complex.

Armenian Christmas will also be observed at local parishes across the Eastern Diocese. Many parishes will celebrate on Tuesday, January 6. However, Diocesan parishes have also been permitted to celebrate the Jrakalouyts (Christmas Eve) service on Saturday, January 3, and the Christmas service and Water Blessing on Sunday, January 4, if local circumstances so demand. Please contact your local parish to ascertain the time of its Armenian Christmas celebration.

The cathedral’s Armenian Christmas Divine Liturgy will be broadcast live over the cathedral’s Facebook page and the Eastern Diocese’s YouTube platform. Many local parishes will also broadcast their services.

St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral is located at 630 Second Avenue (corner of 34th Street and Second Avenue),

COMMUNITY NEWS

AIWA and AGBU Young Professionals Hold Networking Event at Harvard

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — On Thursday, November 20, the Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) and the Armenian General Benevolent Union Young Professions (AGBU-YP) jointly

According to Zela Astarjian, AIWA Board's vice president, 35 mentors and 77 mentees participated in the program.

"We were very encouraged by the tremendous success of this event. The response was overwhelmingly positive with requests to hold this event more frequently. This is the second year in a row that we have been organizing this kind of event," Astarjian said.

Mentors at the event, titled "Meet the Future You" included professionals from fields including medicine, biotech, artificial intelligence, law, medicine, academia, dentistry, architecture, engineering, finance, public relations, hospitality and journalism.

Mentees ranged from graduate students to young professionals.

After a buffet meal, mentors and mentees in the same fields had the chance to sit at small tables and talk in an informal



Mentors and Mentees at the Chao Center



Mentees at the program

held a networking program where mentors and young professionals could come together at the Chao Center, at the Harvard Business School.

yet helpful way.

The organizing committee consisted of Astarjian, Tamar Chamassian, Lori Keve-rian, Ara Balikian, Albert Kiladjian, Garo Kerdelian, Nicole Keikian, Talar Kaya,

Jean-Jacques Hajjar, Vera Manoukian and Garo Safaian.

Because of the overwhelmingly positive response, Astarjian said that more such events will take place.

NY Catholic Archdiocese Says It's Setting up a \$300M Fund for Sexual Abuse Victims

NEW YORK (WABC) — The Archdiocese of New York on December 9 announced it will set up a \$300 million fund to compensate victims of sexual abuse who have sued the church.

In a statement, Cardinal Timothy Dolan said the archdiocese would pay for the fund by reducing its budget and selling off assets, including completing the sale of its former headquarters in Manhattan, with the goal that the fund "can be set aside to provide compensation to survivors of sexual abuse."

The archdiocese has also agreed to engage retired Judge Daniel J. Buckley as a mediator between itself and victims to reach a settlement, Dolan said.

Buckley had a similar role in negotiations

between the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and more than 1,000 people there.

But experts say this is a monumental task and a mediator doesn't have legal power, so if either side wants to walk away, he can't stop them.

The money would be part of a settlement that would go to roughly 1,300 people who say priests and others sexually abused them as minors.

Mitchell Garabedian has represented victims for more than three decades and is cautiously optimistic about the new developments.

"A settlement could come about, but it could also fall apart now or at the last minute," Garabedian said. "I would character-

ize it as a PR campaign, more stalling but at the same time, the Catholic Church is trying to portray itself as acting in good faith and maybe it will reach agreement with the victims' attorneys."

The final amount of the settlement could be higher or lower.

To get there, Cardinal Dolan says the Archdiocese has made a series of difficult financial decisions including reducing its operating budget and firing employees.

Last year it announced it was selling the former headquarters on First Avenue and 56th Street to "ease the final burden from the sex abuse crisis."

It had been its headquarters since 1973 and went for a reported \$100 million.

In a letter, Cardinal Dolan again acknowledged the sexual abuse of minors has brought "shame upon the church" as those seeking justice stress no amount of money can give them back what was stolen from them.

"Any victim I've ever represented would say, if I could choose between \$1 billion and getting my childhood back, I choose my childhood," Garabedian said.

The announcement came as a federal judge on December 8 approved a settlement for the New Orleans Archdiocese to pay \$230 million to hundreds of victims of clergy sexual abuse. The New Orleans Archdiocese filed for bankruptcy in 2020 to avoid handling each of the abuse claims separately.

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FAR Hosts DC Event showcasing Business Accelerator Alumni to Support 'She Can' Initiative

FAR, from page 7

and oversaw the event. "Gift giving becomes even more meaningful when you know each piece is handmade with care and love."

Many in attendance were moved by both the creativity and business acumen of the women founders, as well as the stories of redemption of many of the women who came to Armenia with virtually nothing.

Local resident and eager shopper Taylor Hodge expressed a sentiment shared by many at the event. "The products themselves were beautiful, but being able to see the faces and read the stories of the resilient Armenian women artisans who created them was incredibly moving. Kudos to FAR for spearheading such an impactful program! I can't wait to share these gifts and stories with my loved ones this Christmas."



A D.C. shopper admires the beautiful and unique traditional Armenian products at a holiday pop-up event



COMMUNITY NEWS

At Sts. Joachim & Anne Church, 67 Years of Faith, Heritage & Hope

PALOS HEIGHTS, ILL. — On Sunday, December 7, the 67th anniversary celebration of Sts. Joachim and Anne Church of Palos Heights, began with an Episcopal Badarak celebrated by Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan.

In his homily, Bishop Mesrop spoke with warmth and conviction about the nature of the Christian life. Our spiritual journey, he reminded us, is not meant to be a solitary path. It is a corporate journey, one we walk together as the Body of Christ. Christians do not grow in isolation; we grow by supporting one another, encouraging one another, and lifting one another up. Our walk with God is strengthened when we share



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan with the pastor and deacons at Sts. Joachim and Anne Church

Following the Divine Liturgy there was the ordination of two dedicated young men, David Ter-Akopov and Ayk Krikorian, to the order of tbir.

Following the liturgy, parishioners gathered for an evening of fellowship and celebration. The event opened with words of welcome from Anniversary Committee co-chair Deana Bargamian. Areen Krikorian led the guests in the singing of the Star-Spangled Banner and Mer Hayrenik. Bishop Mesrop then offered a heartfelt invocation, giving thanks to God for the blessings of this parish and for the unity we share.

Dinner and dessert were enjoyed in a warm, joyful atmosphere, made possible by the tireless work of countless volunteers. Special appreciation was expressed for co-chairs Syuzanna Bradford, Deana Bargamian, and Susan Mardoian.

The program continued with a fundraising appeal delivered by Parish Council chair Susan Mardoian. In a musical pro-



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Fr. Tavit Boyajian and young musicians at the reception

Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Fr. Tavit Boyajian and David Ter-Akopov and Ayk Krikorian, the new tbirs

the burdens and the blessings of our faith with our brothers and sisters. This theme of unity — of being one family rooted in Christ — would echo throughout the entire celebration.

gram, Syuzanna Bradford sang Hey Yergir Arax, with Giligia sung by Areen Krikorian accompanied by her mother Arax on violin. Three energetic jazz selections followed, by Ayk Krikorian and the Sandburg High School Jazz Band.

Gratitude for the Past, Optimism for the Future

Fr. Tavit Boyajian offered reflections on the blessings of the parish family. He spoke of gratitude — for the founding families, for those who sacrificed to build this parish, and for the ongoing faith and generosity of our present community. For 67 years, our church has stood as a place where we encounter Christ and walk together in holiness, service, and fellowship, he said.

A significant moment of the evening was the unveiling of a new Endowment and Investment Plaque, honoring 20 funds created between 2003 and 2025. Some were established in memory of beloved family members. Others were created out of gratitude for blessings received.

To highlight this legacy, the parish heard from two speakers representing the first and most recent endowments. Brian Nigohosian spoke in honor of the Stuart and Gloria Nigohosian Endowment Fund, established in 2003. His words beautifully reflected his parents' faith and generosity. Myron Boyajian then shared heartfelt remarks about the fund he established in memory of his wife, Carol — the newest endowment created in 2025.

The names of all 20 funds were read, honoring the families and benefactors

whose faith-filled gifts continue to bless our parish. Bishop Mesrop came forward to offer a special prayer of dedication, asking God to bless the plaque, the benefactors, and all who will be strengthened by their generosity.

The evening concluded with closing comments and a benediction by Bishop Mesrop, who encouraged us to continue supporting one another in our shared journey of faith. His blessing sent us forth uplifted, grateful, and renewed.

Assembly Observes UN Human Rights And Genocide Commemoration

COMMEMORATION, from page 7
detention is an ongoing human rights abuse that the world cannot ignore. Securing their immediate release must be a top priority for the United States and the international community."

As the international community prepares for next year's high-level UN meeting on genocide prevention, the Armenian Assembly urges governments and institutions to take concrete steps to prevent future atrocities and uphold the universal values enshrined in the Genocide Convention and Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan outside the church



KHACHKAR STUDIOS
EMPOWERING GOOD NEWS

A Failing U.S. Armenian Christian Ecosystem Currently Underperforming v

The 3% “Faithful” U.S. Armenian Christian Ecosystem bottom decile of the Body Parts with deeply rooted barriers to change. In stark contrast, a have among the highest non-holiday church attendance rate of 30%. Over the past decade the number of “Faithful” has declined and the ar is now a fraction of overall U.S. population

“Faithful” defined as those who regularly attend Armenian church o

2% of major Armenian Philanthropist donations to Armenian religious activities (2001 to 2023). (2.)

