

Pashinyan vs. the  
Catholikos: What’s  
Behind the Armenian  
Prime Minister’s  
Campaign Against  
The Church?

By Ulivyya Asadzade & Suren Muayelyan

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Armenia is facing its gravest church-state clash since gaining independence, as tensions continue to grow between Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Catholicos Karekin II, the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The dispute has led to arrests, public accusations, and competing narratives about Armenia’s identity, governance, geopolitical orientation — and whether or not the prime minister respects the country’s constitution.

The standoff could reshape Armenia’s political landscape and relations with its diaspora ahead of parliamentary elections in June next year.

What Is the Dispute About?

The government claims it’s targeting corruption and entrenched business interests within the church, an Oriental Orthodox institution.

For example, the church, which is exempt from property tax by law, has been accused of using this exemption for enrichment. However, no official legal judgement or independent verification has so far confirmed these claims.

see CHURCH, page 2

Vardanyan Remains  
Defiant in Face of Life  
Sentence

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Ruben Vardanyan, a prominent Armenian businessman and former Nagorno-Karabakh premier, has issued another defiant statement from an Azerbaijani prison as he faced a life sentence at the end of his trial in Baku.

According to Vardanyan’s family in Armenia, he read out the statement to his elder son David in a phone call on Wednesday, December 17.

“The proceedings taking place in Baku do not meet the basic standards of a fair trial and therefore cannot be regarded as a court in the true sense of the word,” he said.

“I regret nothing. All my actions were taken consciously and voluntarily, fully understanding the possible consequences. I am ready to answer for my actions before God. The only thing I regret is that I was not able to do more.”

“I reaffirm: Artsakh was, is, and will be — regardless of attempts to rewrite history or impose an alternative interpretation of events,” added the statement circulated by the family on Thursday, December 18.

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Watertown’s Armenian Museum Presents  
Blockbuster Gorky Exhibition

By Aram Arkun  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

WATERTOWN — This year has been an exceptional one for Armenian Museum of America. After two intriguing exhibitions devoted to the art of Varujan Boghosian and then Serj Tankian, it concluded the year with a blockbuster titled “Arshile Gorky: Redrawing Community and Connections.”

Gorky, whose birthname was Vosdanig Adoyan, is one of the most famous Armenian artists of modern times.

The museum had over 250 guests, both Armenian and non-Armenian, on the opening night of December 11, for this first presentation of Gorky’s oeuvre by an Armenian museum. The event also served as the museum’s annual members’ Christmas party.

This exhibition is the culmination of various programs in Watertown commemorating “100 Years of Arshile Gorky,” as the artist had lived in Watertown for about four years after arriving in the US in 1920. Curated by Dr. Kim S. Theriault, author of *Rethinking Arshile Gorky* (Penn State University Press, 2009), and designed by Ryann Casey, the show is sponsored by the JHM Charitable Foundation.

While there have been many



From left, Director of Annual Programs Lucia Marconi of the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston, Nancy Kolligian, Sarah Hayes and Michele Kolligian (photo Natalie Nigito)

exhibitions of Gorky’s art over the years, one unique aspect of the current show is precisely the emphasis on Gorky’s local connection as well as his interactions with family, friends and other artists through his art. Furthermore, many of the 26 items in the exhibition have not been displayed publicly before,

as they belong to various private collectors. Loaning institutions include the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Housatonic Museum of Art, Yale University Art Gallery and the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

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Artsakh Refugees in Syunik Live So  
Close to Home Yet Cannot Return



Meghri railway station, which has already received many names: TRIPP, “Zangezur Corridor”, “Part of the Middle Corridor”, “Syunik Gates”, “Crossroads of Peace”, etc. (Marut Vanyan photo)

By Marut Vanyan  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

TEGH, Armenia — The village of Tegh, in the municipality of the same name, in Syunik Province, feels cut off not only from Armenia but from the entire world. Public transportation is nonexistent. Villagers negotiate with the local taxi driver, share the cost, and get to Goris when they need to go shopping or to the hospital. There’s not much talks about the church-government relationship that has so poisoned Armenia’s domestic political life, and when talking to locals, one doesn’t feel like Syunik itself, where they live, has long been a geopolitical issue, or that the issue is primarily about them. Villagers are not aware of the arrival of Azerbaijani fuel in Armenia, nor of the 15 million euros allocated by the EU. A group of women sits in front of a little grocery store discussing household matters, men plow their gardens, burn dry leaves left over from autumn, or do housework. It’s unclear what kind of atmosphere prevails here: is it peace or indifference? Life is different here.

see SYUNIK, page 4

**ARMENIA**  
Bakery in  
Tavush Province  
Offers Artsakh  
Specialties



**NEW YORK**  
More than \$8 Million  
Raised to Support  
Rural Armenia at  
COAF Holiday Gala



**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

### EU Is Closely Monitoring Armenia–Turkey Border Opening Talks

YEREVAN (PanArmenian.net) — The head of the EU Delegation to Armenia Vassilis Maragos stated on December 23 that the European Union is “closely monitoring the process of opening the border between Armenia and Turkey.”

He added that the EU is providing appropriate support in that direction, according to Auroranews.am.

Maragos also confirmed that the EU is participating in negotiations with Armenia and the United States concerning the TRIPP project, discussing possible formats for the EU’s involvement.