2% religious content in Armenian theme major international films (1982-2023) (3.)

3% of articles have religious content in 18 Armenian English language news outlets (2024 sample) (4.)

5% of advertisements have religious content in 18 Armenian English language news outlets (2024 sample) (5.)

6% religious content in 321 Armenian Documentaries (1930-2024) (6.)

3% Armenians “Faith

Armenian churches in the U.S. r — next to last place — among th groups in regular weekly attenda 2010 and 2020 and 10% of the a and Catholics regular weekly att

Notes: (a) “Faithful”: Non-Holiday Badarak Faithful, which is Khachkar Studios Key Performance Indicator #1, KPI #1. (b) Num materials are from 1957 to 2024. (e) See Khachkar Studios webpage “Analyses” for additional information. (f) The 3% Armenia 460,254 Armenian Americans. Furthermore, it is very important to remember that the percentage of Armenian “Faithful” is only



Scan to
Learn More

Armenian Ecosystem: 12 Body Parts with Extraordinary Potential

...e -- next to last place -- performance permeates all of the 12 Ecosystem
systemic misconception held by many Armenian Americans is that they
and have best-in-class performance on all 12 Ecosystem Body Parts.
annual percentage increase in the number of Armenian in the U.S. census
growth and was from 1980 to 2010 a multiple.

...n non-holidays. Percentages are of relevante U.S. Armenian group.

0% → 1%: 10% of Armenians under the age of 18 attending
accredited Armenian schools or Sunday/Saturday school. - KPI #3 (7.)
→ 1% Armenians "Faithful" in the age group 18 to 29.

"Faithful" (1.) - KPI #1

ranked in the bottom decile
the 23 U.S. Orthodox Christian
ance % of adherents in both
average of U.S. Protestants
endance percentage.

0% reading the Bible daily (8.) - KPI #2

0% attending Bible study classes (9.)

**0% Biblically inspired world-class
benchmarking and management
excellence - KPI #4 (10.)**

**0% of church role models non-work hours participating
in church activities training and retention % - KPI #5 (11.)**

**3.7x SROI which is 39% of the U.S.
Orthodox Median SROI of 9.4x (12.)**

...bers are rounded to an integer. (c) SROI: Social Return on Investment. (d) For Ecosystem body parts 10 and 11, the analyzed
n American "Faithful" is 12,894 attendees at 164 Armenian churches in 25 states divided by the official U.S. census number of
1% if the credible and widely cited number of 1+ million Armenian Americans is the denominator

COMMUNITY NEWS

International Day of the Victims of Genocide Is Commemorated at Upper Canada College

TORONTO — On December 9, the United Nations International Day of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide, established on December 9, 1948, Upper Canada College (UCC) hosted the Zoryan Institute’s high-school educational program. The Zoryan Institute, the parent organization of the International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (IIGHRS), is internationally recognized for its scholarship and for its Genocide and Human Rights University Program (GHRUP), which has trained numerous PhD-level educators dedicated to advancing genocide awareness and prevention.


This year’s program was brought to UCC through the leadership of Ara Sagharian, an Armenian-Canadian student, active member of UCC’s Armenian Club, and descendant of Armenian Genocide survivors. Motivated by his heritage and empathy for others, Ara recognized that many students—Armenian, Jewish, Rwandan, and others—carry lived or inherited trauma shaped by genocide. Seeking a historically grounded and professionally delivered educational experience, he approached the Zoryan Institute to bring the program to his school.

Sagharian understood that each genocide is unique in its causes, history, and

GHRUP graduate, the session explored genocide through the voices of two teenage girls, Anne Frank and Aurora Mardi-ganian, emphasizing both unique histories and shared humanity. Students were highly engaged throughout the presentation and posed thoughtful questions, including those about the relevance of cultural genocide within the current UN definition.

Ara’s leadership is a source of pride for UCC, his parents, and the Armenian community at large. He is an inspiring example for youth across Canada, and his initiative underscores the importance of supporting the Zoryan Institute as it continues its vital mission of education and awareness.


If you’d like to bring this presentation to a classroom near you, please visit <https://zoryaninstitute.org/book-a-zigenocide-education-presentation-at-your-school/> and donate to the Institute today.



Promoting equity, tolerance, reconciliation and awareness through genocide education

Tuesday, December 9, 1:30 P.M.

Guest speaker: **Manucha-Bellamy Theatre**



Lauren Fedewa,
Zoryan Insitute

For any questions, email
Armenian Culture Club head Ara Sagharian



Ara Sagharian, second from left, and Lauren Fedewa of the Zoryan Institute, third from left

consequences, yet all are part of a shared human experience of suffering, resilience, and survival. His goal was to honor distinct histories while highlighting the universal patterns, especially the rise of harmful “us versus them” thinking that fuels division and dehumanization

To foster learning and dialogue, Sagharian united every cultural club at UCC, including those for Armenian, Greek and Chinese Heritage, along with the Truth and Reconciliation group and the Pluralism Council. By bringing together students and teachers from diverse backgrounds, he became an agent for equity, justice, and Canada’s commitment to human rights, especially meaningful as this day commemorates the anniversaries of both the Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Institute delivered its program, Promoting Equity, Tolerance, Reconciliation and Awareness Through Genocide Education, launched in 2022 with support from the Ontario Ministry of Education. Presented in 32 Ontario high schools and several in Arizona, the program reflects the Zoryan Institute’s commitment to accessible global education. Led by Lauren Fedewa, a University of Toronto PhD candidate and



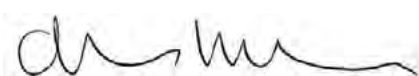
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The *Mirror-Spectator* has covered the violence and political uncertainty affecting Armenia and Artsakh, supported efforts at humanitarian fundraising, and continued to provide periodic video reports online. Send us your email if you wish to receive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

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

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Arts & Culture

Ricky Shayne And His *Mamy Blue* Hasmik Ballarian

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Last year, on November 8, the world lost one of the pop music icons of the late 1960s and early 1970s — Ricky Shayne, who passed away in Berlin at the age of 80 after a long illness. Shayne’s most famous song, *Mamy Blue*, was sung all over the world in the 1970s — even in remote villages of Soviet Armenia, isolated from the rest of the world.

And yet, neither then nor now have Armenians known that Ricky Shayne had an Armenian “Mamy,” who was herself once a well-known figure in Egypt — the painter Hasmik Ballarian, also known as Yasmin Tabet.

This fact is absent from online sources about Ricky Shayne (the



English Wikipedia, for example, refers to his mother as a Frenchwoman without mentioning her name), even though contemporary press at the time often wrote about it.

On the anniversary of Shayne’s death, it seems fitting to revisit the nearly forgotten artistic legacy of this mother and son.

Fair-haired, with blue-green eyes, delicate and charming, the Marilyn Monroe-lookalike Hasmik Ballarian was born in 1922 in Alexandria. She was the niece and student of the Egyptian-Armenian painter Ashot Zorian. At just 12 years old, she held her first solo exhibition at the Grégoire Gallery in Alexandria.

After settling in Cairo, Hasmik studied painting at the Leonardo da Vinci Art School. Starting in 1943, she regularly participated in the annual exhibitions of the Women Painters and Sculptors’ Club of Cairo. That same year, she married Lebanese oil engineer Albert Tabet, and thereafter went by the name Jasmin Tabet, while in Arab circles she was known just as Yasmin.

At first, she mostly painted still lifes and nudes, later turning to abstract compositions — becoming one of the prominent representatives of Egyptian abstractionism. Her art was widely discussed in both the Egyptian-Armenian and Egyptian press (including Al-Ahram), and she received high praise from noted Egyptian-Armenian intellectuals such as Mikael S. Goorjian, Seti Kochounian, and Yervand Msrlan.

From 1963 to 1966, Hasmik see SHAYNE, page 17



From left: Gallery owner Stepan Partamian, photographer Lucy Petrosian, and curator Araks Karyan. (Karine Armen photo)

Center for Armenian Arts Reopens with a Fantastic Photo Exhibition

By Karine Armen

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GLENDAL — The Center for Armenian Arts hosted a photography exhibition, “Voices of Minority, Communities in Armenia,” by documentary photographer Lucy Petrosyan on December 5 and 6. The photographer lives in Yerevan and was in the U.S. for a short time.

The exhibition featured black-and-white and color digital images documenting the lives of Indians, Greeks, Yezidis, Molokans and Assyrians living in Armenia. The gallery screened a six-minute video presentation of all the subjects of the photos. The project was funded by the EU’s “Young European Ambassadors” initiative. It was presented at the Komitas Museum-Institute, with the attendance of the EU, Greek, and Italian Ambassadors.

Lucy Petrosyan holds a degree in geography from Yerevan State University. Her background in geography has shaped her understanding of people, environments, and cultural layers — a foundation that strongly influences her documentary work today.

Petrosyan was born in the village of Bazmaghyur in Armenia’s Aragatsotn region. She is a visual storyteller and documentary photographer with over 8 years of experience. She is a self-taught photographer who has developed her skills through hands-on practice and several specialized online courses. She has traveled extensively. She captures her subjects in her surroundings. The intimate photos are a testament to the trust she develops before taking pictures. She has a passion for traveling and documenting her observations.



Lucy Petrosyan near her photos on December 5 (Karine Armen photo)

‘Sinners’ Ryan Coogler & Sev Ohanian On How Their ‘Unapologetically Original’ Story Earned Seven Golden Globe Nominations

By Ryan Fleming

LOS ANGELES (Deadline) — It’s no surprise that “Sinners” made a big splash on December 9 at the Golden Globes nominations announcement. With seven nominations, including Best Picture Drama and Best Director Motion Picture for Ryan Coogler, the film has been lauded for its unique, visual storytelling and music.

“For me, I was just trying to write from the most honest place,” says Coogler. “We were constantly trying to think about the themes and why we were so excited about the movie... but we were also thinking about the opportunity to entertain folks in theaters all over the world.”

When looking for what excited her most about the movie, producer Zinzi Coogler says it was the charac-



“Sinners” producing partners Ryan Coogler and Sev Ohanian

ters that drew her in. “I was immediately pulled into every single character on the page in a way that I felt like I had known them personally,” she says. “When the script makes its turn just about midway through, I just remember feeling so excited and afraid for everyone that I had fallen in love with.”

Producer Sev Ohanian says the story is what got him. “I just remember being gripped by the script and feeling how bold and ambitious the story was that Ryan had put together,” he says. “It was unapologetically original and I couldn’t wait to make it.”

Among the accolades today is a nomination for their original song “I Lied to You”, which lies at the heart of one of the most memorable scenes in the film. “By the time I got halfway through the script, I realized these characters were going to meet some pretty crazy vampires,” says Ryan Coogler. “So, I wanted to have a victory moment for them of the ancestors from the past and the future.”

As an example of coming from “the most honest place”, Coogler says the scene and the song were inspired by his uncle James who passed away 10 years ago. “He loved blues music, and while he was alive, I didn’t love it as much as he did,” he says. “But after he passed away, I would play songs to remind myself of spending time with him. And the ability for a song to unlock memory... this is a cinematic version of that, and it became so much more when I was writing it.”



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Café Cat's Danish Lemon and Almond Cake

Born in the United Kingdom, Linda Peek is a successful writer, blogger and businesswoman. She has been involved in international diplomacy through her husband's dedicated work as an Australian diplomat. She and her family have lived in Switzerland, Israel, Malaysia, South Africa, Chile, France and Denmark, with postings in Canberra, Australia in between. While living in Chile, she served as the Food Editor for an English newspaper, writing a popular weekly column called "The Good Life." She was also a member of the Circle of Gastronomic Writers of Chile and a food judge.

Since 2011 Linda has been writing about her favorite foods at her weekly blog Café Cat. She and her husband now live in Canberra. They have three children, and more recently, six grandchildren. "Our last posting was Copenhagen where we arrived two days before the engagement of Danish Crown Prince Frederik André Henrik Christian to a young Australian girl named Mary Donaldson that Frederik had met while attending the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney. They married on May 14, 2004 at the Copenhagen Cathedral, and we attended all events leading up to and including their wedding. It was a truly amazing experience and time," says Linda. (King Frederik and Queen Mary now have four children: Christian, Isabella, Vincent and Josephine, and Linda stays in touch with their family.)



Linda Peek (Photos courtesy of Linda Peek)



From left to right, Australian Ambassador Matthew Peek, his wife, Linda Peek, Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark (now King Frederik X), and Crown Princess Mary of Denmark (now Queen), Copenhagen 2004

"When we lived in Copenhagen, we were served lemon cake by the locals. I came home with this special recipe from a Danish friend called Hanne, whom I met at the dog park. Sadly, Hanne is no longer with us, but I still make her delicious lemon and almond cake. My local supermarket sells 8 oz. packets of marzipan in the baking section. We don't like things too sweet, so I only make half the icing recipe. If you're feeling indulgent, serve this cake with a dollop of fresh whipped cream," she adds.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup almonds (blanched or not)
- 8 oz. (1 cup) butter, at room temperature
- 8 oz. (1 cup) sugar
- 8 oz. (1 cup) marzipan
- 4 eggs, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla essence (equivalent to a 2-inch vanilla bean or 1 teaspoon of vanilla paste)
- Grated zest of 1 lemon
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- Juice of 1 lemon

Icing:

- 2 cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1-2 tablespoons boiling water

PREPARATION:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place almonds in the food processor and process until they look like fine breadcrumbs. Set aside.

Place butter (cut into pieces) and sugar in the food processor and process until smooth and creamy. Scrape down the sides of the bowl and add the marzipan. When thoroughly incorporated add the eggs, vanilla, and lastly the sifted flour, baking powder, ground almonds, salt and lemon juice.

Grease and flour a 10-inch bundt pan or any pan of your choice. (Linda uses a fluted cake pan and sprays it with canola oil, but an ordinary round cake pan lined with baking paper will do.) Scrape the cake mixture into the pan, then bake for 45 minutes, or until well-risen and golden and a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean. Ovens vary so it may take a bit longer, but do not overcook.

Cool the cake, remove it from the pan, then spread with the icing, allowing it to drizzle down the sides. Garnish with the lemon slices, fresh or glacé.

To make the icing, sift confectioners' sugar in a bowl. Add the lemon juice and one or two tablespoons of boiling water — enough to make a thick but spreadable consistency.

Note: Photo shows cake with only half the icing recipe.

Serves 12

Center for Armenian Arts Reopens with a Fantastic Photo Exhibition

EXHIBITION, from page 13

During an interview at the gallery, Petrosyan said, "I took the photos with a digital camera, and later I changed some of them to black-and-white if the colors were overwhelming."

Stepan Partamian, the owner of the Center for Armenian Arts, said, "We remodeled the gallery and were not planning to open it this year. But because of Lucy's work, we rushed because she is in Los Angeles only for two weeks." He added, "I am proud of her work. The

creative artists like Lucy inspire me to continue my work in the arts."

The curator of the exhibition, Araks Karyan, said, "I am happy to encourage young Armenian artists to present their work in a quality environment to learn, grow, and build confidence."

Petrosyan's artistic focus centers on documenting human life, cultural identity, and everyday stories. Traveling across different countries, she captures people's lives in a reportage, candid, and emotionally honest style, bringing

visibility to narratives that often remain unseen.

Petrosyan said, "This project took me four months to complete. I traveled to different regions of Armenia." She continued, "I wanted to give a voice to the minorities that not many people know about." Petrosyan contacted each group's leaders to get permission. Taking photos of Molokans was challenging because photography is not allowed in their culture. It was easier to photograph their children than the adults. Molokans moved to Armenia for religious

freedom in the 19th century.

Her mission is to preserve cultural diversity and amplify the stories of communities whose voices deserve to be heard. She is now presenting her projects in the United States as well, continuing to build bridges between people, cultures, and stories through visual narratives.

The two-day exhibition included a reception with homemade Armenian gata and halva. The audience was pleased with the artwork and the remodeled and expanded gallery space.



ARTS & CULTURE

Books

Pietro Shakarian's Monograph *Anastas Mikoyan: An Armenian Reformer in Khrushchev's Kremlin* Reviewed

A lot has been written about the former Soviet Union since its inception in 1922 and even more so since its collapse in 1991. The scholarly effort, studying the Soviet Union in all its nuance, has focused on an immensely wide and diverse set of research problems: from historical analysis to arts, culture, socio-economic research, to political commentary, and more. Popular within this literature has also been the story of some of the prominent Soviet leaders. With varying flavors of critique, these studies tend to focus either exclusively on their protagonists' lifestyles or on their impact in the country they helped build and across the world. Others try to merge both the personal and professional aspects of their chosen character's life, some focusing on absolute trivialities and some on more serious topics.

In that latter category, most publications center on six easily recognizable names: Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Iosif Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and Mikhail Gorbachev. Such attention is warranted as the protagonists of those hefty tomes, often in several volumes and multiple editions, have either influenced or directly presided over much of the Soviet history. One would be forgiven for concluding that anything that could be said about that difficult period has already been said and multiple times over.

So, it is at this juncture that a new monograph, impeccable in its factual analysis and ease of prose, comes to our attention today. The book by Pietro Shakarian, entitled *Anastas Mikoyan: An Armenian Reformer in Khrushchev's Kremlin* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2025, 350 pp.), successfully and, in some ways, courageously rivets our attention towards new evidence in the subject that for all appearances has long been studied and set aside: the complicated history of the former Soviet Union and the role of one of its political figures in that historic context.

The book's focus is on the Soviet statesman and Politburo member Anastas Mikoyan, who, as the author suggests, "is perhaps best known in both the West and the post-Soviet space as a political survivor, weathering every Soviet leader 'from Il'ich to Il'ich, without heart attack and paralysis'" (the reference here is to the times in office from Vladimir Il'ich Lenin to Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev).

This book is not a simple retelling of Mikoyan's biographical details or a presentation of his political impact on the country. Instead, the author leads his reader on a masterful and unexpected analytical discovery of Mikoyan's significance in every detail of Soviet history as a true believer in the socialist ideals. And in that, Shakarian's contribution to our already saturated knowledge of the Soviet epoch is a breakthrough and it comes in two parts.