Turkish Airlines is set to launch regular flights from Istanbul to Yerevan in 2026, according to Turkey’s special envoy for Armenia relations, Serdar Kılıç.

According to Turkish media, border checkpoint preparations have accelerated within the normalization framework. Technical assessments and preparatory work have begun at the Alijan border crossing, one of the key points between the two countries.

### Wizz Air to Launch Direct Yerevan–London Flights in Mid-2026

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Wizz Air will launch direct flights between Yerevan and London starting June 12, 2026, operating twice a week on Mondays and Fridays.

Tickets can be purchased on the Wizz Air website (wizzair.com) and the company’s mobile app, starting from \$48.99, the Armenian Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure said in a press release this week.

“We highly value the launch of direct flights between Yerevan and London. This is an important step toward expanding connections between Armenia and the United Kingdom. This event is the result of the Armenian government’s policy aimed at developing the aviation sector. I am confident that this new route will open up new opportunities for citizens and also boost tourism. Moving forward, we will continue to support initiatives that contribute to improving transport accessibility and expanding international cooperation,” said Armenia’s Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, David Khudatyan, according to a statement issued by the ministry.

Anastasia Novak of Wizz Air said that this is the airline’s ninth new route, while flights to 18 new destinations in 10 countries will be launched in total.

The Ambassador of Armenia to the UK, Varuzhan Nersesyan, emphasized that direct air connections between Yerevan and London provide a strong boost to deepening relations between Armenia and the United Kingdom.

# Pashinyan vs. the Catholicos: What’s Behind the Armenian Prime Minister’s Campaign Against The Church?

CHURCH, from page 1

Pashinyan has accused Karekin II of violating celibacy vows by allegedly fathering a child and being “a threat to Armenia’s national security.” The prime minister has also implied that Karekin II and figures close to him — including his brother, who serves as a diocese primate in Russia — have links to foreign intelligence services.

In a recent speech to parliament, Pashinyan said, “I do not need a Catholicos who obeys me; I need a Catholicos who does not obey a senior lieutenant of a foreign intelligence service and does not report to lieutenants of a foreign intelligence service on a daily basis.”

The church has insisted the government is overstepping its constitutional limits.

RFE/RL’s Armenian Service contacted the Investigative Committee, which handles preliminary probes into serious crimes, as well as the Prosecutor-General’s Office and National Security Service, and learned that no criminal case has ever been opened against Karekin II.

#### How Did Things Escalate?

Tensions between church and state deepened after Armenia’s second war with Azerbaijan over its breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020. The war lasted six weeks before a Russia-brokered ceasefire came into force and resulted in Armenia losing control over parts of the region. In September 2023, Baku completely retook Karabakh from Armenian separatists following a lightning offensive.

Between April and June of 2024, church cleric Bagrat Galstanyan led protests — the largest of Pashinyan’s tenure — over what he sees as Armenia’s territorial concessions to Azerbaijan. At the time, he was serving as bishop of the Diocese of Tavush, where four villages were returned to Azerbaijan

after having been under Armenian control since the first war over Nagorno-Karabakh, which ended in 1994.

Galstanyan was later arrested on charges of plotting a coup and attempting to seize power. And since April 2024, four archbishops have been arrested on different charges.

#### Accusations of Russian Ties

When Galstanyan was arrested, Russia responded angrily, with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov calling for an end to what he called “unjustified attacks” against the church, which he described as “one of the key pillars of Armenian society.”

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan fired back, accusing Moscow of meddling in Armenia’s internal affairs.

Some analysts claim church leaders, including Karekin II, maintain close ties to Russia. “There’s a Russian connection to the leader of the church,” Richard Giragosian, head of the Yerevan-based Regional Studies Center, told RFE/RL.

In 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded Karekin II the Order of Honor for his “great contribution to the development of cultural-humanitarian links between Russia and Armenia.”

Giragosian adds that while the allegations of corruption and ties to Russia may be valid, the government’s response has been punitive: “I think the government is [getting] carried away. This is a vendetta. It’s too personal.” Accusations that the church has ties with Russia have emerged at a time when the Armenian government is experiencing strained relations with Moscow. Pashinyan has argued that Russia abandoned Armenia during the 2020 war, prompting a strategic shift toward the EU and other Western partners.

#### ‘Real Armenia’

The backdrop to the church-state confrontation has been Pashinyan’s Real Armenia doctrine. According to the prime minister, Armenia should refocus national identity on the Republic of Armenia rather than territory outside its borders. Pashinyan has said that focusing on a historical homeland for Armenians, which includes parts of Turkey and Azerbaijan, has only caused geopolitical vulnerability and leaves room for Russian meddling.

#### Elections Ahead

The standoff between church and state comes at a sensitive time for Armenia, with the country heading toward parliamentary elections in June.

Analyst Giragosian cautions that the government is “going too far, too fast,” undermining legal norms and public confidence. “If this conflict continues next year, the government will suffer in terms of worse relations with the diaspora and will be seen as unnecessarily vindictive,” he adds.

Critics of the government’s actions say that the arrests of clergy and investigations into the church violate the constitutional separation of church and state.

Another sensitivity is Armenia’s peace agreement with Azerbaijan. While the presidents of both countries initialed the draft peace deal in August, the full treaty has not yet been formally signed or ratified.