The first contribution comes from Shakarian's discovery and analysis of new unique archival records, some also based on Mikoyan's personal communications as well as those from the family's archives. Shakarian's impressively responsible treatment of his sources, with cross-verification between the Russian, Armenian, and Western archives and various translations of the same documents, culminate his undisputed command of the topic and crisp analysis. Through his examination of the hard to obtain drafts of some of Mikoyan's most momentous public addresses, the author leads us on developing a full picture of those little-noticed microscopic circumstances that went on to shape one grand political decision after another. And in Mikoyan's tenure in the Soviet political elite, he oversaw some of the foundational aspects of Soviet social, political, and economic management. Shakarian is one of the first, if not the first, to discuss these events leveraging his familiarity with the archival documentation.

It was Mikoyan who, as the Soviet foreign trade commissar in the 1930s, procured new technology in the Soviet agricultural and industrial sectors. It was Mikoyan who during the Cuban Missile Crisis led the diplomatic effort on the Soviet side of preventing a nuclear catastrophe. It was Mikoyan who would take on a leading role in de-Stalinization during the Thaw period of 1953-1964. But it was also Anastas Mikoyan,

an "Armenian in the Kremlin," who would become the main reformer on the questions of nationality in the Soviet Union, expressly advocating for the preservation and support of the authentic diversity of the big country's multitude of ethnicities.

And that brings us to the second, and probably the most important, contribution of the book. Namely, it is the author's ability, by merging "Armenian" and "Kremlin" in the book's title, to bring into focus the age-old problem of the role of a personality in shaping the nations' destinies. Indeed, as the book insists from page one, it was Anastas Mikoyan's Armenian origin that determined much of his nuanced approach toward policymaking in those areas to which he was entrusted, impacting the Soviet Union and reverberating far beyond its boundaries. Mikoyan's first-hand knowledge of the sufferings experienced by the Armenian people, the memories of the 1915 genocide and historic persecutions, guided him in articulating a balanced decentralized nationalities program in the Khrushchev's Kremlin, as Shakarian explains.

The book is organized into six chapters with separate introductory and concluding sections. To understand Mikoyan's significant influence on the nationalities question, Shakarian argues, it is important to understand the pre-1950s period, the most difficult part of that being the time of the 1930s Great Purge. This first chapter sets the tone for what the reader discovers in the subsequent parts of the book: a narrative based on scrupulous archival work that is impossible to eclipse by any approximation.

The book then moves on to discuss Anastas Mikoyan's speech in Yerevan, Armenia on March 11, 1954 where he sets the political and intellectual background for the process of de-Stalinization and the necessity for an adaptable policy toward Soviet nationalities — the two prerogatives, as Shakarian states, that "preoccupied [Mikoyan] for the remainder of his life and career." It is this chapter that Shakarian wants the reader to interpret as the cornerstone to the dialectical complexity of Mikoyan's figure in the Soviet politics.

The third chapter, entitled "Apricot Patronage," deals with some intricate details of Mikoyan's initiatives in promoting Armenia's economic development. Through the narrative, based entirely on archival data, documents, and memoirs, we learn about Mikoyan's continuous encouragement of the political leadership of the Armenian SSR to work through the Soviet administrative red-tape and solicit support for new industrial development projects. Mikoyan, in his formal Supreme Soviet consultative role to the republic, would guide his less experienced and more reserved compatriots in properly drafting budget proposals and articulating the need to build textile factories, agricultural processors, and even the transportation and industrial infrastructures of entire cities. It was Mikoyan who advised Yerevan to entertain Nikita Khrushchev on a boat on Lake Sevan during the latter's official visit to the republic, to convince him to allocate the necessary funding for the Arpa-Sevan canal, thus preventing one of the nature's wonders, Lake Sevan, from drying out.

Well in tune with developments in his homeland, Mikoyan leveraged that experience in his work across all Soviet republics. He believed, according to Shakarian's records, that it was through economic prosperity that the diverse multi-ethnic Soviet Union could achieve long-lasting and enriching socio-economic and political stability. And in Chapter 4, the author addresses one of Mikoyan's lasting commitments to the principles of *druzhba narodov* (the friendship of peoples), transitioning then in Chapter 5 to detailing Mikoyan's efforts in the North Caucasus. Here, Shakarian convincingly argues that, yet again, thanks to Mikoyan's Armenian origin and his familiarity with the multi-ethnic complexity of the Caucasus region and his sincere appreciation for one's homeland, he became the most ardent political leader at the vanguard bravely advocating for the return of the Chechens, Ingush, and other peoples in the 1950s from their forced exile in Central Asia back to the historic homelands in the



North Caucasus.

In the final chapter 6, the author reflects on Mikoyan's work on the nationality platform of the third CPSU program and the 1960s constitutional revisions. It would be Mikoyan's delicate understanding, again dictated by his background, of the potential socio-economic strength of the multitude of ethnicities in a socialist balance, allowing him to influence nationality policy decisions during the difficult process of constitutional reform under Nikita Khrushchev.

While surely known to researchers in general, these facts (and here, just a high-level sample of what the book has to offer) are usually discussed in lump-sum frameworks of the bigger Soviet policy. Such approaches view an individual policy maker as important but, often, as subservient to the bigger system's postulates. Perhaps that fate may not have entirely escaped Mikoyan either, who in his absolute belief in "socialist democracy" was not able to bring the final historical justice of self-determination to the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, an outcome of the 1920s pragmatic *realpolitik* ending in 2020-2023 with a humanitarian catastrophe and the forced expulsion of the native Karabakh Armenians.

But at the same time, differing from the established routine of "blame the system," Shakarian adds to the Soviet literature his analytical reading of the archives unequivocally articulating Mikoyan's personal and detailed involvement in every process where he could exert real influence. Here, the process of Chechen and Ingush resettlement or Mikoyan's role in effectively building his native Armenia from the ground up — both facts little-known to non-specialists and hardly appreciated by the direct beneficiaries — come to mind.

Overall, *Anastas Mikoyan* by Pietro Shakarian is an incredible new highly analytical and well-researched testament to the troublesome and yet largely unknown Soviet past despite the vastness of the available research. Equally so the book is a testament to the Shakarian's tenacity in uncovering the truth, whether sweet or bitter, as a scholar intellectually and emotionally tightly attached to his research subject. Through the book, Pietro Shakarian is talking to his reader in a convincing and informed style. This makes the book easy to follow, despite the abundance of technical end notes and references to various political events or protocols.

Anastas Mikoyan is a book that deserves to be not only on the shelves of today's students of history, philosophy, and statesmanship, but also on the shelves of anyone seeking a well-rounded, objective understanding of Soviet history and twentieth century socialism.

(Aleksandr V. Gevorkyan, PhD, is Henry George Chair in Economics and Professor of Economics at the Department of Economics and Finance of the Peter J. Tobin College of Business at St. John's University. He is the author of *Transition Economies: Transformation, Development, and Society in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (Routledge, 2018).)

Books

The Hawk Pays Tribute to Descendents Of Genocide Survivors

COCONUT GROVE, Fla. — At 88 years old, Shahen Guiragossian has turned a lifetime of memories into a lasting legacy. His debut memoir, *The Hawk*, is more than one man’s story — it’s a bridge between generations, carrying the spirit of Armenian resilience forward for those who will inherit it next.

Born to survivors of the Armenian Genocide, Guiragossian grew up in a home filled with love, silence, and the weight of unspoken history. Through *The Hawk*, he finally gives voice to that inheritance

— tracing how his parents’ endurance shaped his own journey and how storytelling itself can become an act of remembrance.

“My parents never spoke much about what they endured,” he says. “But I realized that by writing, I could keep their story — and our people’s story — alive.”

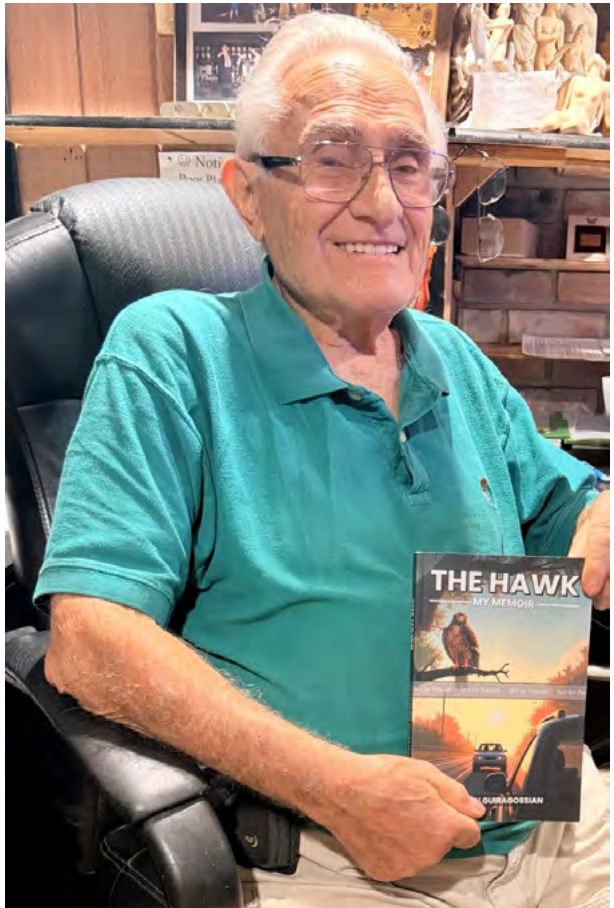
Both deeply personal and universally human, *The Hawk* invites readers to remember where they come from while finding hope in who they can still become. Written in his late eighties, Guiragossian’s memoir reminds the Armenian diaspora and younger generations that it’s never too late — or too early — to tell your story.

Shahen was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1937 and grew up in Beirut. His mother, an infant, lost her parents in the genocide, whereas his father, in his late teens, lost his father in the genocide.

Shahen and his wife, Sally Ann, have four children. Tragically, a fifth child died in a car accident when he was 16.

He had an entrepreneurial career spanning decades from car mechanic to business owner.

Proceeds from *The Hawk* support the Armenian Relief Society, in honor of his heritage, and the

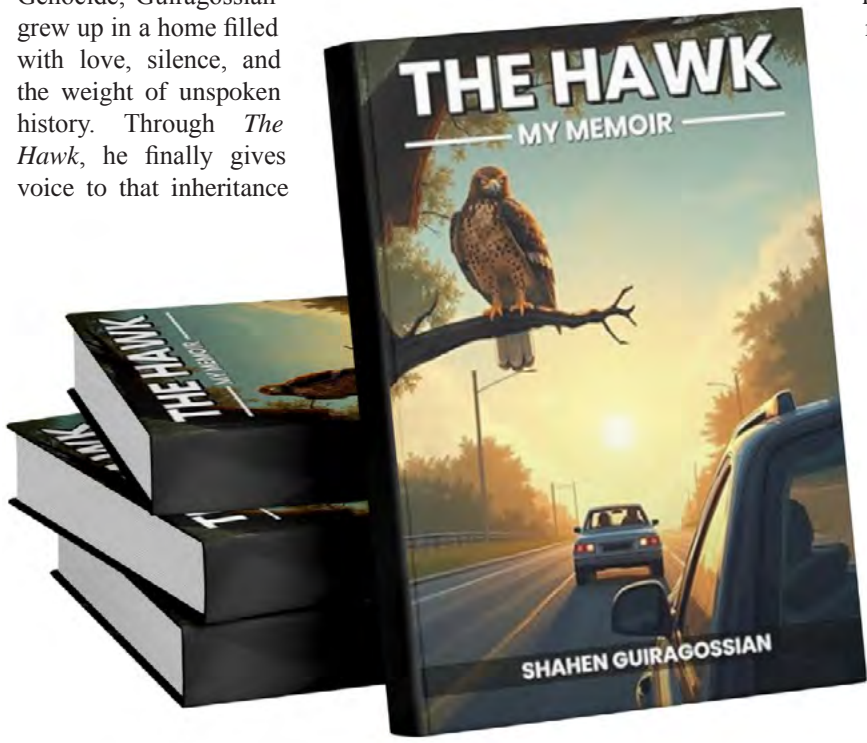


Shahen Guiragossian

9/11 Memorial & Museum, in memory of his nephew lost in the September 11 tragedy.

The Hawk is available now on Amazon in paperback, hardcover, and eBook formats. Those interest in the book can also visit www.thehawkmemoir.com.

Guiragossian is an Armenian-American author and storyteller based in Coconut Creek. A lifelong dreamer and entrepreneur, he channels his reflections on struggle, success, and survival into *The Hawk* — a story meant to inspire and endure. When he isn’t writing, he spends time with music and reflection — the two companions that have carried him through every chapter of life.





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ARTS & CULTURE

Ricky Shayne And His Mamy Blue Hasmik Ballarian

SHAYNE, from page 13

Ballarian-Tabet ran her own art gallery in Cairo, called Akhenaton. The gallery officially opened on December 7, 1963, with an exhibition titled “First Winter Salon,” featuring works by 55 Egyptian artists, each presenting one piece. Among them were eight Egyptian-Armenians, including Rose Papasian, Ashot Zorian, Nora Ipekyan, Buzant Kojamarian, and Alexander Saroukhan. Alongside well-known artists, Ballarian also presented painters who had never before taken part in any exhibition, thereby helping to reveal new talents.

In 1966, while in Beirut, she learned that her Cairo gallery had been flooded, and she decided to not to return to Egypt. She continued her artistic career in Beirut for about a decade and, in 1967, received the Lebanese Said Akl Prize for her abstract paintings. Later, due to the Lebanese civil war, the painter moved to Paris. Her later life and the date of her death remain unknown.

Information and bibliography about Ballarian’s artistic career can be found in Haig Avakian’s book *Materials on Egyptian-Armenian Painting and Sculpture* (up to 1970) (Cairo, 2023, in Armenian, pp. 169–176).

Tall, handsome, with curly hair, green eyes, and striking features, Ricky Shayne became one of the symbols of beauty and sensuality for Western youth of the 1960s and 1970s. His photographs often appeared on the covers of European magazines and on television screens, and he toured throughout Europe giving solo concerts.

Born Georges (Joe) Albert Tabet in Cairo in 1944, Shayne began singing in childhood — his mother taught him songs — and by the age of 11 he was already playing the guitar. At 15, he moved to Lebanon, performing in clubs with his voice and guitar. Later, he and his mother relocated to Paris, where he studied music, and then to Italy, amid the wave of British pop music sweeping the continent.

In Italy, Shayne was discovered by music producers Sergio Bardotti and Alberigo Crocetta, who signed him with the ARC record label. It was under the stage name Ricky Shayne that he released his first recordings. His debut hit, *Uno dei Mods* (“One of the Mods”), written especially for him by Gianni Meccia and Franco Migliacci, became a defining anthem of the beat era and topped the charts. Set against the backdrop of Liverpool and inspired by the rivalry between London’s youth subcultures — the Mods and the Rockers — the song was featured in the 1966 Italian-German musical film “The Battle of the Mods,” directed by Franco Montemurro, where Shayne played the role of a disillusioned singer, Ricky Fuller. The film, much like “West Side Story,” captured the rebellious spirit of the 1960s youth.

Uno dei Mods enjoyed a revival in 1990, when Shayne performed it on Red Ronnie’s television program “Una rotonda sul mare” (“A Round Dance by the Sea”).

Building on the success of this song, Shayne and his collaborators created a second piece inspired by the Mod movement — *Vi saluto amici Mods* (“Farewell, Mod Friends”) — the theme of which was the protagonist’s departure from Liverpool. The song had a slower rhythm and classical instrumentation, accompanied by spoken passages, violins and drums; however, it did not achieve the success of its predecessor.

Shayne then moved away from the beat style and, starting in 1966, began recording cover versions of songs by other well-known artists such as Elvis Presley and Tom Jones. After relocating to Germany in 1967, he replaced Italian with German

and recorded *Ich sprengte alle Ketten* (“I Will Break All Chains”), which became a nationwide hit, as well as the singles *Das hat die Welt noch nicht gesehen* (“The World Has Never Seen Anything Like It”), *Es wird ein Bettler zum König* (“A Beggar Becomes a King”), and *Ich mache keine Komplimente* (“I Don’t Give Compliments”). He was awarded the Otto Singer



Prize, regarded as the “Oscar” of German popular music.

In 1967, Ricky Shayne was seriously injured in a car accident in Rome. Journalists wrote that, fortunately, he did not become a second James Dean — the life of the talented young artist was saved. While recovering in the hospital, he received hundreds of letters from all over Europe, South America, and even Cuba. After a brief hiatus, in 1969 Shayne presented “The Ricky Shayne Show” on German television, and in 1970 won first place at a hit parade in Luxembourg, receiving the Golden Lion Award. Yet his greatest success was still to come.

In 1971, Shayne released the German-language version of *Mamy Blue*. The song’s lyrics and music had been written in 1970 by French composer and songwriter Hubert Giraud. Originally performed in French, the song became an international hit through various versions, including the English rendition by the Spanish band Pop Tops and Shayne’s own German version. His recording sold half a million copies within a week, reaching the 7th position on Germany’s national charts. Its English version ranked 8th in France, entered the top ten in French-speaking Belgium and Japan, and reached first place in Argentina and Brazil.

As an actor, Shayne mainly appeared in Italian musicarelli and German musical films, including Enzo Trapani’s *Masima pressione* (“Maximum Pressure,” 1965) and *Sedici anni e bionda* (“Sixteen and Blonde,” 1966), Mariano Laurenti’s *Una ragazza tutta d’oro* (“A Girl Made of Gold,” 1967) and *I ragazzi di Bandiera Gialla* (“The Boys of the Yellow Flag”), Kurt Wilhelm’s *Olympia*, *Olympia* (1971), Harald Philipp’s *Hurra, wir sind wieder gesund* (“Hooray, We’re Single Again,” 1971), and an episode of the German TV series “Derrick” titled “Calcutta” (1976). In 1971, he created a photo novel in Beirut for the German weekly *Bravo*, and later that year was invited to the United States by the renowned singer Ray Charles to collaborate and perform together with Dean Martin on the latter’s television shows.