The prime minister, however, has not let off the pressure, recently confirming that he ordered the National Security Service to censor church services by instructing priests not to mention Karekin II’s name during liturgies.

Pashinyan has defended his actions, saying that he is criticizing the catholicos as an ordinary believer calling for church reform rather than prime minister.

## Pro-Pashinyan Bishops’ Massive Security Detail Raises Questions

By Robert Zargarian and Susan Badalian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Dozens of men believed to be law-enforcement officers manhandled journalists outside Armenia’s main cathedral late on Thursday, December 18, as they escorted renegade clerics who were met with a furious reception from thousands of people demonstrating in support of Catholicos Karekin II.

Armenian law-enforcement authorities reported on December 19 no inquiries into their violent conduct. Critics said, meanwhile, that the size of the security detail only proves that the ten archbishops and bishops demanding Karekin’s resignation acted on Pashinyan’s orders when they urged supporters to converge on the Echmiadzin cathedral to help them “liberate” the Mother See of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The Mother See responded by scheduling a special prayer service there at the same time. For their part, Armenian opposition leaders and other prominent critics of the government urged supporters to join them in scuttling what they called an attack on Karekin’s headquarters ordered by Pashinyan.

Thousands of believers heeded the opposition appeal, outnumbering other demonstrators, including local government officials and ruling party members, backing Pashinyan’s efforts to depose the supreme head of the church. Hundreds of riot police were deployed around the cathedral to separate the rival groups.

The police failed to prevent a group of government loyalists from trying to burst into the cathedral at the end of the service

led by Karekin. They were pushed back by priests and laymen supporting Karekin. One of the priests suffered a heart attack in the melee and was rushed to the hospital.

The incident occurred right after six of the pro-government bishops made a brief appearance outside the cathedral, triggering “Judas!” chants from the pro-Karekin crowd. They were surrounded by several dozen plainclothes guards who hit and shoved journalists trying to interview the clergymen who were whisked away from the scene several minutes later. One of the reporters felt unwell and was helped by policemen.

A man who seemingly led the security guards was later recognized as an officer of Armenia’s National Security Service (NSS) who participated in the June 25 arrest of Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, a vocal critic of Pashinyan. Two other guards appeared to be police officers. One of them was identified as a member of a special police unit tasked with crowd control.

The massive security entourage of the rebel clerics sharply contrasted with the fact that Pashinyan’s government had stripped Karekin of state bodyguards years ago.

“Have you identified them as NSS employees?” a spokesperson for the former Armenian branch of the Soviet KGB told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service. “Please send us your questions [in writing.] We will respond within the [legally] defined time frame.”

Opposition leaders and other government critics portrayed the dramatic events in Echmiadzin as a serious setback for Pashinyan. They claimed to have prevented

a government seizure of the cathedral while urging supporters to be ready for more actions in support of Karekin.

One of the six pro-government bishops, Vazgen Mirzakhanyan, admitted on Friday that they had planned to enter the cathedral the previous night.

“But since various groups and factions were invited and their main goal was to provoke, we naturally tried to evade,” he told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service.

Mirzakhanyan sought to justify the violent behavior of the security guards. He suggested that they “tried to defend the clergymen against those aggressive media outlets.”

He also said that he and the like-minded bishops are not yet planning to rally their supporters again. But he said they will keep campaigning for Karekin’s resignation.

Karekin, who received a hero’s welcome from his supporters, again rejected those demands when he addressed them at the end of Thursday’s prayer service.

“Another attempt to encroach upon Holy Echmiadzin took place today, unfortunately, with the involvement of some members of the clergy,” he said. “Yet the faithful children of our people remain steadfast and fearless. This noise will never hinder the fulfillment of our sacred mission, nor the realization of our programs dedicated to the construction and prosperity of our homeland.”

“We urge our venerable clergy who have gone astray to return to the canonical path and act exclusively in accordance with the sacred order of our Holy Church,” added the Catholicos.





## ARMENIA

# Bakery in Tavush Province Offers Artsakh Specialties

By Elizabeth Yekhtikian

Before sunrise each morning, baker Ganna Hakobyan begins shaping dough inside a new family business that is quickly becoming a cornerstone of village life. By 4 a.m., she is already preparing loaves, pastries and the specialty dish that gives the bakery its name: zhingyalov hats.

Artsakhi Hats, which means “Bread of Artsakh,” opened earlier this year in Achajur, a border village in Tavush Province. It is the only spot in the village of over 4,700 people where residents can buy the traditional Artsakh flatbread filled with fresh herbs.

Hakobyan, 52, runs the bakery with several relatives who all moved from Artsakh after being forced to leave in 2023. The family used to live and work in Martakert, where they baked bread for soldiers.

“The nature here — the air, the climate — everything reminds us of Martakert,” Hakobyan said. “But what matters most is that we are together.”

Her cousin, 27-year-old Davit Avagyan, started the bakery after getting a grant from the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) and the Knights and Daughters of Vartan. The money helped the family buy important equipment like ovens, a proofing chamber, a convection oven, a fryer and baking trays.

Before applying for the grant, Avagyan took business training courses from FAR. These courses helped him create a solid business plan that won the award.

“The bakery brought new light into our lives,” Avagyan said. “Deep down, I always believed we would succeed.”