After settling in the U.S. in 1975, the for-

mer idol of Western youth went into business but occasionally returned to Germany for professional projects and nostalgic concerts. In 1989, he made a modest comeback, recording *Once I’m Gonna Stay Forever* with the famous German singer Dieter Bohlen for the ZDF TV series “*Rivalen der Rennbahn*” (“Rivals on the Racetrack”). The soundtrack became the most success-

tion titled “Ricky Shayne: The Outsider” in Düsseldorf. In 2012, he appeared in a small role as a street musician in the TV movie “*Und weg bist du*” (“And You’re Gone”).

In 2019, at the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale), as part of the Forum Expanded program, filmmaker Stefan Geene premiered the documentary “Shayne,” in which the singer’s sons, Tarek Shayne Tabet and Imran Shayne Tabet, recreated their father’s image in dramatized sequences. (Incidentally, Tarek is a Berlin-based filmmaker, cinematographer, and photographer.)

In 2021, the white-haired, bearded 76-year-old Shayne made his last public appearance on Germany’s Second Television Channel (ZDF) in “50 Jahre ZDF-Hitparade – Die Zugabe” (“50 Years of the ZDF Hit Parade – The Encore”), performing *Mamy Blue*. In 2022, Stefan Geene published the book *Freiheit 71: Ricky Shayne, Music and the Materiality of the Postwar Era*, which situates the singer’s work within the context of postwar Berlin’s cultural revival.

Although Ricky Shayne once said, “I don’t belong to any nation. I belong to Mother Nature,” in interviews he sometimes mentioned his Armenian roots and once confessed — not to sound too prosaic — that he loved eating Armenian *tolma* with garlic. According to his son, Tarek, Shayne used to speak Armenian with his mother and maternal grandparents, also visited Armenia in 1990s.

In his later years, Shayne never spoke about his illness and wished for his death to remain private; he told his former partner to say that he was living in Canada after his passing, thus, she revealed news of his death only eight months later, in June of this year...

CALENDAR OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

DECEMBER 12-APRIL 26, 2026 —The Armenian Museum of America 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.

JANUARY 12 — Monday, St. James Men’s Club Monthly Dinner and Fellowship, joint gathering with the Knights of Vartan, Guest speaker - Raffi Barsamian, Having recently spent the past year living in Jerusalem, Raffi will share his reflections on life in the Armenian Quarter, the history of the Armenian presence in the city, and the current political climate. Mezza 6:15pm, Dinner 6:45pm Losh Kebab and Kheyma, \$25.00 per person, all are welcome. 465 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown.

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

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.

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE
UNITED STATES

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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.

Iran Takes Diplomatic Initiative

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

While Russia continues its war in Ukraine and still lacks the capacity to fully pursue and service its interests in the South Caucasus, Iran begins to take the initiative into its own hands — at least from a diplomatic standpoint.

On December 15, Ali Akbar Velayati, adviser on international affairs to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, during a meeting with Armenia's Ambassador to Iran, stated that the Trump Route is essentially identical to the so-called Zangezur Corridor. Velayati noted that Iran has opposed the corridor from the very beginning, as Tehran rejects any change to regional borders and fears threats to its security. According to Velayati, this scenario could lead to NATO's presence north of Iran, creating serious risks to the security of Northern Iran and Southern Russia.

Notably, the Armenian Embassy in Iran limited itself to issuing only an official statement on this meeting, reporting that the Armenian ambassador emphasized that the Trump Route would be implemented on the basis of the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty, jurisdiction, and reciprocity of states, and that it would create broad opportunities for regional connectivity and economic development. This information was disseminated by Iranian media outlets but was not mentioned in the Armenian version of the press release. The Armenian ambassador also assured that everything would take place within the framework of Armenia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and that Yerevan takes into account Iran's sensitivities.

However, Velayati's remarks — at least as quoted by Iranian media — are quite sharp and strong. The most interesting aspect is that he is also speaking on behalf of Russia, which is not common diplomatic practice. This may either indicate that the issue has been discussed with Russia or suggest that Iran is sending a signal to Moscow to adopt a tougher stance. It is noteworthy that since August 8, Tehran seemed not to have voiced such assessments, perhaps because it was waiting for certain details. There is a high probability that those details have now become known, and Tehran is effectively rejecting them completely.

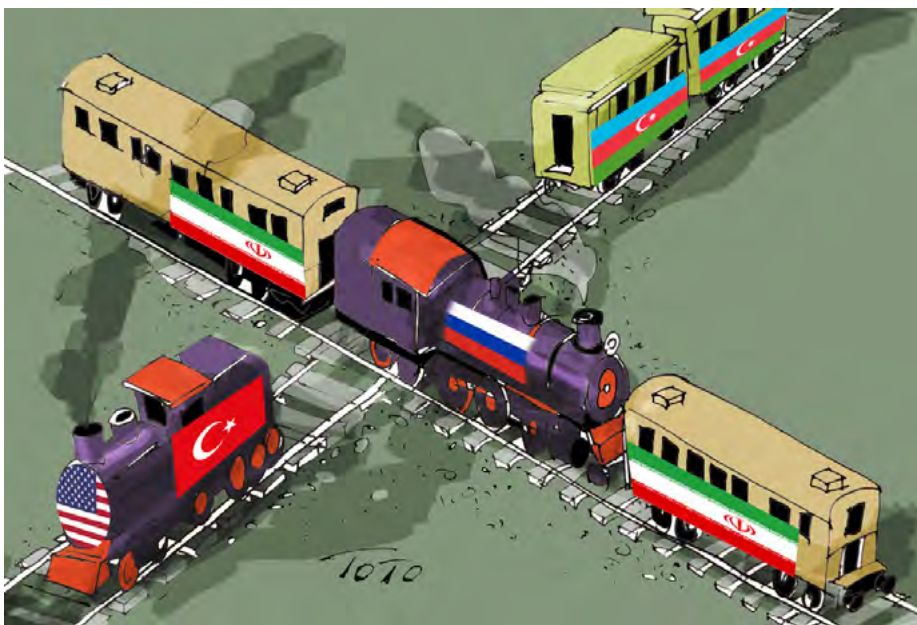
This dynamic is also noteworthy in the context of the Putin-Pezeshkian meeting that took place a few days earlier. As the official statement noted, the presidents of Iran and Russia discussed East-West routes, which appeared to be a new element in those discussions. Moreover, following this meeting, the Russian Foreign Ministry stated that it is ready to consult with Yerevan on the parameters of the Trump Route initiative and Russia's possible participation, adding that "there are sufficient grounds for this."

Another issue arises concerning Moscow. South Caucasus Railways, a subsidiary of Russian Railways, holds the concession to manage Armenia's railway network, and the region uses Russian railway lines. Furthermore, the Trump Route will largely pass through areas under the responsibility of Russian border guards, which makes it difficult not to take into account Russian interests and its factual presence on the ground. Additionally considering Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), it is evident that this process cannot proceed without Russian involvement.

The most consequential question is whether Russia will seek to participate in the project or attempt to obstruct it? This is a critical choice for Moscow and largely depends on the course of the Putin-Trump negotiations. Unlike Iran, Moscow has two options: to ensure long-term involvement, or to try to block the process by employing a wide range of instruments.

If Moscow fails to find a way to join this project, it risks losing much — if not all — of its influence in the South Caucasus, as both its de facto presence and its concessionary footprint could come to an end in light of the new realities. On the other hand, if Russia does become involved, it would effectively mean participating in a project that was originally designed to bypass it. Tehran appears to be pushing Moscow to make the choice as soon as possible.

(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.)



Seeing Us in Armenia and Armenia in Us

By Paul Kayaian

I recently left the overpriced Cinnabon shops and damp, stained, dirty carpet leading down the gangplank, as it were, of JFK to arrive at the gleaming halls of Chanel, Longchamp, Pierre Herme (macarons!) and Francis Kurkdjian of Charles De Gaulle airport in Paris, on my way to Armenia!

A vacation? Much more than that. A pilgrimage? Maybe. An ancestral obligation. A cultural mission. A walk and no longer just a talk.

I knew every story, every painful moment in the 3,000-year history of Armenians and Armenia. All the places of murder and triumph, of slaughter and resistance, of faith unbroken and unbowed and of empires surrendered but never abandoned. But now, finally, I could see and touch the stones, broken but still evident, of roads and churches walked and suffered and danced upon by my people, where we all came from, no matter the ship that took us away to other places in horrible times.

I was a fortunate part of a small group of good friends, friends for more than 55 years, on our way to Armenia. I was a bit trepidatious at the original thought: too far away; unsure of the cultural differences to be able to enjoy and not leave disdainful; too long a proposed itinerary.

But the idea grew, with the rationale (if one was necessary) that I'd be among good friends and if it all was not entirely to our liking, we'd surely laugh together despite it. We also booked a few days in Paris after Armenia, to get re-organized and recover and, well, why would we just pass through Paris? So we were off, increasingly excited about the trip, with a folder full of recommendations, must-sees, warnings ("...make sure to bring enough Imodium...") and adventurous excitement.

Our layover in Paris was as long as the flight to get there, though not without a bit of angst at our suddenly-missing Air France lounge confirmation. Graciously sorted after a chat (plea, payment evidence) with the lounge manager and a mysterious fixer on the other end of the phone, complete

with frowns, twisted smiles, doubtful looks, head shakes and finally, a reprieve, we were off again, to Yerevan, one of the oldest continuously-habited city on Earth.

Waiting by the gate, I never saw or heard so many Armenians in one place outside of a church picnic or expensive fundraiser! The cultural shift was fully underway as we were them and they were us; we couldn't even smirk or judge in "another" secret language: they all understood us!

After a scheduled 1 a.m. arrival we zipped to our rather luxurious hotel, past auto parts stores and yes, even themed nightclubs (aka strip bars!) and awaited the day to come, which, like almost every other day to come, was warm and sunny and blue-sky bright.

Day 1 was a free day in Yerevan and that's where my delighted amazement began. I came with an open mind, without really any preconceived images of what I was to experience. What I was unexpectedly met with was a high level of elegance and cosmopolitan sophistication. Shame see PILGRIMAGE, page 20



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Pashinyan May Soon Declare Himself the New Catholicos of All Armenians

With each passing day, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is causing further damage to the Armenian Apostolic Church and the reputation of Armenia around the world as the first Christian nation. His actions are a gross violation of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia.

Without any authority, Pashinyan outlined last week on his Facebook page a “Road map for the renewal of the Holy Armenian Apostolic Church.” He indicated that “after removal” of Catholicos Karekin II, the “primary task” of the future locum tenens is “to organize the process of adopting the new regulations of the Apostolic Church in Armenia.”

Pashinyan even provided detailed steps for his suggested “new Church regulations”:

- Rules for the good conduct of the clergy and guarantees for its implementation.

- Financial transparency of the Church and guarantees for its implementation.

- The necessity for the Church to be apolitical and guarantees for its implementation.

- Compliance of the Church with Armenia’s tax regulations. Taxes paid by the Church will be returned to the Church!

- Clergy to benefit from the government pension fund and health insurance.

- Election of a new Catholicos of All Armenians on the basis of the new rulebook.

To make his interference in the Church complete, Pashinyan suggested that, at the request of the locum tenens, the government “will provide advisory support to the work on the development of the draft [Church] rules.”

During his visit to Berlin last week, Pashinyan denigrated the Armenian Church and the Catholicos in front of the prestigious German Council on Foreign Relations. Disseminating internal Armenian disputes to an international audience is a grave error and contrary to Armenia’s best interests.

Pashinyan raised several inappropriate church-related issues in Germany.

1) He accused the clergy, not just the Catholicos, of being “more vulnerable to external influence and, forgive me for phrasing it this way, can turn them into a tool for external influence.” The Prime Minister has hurled this serious accusation at various members of the clergy, including the Catholicos. Pashinyan even told the Armenian Parliament last week that the Catholicos obeys “a senior lieutenant of a foreign intelligence service” and reports “daily to lieutenants of a foreign intelligence service.” However, Justice Minister

Srbuhi Galyan contradicted her boss by saying that she has no such information. Pashinyan’s baseless claim goes beyond the issue of the moral behavior of the clergy. Being a foreign agent is a serious violation of Armenian law. If Pashinyan has any evidence, he has the obligation to submit it to the courts for prosecution. Making such a charge without any evidence is libelous, for which the Catholicos should sue Pashinyan.

2) Pashinyan told the German audience: “No one knows how our Church is funded, how much money is entering, how it is spent.” Since the government knows about the personal lives of the clergy, then it surely knows the amounts and sources of those funds.

3) Pashinyan went on to condemn “some of the leaders of the clergy” for living “in shameful luxury, while some ordinary clergy live in poverty.” If this is true, it is none of the Prime Minister’s or the government’s business. Once again, he is violating the constitutional provision separating Church and State.

4) Pashinyan spoke about the need to reform the Church even though he has no right to interfere in internal church affairs. The Church has its own established procedures for dealing with such matters. The Prime Minister’s main responsibility is running the government; he has no authority or mandate to reform the Church. As a Church member, he can express his personal opinion, but he has gone far beyond that. He initiated a whole campaign to depose the Catholicos, proposed specific Church reforms, denigrated the clergy, and imprisoned several high-ranking clergymen.

Last week, Pashinyan made another bizarre suggestion on his Facebook page. He wants Church choirs to sing the national anthem of the Republic of Armenia “in all churches, at 10:55 am, right before celebrating Mass.” By saying “all churches,” it is not clear if he is including the Armenian Catholic and Evangelical churches. He also did not clarify if he is including Armenian Apostolic Churches outside Armenia. One can imagine the hostile reaction of the Turkish government should the choirs of Armenian churches in Istanbul sing the Armenian, not the Turkish, national anthem.

If Pashinyan is such a nationalist and a faithful follower of the Armenian Church, why does he not start his weekly Cabinet meetings with the national anthem and a prayer? Why doesn’t his parliamentary majority open each session with the national anthem and a prayer? I suggest that before Pashinyan starts ordering the Church what to do, he should institute those changes in his own government.

In a follow-up video on his Facebook page, Pashinyan suggested that “the placement of the tricolor flag at the entrance or inside the churches of the Republic of Armenia should be discussed.” Pashinyan not only wants to change the Catholicos, but also what the choir should sing in the Church and what flag it should display. This is a completely unwarranted interference in internal Church affairs. He should concentrate on his real job — running the government — which he has miserably failed to do.

Prime Minister Pashinyan, a man who cannot even manage a doghouse, may soon declare himself the next Catholicos of All Armenians.

Armenia’s Church—State Tensions Need Clarity, Not Conflict

By Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

The Armenian people are living through a historic turning point. For the first time in centuries, we have an enduring and independent Republic of Armenia. Yet roughly three-quarters of the Armenian Apostolic faithful live outside its borders, in a vast and diverse diaspora.

This new reality raises an urgent but often confused question: What is the proper role of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and what is the proper role of the state?

Armenian identity and Christian faith have been tightly woven together. Our medieval writers often spoke of God and homeland in the same breath. This bond helped Armenians survive foreign rule, genocide, and dispersion.

But what helped us survive statelessness can easily create confusion in a modern republic.

Today, the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin stands on the territory of a sovereign Armenian state. The Catholicos of All Armenians resides in Armenia. Yet most Armenians who look to Etchmiadzin as their spiritual home live abroad. Is the Church mainly the religious arm of the Republic of Armenia? Or is it a global spiritual body for Armenians everywhere, with a mission that cannot be reduced to any one state?

In the Catholic world, the Holy See (the Vatican) and the State of Italy eventually defined their relationship clearly (Lateran Treaty 11 February, 1929): one is a spiritual center with a worldwide flock; the other is a nation-state with its own political responsibilities. Armenia faces a similar need for clarification, adapted to our own history and circumstances.

Such clarity begins with a few basic principles.

First, the Armenian Apostolic Church has a spiritual

and moral mission, not a political one. Its core tasks are to preach the Gospel, celebrate the sacraments, form conscience, comfort the suffering, and preserve Armenian Christian culture and memory. It has every right — and sometimes the duty — to speak on moral questions that affect society: justice, corruption, dignity, war and peace, the protection of the weak. But it is not a political party and should not be turned into one.

Second, the Republic of Armenia is a secular state. That should not mean an anti-religious state. It means a government that serves all citizens — believers and non-believers, Apostolic and other—without imposing or enforcing a particular theology. The state must guarantee freedom of conscience, equality before the law, and protection of human rights.

At the same time, a mature secularism can recognize the special historical role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the life of the nation, and cooperate with it in areas like education, social services, and cultural preservation — within clear legal boundaries.

Why, then, are tensions so high?

Part of the answer lies in expectations formed in another era. For centuries, when Armenia had no state, the Church often acted as the main organized Armenian institution: mediator, educator, protector, diplomat. Some still expect it to play that political role. Others, reacting against this, demand that the Church remain silent in all public matters. Both positions misunderstand the difference between partisan politics and moral witness.

Another part of the answer is politicization. In today’s heated atmosphere, political actors sometimes try to use Church symbols and language to advance their own agendas — or attack the Church to weaken their rivals. This harms both the Church’s spiritual credibility and the quality of democratic debate.

Finally, there is a gap between perspectives in Armenia and in the diaspora. For many in the diaspora, the Church is their primary national institution. For many inside Armenia, it is one institution among others, operating within a fragile and contested political environment. Without careful listening, these different experiences feed mutual frustration.

How do we move from confusion to clarity?

One path is to follow, in our own way, what other states and churches have done: publicly define the relationship between Church and state. That could mean: reaffirming the independence of the Church in spiritual and internal matters; confirming the secular nature of the Republic and its neutrality toward all faiths; recognizing, in law, the unique historical and cultural role of the Armenian Apostolic Church; setting rules to prevent the misuse of Church structures for partisan purposes; creating regular, transparent channels of dialogue between state and Church leadership.

None of these alone would resolve all conflict. Disagreements would remain — and they should, in a free society. But it would reduce the temptation to turn every dispute into an existential struggle between “old Armenia” and “new Armenia,” or between “religion” and “progress.”

In a time of serious national challenges — security threats, social hardship, mass emigration, and unresolved trauma — Armenia needs both a competent state and a credible Church. The state must focus on justice, security, and the material well-being of citizens. The Church must focus on faith, moral formation, hope, and identity. They serve the same people, but in different ways.