Today, Artsakhi Hats makes bread, bulki (sweet bread), cookies and other pastries for local residents and the village school. The flatbread is baked in cer-



Baker Ganna Hakobyan

tain seasons, depending on how fresh the greens are.

“Zhingyalov hats are usually baked in spring,” Hakobyan said. “But when the weather is good, like now and the greens are fresh, we bake it.”

The family hopes to grow their business and start sending baked goods to nearby villages and stores in

the region.

For the Hakobyans, this project means more than just business. It is a way to rebuild their stability and sense of identity after losing their home.

“We used to bake for soldiers in Artsakh,” Hakobyan said. “Now we are baking for our new community.”

## H. Hovnanian Family Foundation Announces Over \$290,000 in Environmental Grants Ahead of COP17

YEREVAN — From river restoration and biodiversity protection to youth education and climate readiness, environmental actors across Armenia put forward a wide range of proposals this quarter. After reviewing 37 full applications from an exceptionally strong pool, the H. Hovnanian Family Foundation has selected nine projects to receive more than \$290,000 in support through its third-quarter 2025 environmental grant cycle.

The grant recipients can contribute to the country’s preparations for the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (COP17). Armenia will host COP17 at the Meridian Expo Center in Yerevan from October 18 to 30, 2026, bringing together nations to advance global biodiversity conservation, restore ecosystems, and implement the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Preparatory activities are already underway across the country.

Two of the selected projects focus directly on environmental education and public engagement during COP17.

Innovative Solutions for Sustainable Development of Communities (ISSD) will implement a two-part initiative: producing 25,000 pins from recycled plastic waste and demonstrating the process at a Mini Recycling Lab in the COP17 Green Zone. In parallel, the program will bring together 20 to 30 young environmental leaders from Armenia and abroad for guided tours focused on biodiversity, recycling systems, and collaborative problem-solving. Their work will culminate in a youth-led presentation on actionable solutions to biodiversity loss and waste challenges. All materials and equipment developed through this grant will remain in long-term use within the Eco-Schools program.

My Forest Armenia will design an immersive installation for COP17 that simulates a forest both above and below

ground. Visitors will experience the interconnected world of roots, fungi, and trees, fostering emotional and educational connections to Armenia’s ecosystems. Approximately 3,000 international visitors are expected at COP17 each day, along with a large number of local guests.

The Sisian Adult Education Center will lead a one-year effort to restore the ecosystem of the Vorotan River, which flows through the city of Sisian and serves roughly 20,000 residents. Algae overgrowth, pollution, and years of mismanagement have led to recurring environmental and public health concerns. The project includes purchasing an aquatic weed harvester, introducing a modern water quality monitoring system, creating youth-led “Guardians of Vorotan” activities, and developing a community water resource management strategy with the municipality. Local authorities, schools, youth groups, and the Ministry of the Environment’s regional office will participate. The effort is co-funded by the Sisian Municipality and the Center.

The Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) will lead a one-year program in Vayots Dzor to help the Areni community coexist more effectively with local wildlife, particularly bears. In recent years, beehives, orchards, and crops have been increasingly damaged by food scarcity, waste, and pressure on natural habitats. To address this, the project will install 10 bear-proof electric fences to protect up to 2,500 beehives, train more than 150 residents in coexistence and waste management practices, and carry out Armenia’s first structured assessment of wild harvesting. Informational signage in Areni and the Noravank Gorge will encourage responsible ecotourism and discourage wildlife feeding.

In Lori, the Boo Mountain Bike Park initiative will develop a 10-kilometer hik-

ing and biking trail in Vanadzor, guided by an environmental impact assessment (EIA) that will also produce a biodiversity baseline for the area. The data will be shared with the ArmForest State Agency. The project includes installing 15 informational stations and training 20 local youth as eco-ambassadors. Allegra Tourismus International and the International Mountainbiking Association IMBA Switzerland will support the technical design and implementation. The trail will be free and open to the public, with long-term maintenance covered by the Boo Park NGO.

The Armenia Tree Project (ATP) will expand its nationwide Eco Club program by establishing six new clubs in 2026, serving approximately 180 students. The one-year initiative combines classroom learning, project-based activities, field visits, and a four-day Eco Camp. Students will design and implement environmental projects in their communities, culminating in a national showcase event. ATP has operated Eco Clubs since 2019 and has already reached more than 500 students.

The Arpa Environmental Foundation will support environmental improvements in the Areni community of Vayots Dzor. Activities include water and ecosystem restoration in Khachik village; sustainable agriculture and soil care training for about 100 farmers; installation of 25-30 kW of solar panels at a community school or kindergarten; and environmental education through youth eco-clubs and summer camps. The project combines UNDP funding with support from the H. Hovnanian Family Foundation.

The American University of Armenia (AUA) will partner with the Ministry of Environment’s Hydrometeorology and Monitoring Center SNCO (ArmHydromet) to build national capacity in water quality analysis. Through hands-on project work, ArmHydromet staff will analyse long-term

Lake Sevan chemistry data using advanced statistical tools. The results will support national policy discussions and be published in at least three peer-reviewed journals. The collaboration will leave ArmHydromet with a ready framework for continued data-driven monitoring.

The Miassine Foundation will establish an Environmental Education Laboratory and Mountain Arboretum at Lake Arpi. The project will restore two hectares of degraded high-mountain land with native species and create a site for conservation education and ecotourism. Around 600 students from 30 schools and vocational colleges will participate in workshops, and 200 women and youth from border communities will receive training in circular economy practices, reforestation, and ecotourism.

The Foundation’s commitment to these goals was underscored on November 26 during a Ministry of Environment briefing that brought together media representatives and partners to discuss COP17 preparations, during which the winning projects were formally announced.

“What stands out this quarter is the commitment to building change that lasts. These projects do not focus on quick fixes. They strengthen systems, deepen local skills, and create the conditions for communities to manage their own environments more sustainably. That long-term approach is essential if we want real improvement in water quality, biodiversity, and environmental awareness across Armenia,” said Anahit Hakobyan, Program Manager at the H. Hovnanian Family Foundation. “We are proud to support initiatives that leave knowledge, tools, and capacity in place well beyond the grant period.”

Full details about the grant program and upcoming calls can be seen at [hovnanian-foundation.org/en/armenia-grants](http://hovnanian-foundation.org/en/armenia-grants).





## ARMENIA

# Artsakh Refugees So Close to Home Yet Cannot Return

SYUNIK, from page 1

Imagine you are standing in front of your house, but for some reason you can't get in; you haven't lost the key. It is in your pocket, but you can't get it. This is exactly the feeling that arises for any Artsakh Armenian who is in Togh. They can be home in two hours, but they can't. The once-busy highway is now empty; only rare military vehicles pass by. All the businesses along the highway have gone bankrupt. Just a little further from the Artsakh and Stepanakert signs, barbed wire and cement blocks cut off contact with Artsakh.

## Lusine

Lusine, a mother of seven (and expecting her eighth), says she asks her daughter to hang out the laundry so she does not have to see the mountains of Artsakh, which are clearly visible from the balcony of the village home she is renting in Togh.

"I don't want to get out of the house, I don't talk to anyone. My children are my friends, neighbors and relatives. I don't even use the Internet or TV. I ask my eldest daughter to hang the laundry so that I don't see the Artsakh mountains, which are right in front of me. It's better not to see them than to see them but not be able to go to my native Astghashen and Martakert. The children also miss Artsakh very much; even the little one remember it. One day, I noticed that one of my kids had started wearing school clothes and shoes. When I asked him where he was going, he replied that the Azerbaijanis were now driving his baby walker, and he was going to take it back. He saw it on the Internet, how Azerbaijanis were riding the abandoned children's bicycles and baby walkers. My older children are full of hope, they say the day



Mher works as a construction worker

will come when the road will open and we will go home. They don't adapt here, no matter how much Armenia is their homeland," she says.

Lusine is from the village of Astghashen in Askeran region. Her husband, Mher, is from Martakert. As a large family, they got an apartment in Martakert, but lived there only for two years before fleeing like everyone else in 2023.

"How terrible it was? The local authorities said, 'Wait, someone is coming to evacuate you,' but no one came, everyone left as best they could. Anyway, a military Ural [off-road vehicle] arrived. We boarded it and after two days of wandering on the roads, hungry and thirsty, we finally reached Goris. I felt like a war was about to break out. The teacher from school called me and asked why I hadn't sent the kids to school and whether they were sick. No, I replied, I felt like something bad was going to happen, and that I wouldn't have time to gather my kids in a panic. Then, when everything happened, as I had predicted,



Lusine and Mher's children in their rented house in the Togh community. Lusine doesn't want to be photographed, nor do her older daughters. "When we go to Artsakh, you'll take pictures of us there," she says. (Marut Vanyan photo)

they asked how I knew that. Even though after the 2020 war, the government started paving roads and building apartments, I felt that danger was approaching," Lusine recalls. "

Lusine and Mher are planning under the Armenian government's housing program to buy a house in Goris or in Sisian and start everything from scratch. "We are tired of paying rent already, at least we should have our own corner. My husband works hard all month long. We add to his salary from the children's pension and pay rent. And sometimes when we're late, the landlord says leave the house. I don't want to live in big cities. I need to raise livestock and have my own garden," she says.

Lusine is very smart. Despite all these difficulties, she keeps going. She even manages to make a little extra money when there is an event in the village, by baking zingalov hats and pakhlava for the guests.

"I don't ask anyone for help, I'm grateful for what they've done for me. They've given me a refrigerator and a washing machine. The Red Cross has helped. That's enough, I'm grateful, I'll do the rest myself. I don't even take children to the hospital, I treat them with folk medicine. That day, the teacher from the kindergarten called and said that the child was coughing, take him to the hospital right away. I didn't, I just put two pieces of plum lavash, one on the child's chest and the other on his back, wrapped him up and look, he doesn't have a single cough now!" Indeed, the child was playing with dog actively (barefoot).

Speaking about today's reality Lusine says she doesn't believe peace is possible between Armenia and Azerbaijan. "There won't be any peace," she says, "I see the same signs here as in Artsakh then. At that time, we were also attracted by new roads, construction, and Russian 'guarantees,' but in the end we saw what happened. If this continues, the process of 'demilitarization' will reach Yeraskh and don't be surprised if one day we find ourselves, at best, in America or France," she says.