Armenian Christianity has always combined patriotism and piety in a distinctive way. That heritage should not be a weapon in a power struggle. It should be a source of wisdom as we learn, perhaps for the first time, how to live as citizens of a modern republic and as heirs of an ancient Christian people.

Clarifying the respective roles of Church and state in Armenia will not diminish either institution. Done well, it will enable both to serve more honestly and more effectively, ensuring that neither political power nor spiritual authority is abused. In this way, the Armenian people-at-home and throughout the diaspora-can face the future with clearer minds and steadier hearts. This important mission can be accomplished through a strong partnership amongst the leaders of Church and State, committed to a moral theory that safeguards the well-being of our people both in the homeland and in the diaspora.

Seeing Us in Armenia and Armenia in Us

PILGRIMAGE, from page 18

on me? Perhaps, but it was wonderful: Bentleys next to Ladas. Yes, trash and trinkets but also beautiful hand-carved chess sets (Armenia is world-renowned for their championship chess players) and bags of mountain-herb teas. And piles and piles of freshly-baked lavash bread.

We strolled and shopped and ate and quite honestly marveled at nearly every turn, again, face to face with “us”: despite being tourists, we were never really tourists.

There is and remains a kind of cultural schism, Western Armenian (the diaspora) and Eastern Armenian (homeland). The foods are a bit different, the language was a bit different, though all of our rusty ever-since-my grandmother-died-I-do-not-speak-it did suffice, fooling ourselves into temporary fluency.

The church, though, remains the same for all of us. The church, for Armenians, was never about the building, though the churches and monasteries we saw and walked through really made my head spin at the strength and precision of their eternal construction.

Some of you abhor religion and cannot square with your own moral guidelines the lives lost in the defense of its name and/or principles. Fear not, I won’t proselytize nor did I have any kind of choirs-of-angels epiphany. I myself am a true believer, in

US Rep. Luna Introduces Bill to End Aid Restrictions On Azerbaijan

907, from page 1

has taken steps to lift the blockade and other use of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.” Thus, Azerbaijan was the only post-Soviet country that did not benefit from the Freedom Support Act, at least until 2001, when the bill was amended so that the president has the authority to temporarily waive the restrictions. Since then, it has been waived several times, though the restrictions were never entirely removed.

As part of the historic meeting between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and US President Donald Trump in Washington in August 2025, Trump authorized section 907 to be temporarily waived, but not fully removed, which can only be done by an act of Congress.

Luna has not made public comments on her decision to put forward the bill, which was welcomed in Azerbaijani media.

A member of Congress from Florida, she has long been a close ally of Trump, and is considered to be one of the more pro-Russian members of the House.

Separately, on Wednesday, December 10, Luna said she would co-sponsor a bill put forth by her Republican colleague Thomas Massie to withdraw the US from NATO.

(This article originally appeared in oc-media.org on December 11.)

my own way and need not convince any of you of anything divine: that’s my business and that’s your business.

But I will say to light a simple candle in churches that have stood, unchanged, in the face of wind, rain, snow and marauding hordes hell-bent on the domination and destruction of the nation, of which there were untold numbers, (and ALL defeated, as we still stand today) moved my very soul. It undeniably shifted my axis towards a deeper appreciation and gratitude to all those who stood in that very same spot doing the very same thing, asking for the forgiveness of their sins and the eternal love and protection of their family, for thousands of years.

Just as I did.

There was, for me, a moment or two, embracing the historical enormity of not only the “place” but the country, where I felt, however briefly (before we had to get back on the bus) that I was as close to God as I ever might be.

Monasteries, waterfalls, seeing Mt. Ararat for the first moment, grand lunches laughing and toasting with old, deep honest friends; a circle of stones with cosmically-placed rocks well before Stonehenge; long rides on twisty single-lane highways; cigars and wine (made in a country that has been producing wine for thousands of years) and the freshest lavash bread baked by old grandmothers on their knees; caves and eagles and redoubts and again and again, churches, testimonies of faith, made by (two) hands temporarily unclasped, in defense and veneration of a faith that has never been broken or denied.

I did not have an out-of-body revelation. I am not moving to Armenia. I was astounded by the number of Asian tourists! But I am immensely glad I made the trip and like any ethnicity, I would encourage one to return to their homeland at least once in their life, so you can see where you truly came from, to walk the walk and not just talk the talk.

One foot literally in ancient history, one in very modern times, the trip was a wonder-filled experience.

(Paul Kayaian is a writer based in New York and formerly in Barcelona. He recently published his first book, *Day Rates, Night Sweats, and Often Barcelona In Between*. He is also the creator of a Substack blog “Barcelona Redux.”)

Pashinyan Violates Constitution: Should Global Armenian Church Ask for International Judicial Intervention?

INTERVENTION, from page 1

Informed Armenians naturally follow with deep indignation this sad crisis taking place in Armenia, which has gradually become destructive for the entire Armenian nation.

Our press recently made two appeals, first demanding that the Armenian authorities stop the practice of detaining clergy and laity without the basic formalities of a regular trial, thus violating the standards of international justice. This is a practice characteristic of despotic countries. We also demanded that they respect the laws of state non-interference in church affairs embodied in the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia. Secondly, and with equal emphasis we asked the Mother See to implement the requirements of our Church’s canons, by convening episcopal and then national ecclesiastical assemblies as soon as possible in order to examine and when necessary, adopt reforms in the church laws that regulate the operations of the church.

However, the extreme gravity of the situation prevailing in Armenia currently was revealed more vividly when, though the Catholicos of All Armenians took a first step in an exemplary manner by inviting the Episcopal Assembly to convene on December 10 in the Mother See, the convening of that council failed. Indeed the majority of the bishops in the worldwide dioceses of the Armenian Apostolic Church understandably felt themselves threatened within Armenia, so that, according to information received from the Mother See, “taking into consideration the current situation in Armenia, in particular the repressions carried out against the clergy, including arrests, in response to the request of the bishops, the convening of the Episcopal Assembly by the order of the Catholicos of All Armenians is temporarily postponed.”

This is how unfortunately, the stubbornly unconstitutional, undemocratic and dictatorial practices of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his government in this matter, have clearly reduced Armenia to a disgraceful level in the context of the civilized nations of the world.

While preparing this article analyzing the current situation, Pashinyan’s latest statement appeared, in which he openly confirms his decision to trample not only on the national constitution, but also on the bylaws of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which has a global structure, and to illegally, with his forceful intervention, remove the Catholicos of All Armenians, who had been elected by the entire Armenian nation, and illegally appoint an unlawful locum tenens and generate new bylaws, all of that absolutely illegally.

This will certainly turn a lamentable national crisis

inevitably into a global one. Will the Armenian Apostolic Church, which has a global structure with constituent clerical and lay components, be forced to resort to the intervention of international human rights bodies and other appropriate institutions?

Despite all this, even at this stage, we directly call upon Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his administration to immediately and profoundly reform their current, clearly unacceptable and nationally damaging behavior.

First of all, they must release all clergy and lay prisoners who have been detained for political reasons without following internationally accepted rules of justice, and they must officially declare that they will cease this practice.

The authorities must also declare that they will henceforth rigorously limit their actions to the requirements of the law, as delineated by the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia.

We wish also to express our appreciation for the exemplary initiative of the Catholicos of All Armenians to call for the Episcopal Assembly of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which must be convened in calm and unfettered conditions guaranteed by the authorities, necessarily in the Mother See, with the aim of preparing for according to the church bylaws, the convening of a National Ecclesiastical Assembly, where as needed reforms may be adopted in the canons of the church.

We consider the immediate implementation of the aforementioned steps necessary so that every Armenian, whether resident in Armenia or in the diaspora, clergy or laity, can feel completely safe in traveling to Armenia and feel completely free to participate in any and all legal events and meetings aimed at improving the spiritual or physical life of Armenians, without feeling exposed to the threat of illegal secret recordings.

We demand all of this unequivocally, for the sake and in the name of the supreme interests of our church and the Armenian nation.

Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADLP)
Coordinated Press
Azg (Armenia)
Abaka (Canada)
Arev (Egypt)
Zartongk (Lebanon)
Nor Ashkharh (Greece)
Baikar (USA)
Armenian Mirror-Spectator (USA)
Sardarabad (Buenos Aires)

December 10, 2025

Armenia to Take €300m Loans for Syunik Housing for Displaced People

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The Armenian government is set to take out loans totaling about €300m to fund regional development in Syunik Province and housing programs for Armenians forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh).

Presenting the agreement with the European Investment Bank (EIB) to lawmakers on December 16, Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Kristine Ghalechyan said a €50m loan would support the Resilient Syunik program. The funding will be directed at improving water supply, education and healthcare services in the southern region, with the aim of boosting economic resilience and living standards.

Separately, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Davit Khachatryan outlined a \$250m loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank under the THRIVE housing reform program. The initiative is designed to help create a sustainable and inclusive housing system for displaced Artsakh Armenians.

Khachatryan said the government-approved housing support scheme, launched in mid-2024, has so far enabled more than 1,600 families to purchase homes, while another 2,200 families have received housing certificates and are searching for properties. The program operates through commercial banks using a mortgage mechanism, with the state covering both principal and interest over a 10-year period. The ADB loan has a 27-year term, including a 10-year grace period, an interest rate of 4.84%, and repayments beginning in 2035. An additional \$16m will be provided as a grant.