## Seda

The locals also describe the situation vaguely. Sometimes they say everything will be fine, sometimes they predict a possible war. "Maybe [Prime Minister Nikol] Pashinyan will be able to do something, maybe not," says Mrs. Seda and tells a tragic story that happened to her son-in-law.

"He went and didn't come back..." says Seda as she wipes away her tears. "We got the news of his death on October 13 in 2020. Before that, he had called and

see the Azerbaijani trenches from here, but there is no proper attention to taking care of people's social needs," Seda adds.

## What Is Happening in Syunik?

"Peace is a reality now," Pashinyan posted on Facebook sharing a report of Azerbaijani fuel arriving in Armenia via Georgia. The US Ambassador to Armenia Kristina Kvien announced another step in the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) project.

"Another implementation achievement is the recent U.S. announcement of \$145 million in new assistance funding for Armenia. The bulk of these funds will go toward advancing the TRIPP project and enhancing border security and management," she wrote.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk recently arrived in Armenia and announced that the "Trump Route" is impossible without Russia and that Armenia must choose between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Back in April, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the opening of the borders between Armenia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, calling it a "game changer." "After three decades of closure, the opening of the borders of Armenia with Turkey and Azerbaijan is going to be a game changer and it will bring Europe and Central Asia closer together like never before."

On December 15, Ali Akbar Velayati, senior advisor to the Supreme Leader of Iran, stated (again) that Iran opposes the TRIPP project, describing it as a serious threat to regional security arguing that the plan is merely a renamed version of the "Zangezur Corridor."

However, what is happening on the ground is that today, in the south of Armenia, there are many parties with a vested interest. The Armenian-Iranian border is guarded by the Russian security services, Iranian fuel tankers are coming and going, Iranian construction companies are involved in road construction work in Syunik, the EU Monitoring Mission is stationed there, Turkey and Azerbaijan have extended the railway tracks to the Armenian borders, in the Armenian part, rusty train cars have been parked since Soviet times and it seems that assurances about Armenia's sovereignty no longer convince anyone. How will so many superpowers find common ground in this small province? It is difficult to say what eclectic picture, if any, will emerge from all this in the future.



Mrs. Seda (Marut Vanyan photo)

would find it in his pocket. So many young guys died. If they were going to hand him over, why did they kill so many young people?," she asks. "My daughter now lives alone in Goris with four children. How can she take care of four children alone, one of whom has health issues? Yes, she is young, she can work, but who should look after the children? Or here is my neighbor Varduhi, she is also the mother of two disabled children. We live in a border village, you can



Meghri railway station, which has already received many names: TRIPP, "Zangezur Corridor," "Part of the Middle Corridor," "Syunik Gates," "Crossroads of Peace," etc. (Marut Vanyan photo)





## INTERNATIONAL

# Aliyev Skips CIS Summit in Russia, Claiming Busy Schedule

By Aytan Farhadova

Despite preparations and positive statements from Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev did not attend the informal summit of Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS) on Monday, December 22, in St. Petersburg.

The state-run media outlet Azertac wrote on the same day of the summit that Aliyev would not be able to attend the informal summit due to his “tight schedule.”

Aliyev had attended the previous CIS summit in October in Tajikistan.

Although Russia clearly expected Aliyev to attend the summit and appeared to be surprised by the last-minute cancellation, Peskov attempted to put a positive spin on the announcement, “they understood Aliyev’s reasons.”

“No, we completely understand [Aliyev’s decision]. Indeed, all heads of state

have very busy schedules, especially in December, on the eve of the New Year,” Peskov said on Monday, December 22.

However, Peskov told the state-run media outlet TASS on Sunday, ahead of the summit, that President Vladimir Putin would “speak with everyone individually,” and also reiterated that the Kremlin expected Aliyev to attend.

In the same comments, Peskov hinted that Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan would also attend the summit, and that he was set to have talks with Aliyev.

Although no such reason was officially stated, there has been speculation that the cancellation is connected to lingering resentment in Baku over the deadly Azerbaijan Airlines plane crash in December 2024, and worsened after Baku said that Russian police tortured two ethnic Azerbaijanis to death in Yekaterinburg in June 2025. Tensions quickly escalated in the following days, with Azerbaijan issuing a formal

complaint to Russia, cancelling all Russia-related cultural events, and arresting a number of Russian journalists accused of espionage.

In October, Putin finally apologised to Aliyev during a face-to-face meeting in Dushanbe, prompting many to believe the spat had been put to rest.

Azerbaijani political analyst Elkhan Shahinoghlu told RFE/RL that Aliyev’s decision not to attend the CIS summit was connected to the crash and Putin’s alleged failure to follow through on the promises made during their meeting in Dushanbe. At the time, Putin pledged that Russia would pay compensation to the victims and bring those responsible for the crash to justice.

“In such a situation the possibility of Aliyev attending the informal summit was low,” Shahinoghlu said.

(This story originally appeared on the website [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on December 23.)

## Trump Administration Recalls Nearly 30 Career Diplomats around World

WASHINGTON (*The Guardian*) — The Trump administration is recalling nearly 30 career diplomats from ambassadorial and other senior embassy posts as it moves to reshape the US diplomatic posture abroad with personnel deemed fully supportive of Donald Trump’s “America first” priorities.

The chiefs of mission in at least 29 countries were informed last week that

their tenures would end in January, according to two state department officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal personnel moves.

All of them had taken up their posts in the Biden administration but had survived an initial purge in the early months of Trump’s second term that targeted mainly political appointees. That changed on Wednesday when they began to receive notices from officials in Washington DC about their imminent departures.

Ambassadors serve at the pleasure of the president, although they typically remain at their posts for between three and four years. Those affected by the shake-up are not losing their foreign service jobs but will be returning to Washington for other assignments should they wish to take them, the officials said.

The State Department declined to comment on specific numbers or ambassadors affected, but defended the changes, calling them “a standard process in any administration.” It noted that an ambassador was “a personal representative of the president and it is the president’s right to ensure that he has individuals in these countries who advance the America First agenda.”

Africa is the continent most affected by the removals, with ambassadors from 15 countries being removed: Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Gabon, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Madagascar, Mauritius, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia and Uganda.

Second is the Asia-Pacific region, with ambassadorial changes coming to six countries: Fiji, Laos, the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Vietnam are affected.

Four countries in Europe (Armenia, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Slovakia) are affected; as are two each in south Asia (Nepal and Sri Lanka); and the western hemisphere (Guatemala and Suriname).

Politico was the first to report on the ambassadorial recalls, which have drawn concern from some lawmakers and the union representing American diplomats.

## Vardanyan Remains Defiant in Face of Life Sentence

VARDANYAN, from page 1

It came as Azerbaijani prosecutors demanded that Vardanyan be sentenced to life in prison. They earlier also demanded life sentences for most of the seven other former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh standing a separate trial in Baku. Like Vardanyan, the latter were captured by Azerbaijan during or shortly after its September 2023 military offensive that forced Karabakh’s

In his latest statement, the 56-year-old tycoon, who had made his fortune in Russia, also urged Armenians to “not fear death.”

“It is not death that is frightening,” he said. “What is truly frightening is indifference — a state that enters us quietly and gradually, like radiation, and destroys us from within.”

The Armenian government is accused by its domestic critics of doing little to try to



Ruben Vardanyan stands trial in Baku, March 11, 2025.

entire population to flee to Armenia and restored Azerbaijani control over the region. All of the defendants deny a long list of accusations leveled against them.

Vardanyan, who held the second-highest post in Karabakh’s leadership from November 2022 to February 2023, was arrested at an Azerbaijani checkpoint in the Lachin corridor during the exodus. He stands accused, among other things, of “financing terrorism,” illegally entering Karabakh and supplying its armed forces with military equipment.

secure the release of these and 15 Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan. It denies the accusations that were echoed by Vardanyan’s American lawyer, Jared Genser, earlier this year.

In a June interview with RFE/RL’s Armenian Service, Genser pointed out that a draft Armenian-Azerbaijan peace treaty finalized in March does not address the fate of the prisoners and instead commits the two sides to withdrawing their international lawsuits filed against each other.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Russia Issues Arrest Warrant for Kasparov

MOSCOW (PanArmenian.net)

— Moscow’s Zamoskvoretsky District Court has ordered the arrest in absentia of Garry Kasparov, who has been labeled a foreign agent and listed as a terrorist and extremist in Russia. The news was confirmed by the court and reported by TASS on December 23.

Kasparov faces criminal charges under Part 2 of Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code for “public justification of terrorism” via information networks, including the internet. The law stipulates a prison sentence of five to seven years, along with a ban on holding certain positions or engaging in specific activities for up to five years.

The grandmaster has long spoken out against the Russian government.

Kasparov currently resides outside the country.

### Armenians not Harmed In Aleppo Clashes

YEREVAN (PanArmenian.net)

— After the December 22 clashes in the Syrian city of Aleppo between Kurdish and government forces, the situation has returned to calm, with no Armenian casualties reported. This was confirmed by Maria Gabrielian, spokesperson for the Armenian Prelacy of Aleppo and a former member of the Syrian Parliament, according to Armenpress.

Gabrielian stated that the clashes began at noon and continued late into the night.

“However, after midnight, the situation was completely calm. Things are now peaceful. Shops are open, and life has resumed its usual course,” she said.

In light of the tensions, the governor of Aleppo declared December 23 a public holiday, closing schools and government offices.

The clashes involved the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and government troops.

### Former German MP Accused in Bribery Scandal Arrested

MUNICH (DPA) — The Munich Higher Regional Court (Oberlandesgericht München) has issued an arrest warrant for former CDU Bundestag member Axel Fischer, who was taken into custody in a clinic in Bad Säckingen (Baden-Württemberg), the German television station n-tv.de reported on December 23.

Fischer, 55, is facing trial on corruption charges related to the so-called Azerbaijan affair. Prosecutors allege that while serving as a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) between 2010 and 2018, he acted in the interests of Azerbaijan in exchange for money.

Fischer is accused of giving pro-Azerbaijan speeches, passing on confidential documents, and receiving tens of thousands of euros in cash over several years. Fischer denies all allegations and insists he always voted independently and “never sold his vote.”





INTERNATIONAL

# Georgia’s Ethnic Armenians Have a Long History From Medieval Times to Current Political Unrest

By **Larry Luxner**  
*Special to Mirror-Spectator*

TBILISI, Georgia — High on a hill, in the Avlabari district of Georgia’s capital, Tbilisi, a quiet memorial invites visitors to recall an earlier era when ethnic Armenians dominated this city.

The Khojavank Pantheon of Prominent Armenian Public Figures sits next to Tbilisi’s Holy Trinity Cathedral, which at 87 meters ranks among the world’s tallest Eastern Orthodox churches. Here, preserved above the ruins of a cemetery that once held more than 90,000 graves, are the remains of 48 important Armenians including playwright Hakob Melik Hakobyan (known by his pen name, Raffi) and poet Serob Stepani Levonyan, known as Kousan Jivani.

Ten minutes’ walk from this solemn place — just off Ketevan Tsamebuli Square — is St. George [Gevorg] of Echmiadzin Church, built between 1806 and 1808. Renovated numerous times since then, most recently from 2006 to 2010, the cathedral belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Church and is one of only two remaining Armenian houses of worship in Tbilisi (at one time there were 29).

The other is St. George’s Church, a 13th-century Armenian cathedral located at the southwestern corner of Vakhtang Gorgasali Square, under the shadow of the ruins of Narikala fortress. Its most recent renovation — financed by Russian-Armenian businessman Ruben Vardanyan and former Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, among others — was completed in 2015.

Given its location in the heart of the Caucasus, it’s no surprise that the Republic of Georgia is home to some 220,000 people of Armenian origin. That includes 50,000

percent of Georgia’s population.

Unlike the case with nearly every other Armenian diaspora, those in Tbilisi did not come as a result of the 1915 genocide. Rather, they’ve been living in the Georgian capital since medieval times. For much of the city’s history, Armenians comprised the majority of Tbilisi’s inhabitants; in fact, most of its mayors have historically been ethnic Armenians.

“Tbilisi was the main cultural center of the eastern Armenians,” said historian Levon Chidilyan. “As such, it was here in Tbilisi that the idea of an independent state of Armenia was born.”

Chidilyan, 38, traces his roots to Khach Gyugh (“village of the cross”). His ancestors immigrated to Georgia in 1828, and his family moved to Tbilisi when he was 4 years old. Interviewed at a café in the old city’s Meidan bazaar, Chidilyan is the former director of Tbilisi’s Hayartun cultural center, and the co-founder of several NGOs dealing with Armenian affairs.

“During the reign of the Georgian kingdom, the majority of Tbilisi’s residents were Armenians. And when Tbilisi became the administrative center of the Caucasus, even more Armenians came,” he said. The first non-religious Armenian school opened in Tbilisi in 1824, and the first newspaper in Armenian was established in the 1840s.

In the southern region of Samtskhe-Javakheti — which borders both Turkey and Armenia — ethnic Armenians represent 50.5 percent of the population, according to the 2014 census. And in Abkhazia, Armenians are the third-largest ethnic group after Georgians and the Abkhazians themselves.

Although differences exist between the Armenian Apostolic Church and Georgia’s Orthodox Church, the two countries



A woman lights candles at the Echmiadzin Church in Tbilisi, Georgia (photo Larry Luxner)

century, Armenians were the wealthiest citizens of Tbilisi.

“We were the bankers, and we owned businesses and properties. But capitalism ended with the Soviet Union, and then everyone became part of the communist system,” he said. “Antisemitism never had a place in Georgia, but when the Armenians were really powerful, there was anti-Armenian sentiment.”

He added: “Armenians, especially in Tbilisi, are very well integrated. But unlike Georgian Jews, whose surnames are usually the same as Georgian surnames, ours are very easy to identify. If I never introduced myself by name, nobody would guess that I’m not Georgian.”

Tumasyan, 30, has a bachelor’s degree in international relations and international law from the Free University of Tbilisi, and a master’s in government from a German university. For 10 years, he chaired the Armenian Community Platform of Georgia.

“But right now, we’re completely shut down because of these new anti-NGO regulations, which are actually very undemocratic. So we got rid of the name, and I continue to work on issues relating to the Armenian community,” he said.

Those anti-NGO regulations were first approved in late 2023, requiring any civic organization accepting donations from abroad to register as foreign agents. Following huge street protests, the law was rescinded but was later adopted following the victory of the pro-Russia Georgian Dream party in October 2024 parliamentary elections.

One month later, mass protests again erupted after Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced the suspension of Georgia’s efforts to join the European Union. Thousands of people gathered on Rustaveli Avenue in central Tbilisi and were attacked by riot police armed with water cannons, tear gas and pepper spray. The protests continue to this day, though with less intensity as before.

“The rights of every citizen are undermined. That’s why I participate in protests against this government’s anti-democratic actions,” Tumasyan said. “I do that as a Georgian civic leader.”

Tumasyan said he was fined 4,000 laris (the equivalent of \$1,500) for a Facebook post that accused a prominent lawmaker — Mariam Lashkhi from the ruling Georgian Dream coalition — of being a “traitor to the homeland” for blocking Georgia’s acces-

sion to the EU.

“They oppress those who don’t like Russia,” he said, adding that he was fined twice for participating in anti-government protests in front of the parliament building. “Of course, I understand that such statements can result in fines, and not only fine. They can imprison you for up to 60 days.”

The Council of Europe has warned that Georgia’s Foreign Agents Registration Act will cause “grave and unjustified damage to civil society.”

Despite their government’s stance, a recent poll showed that 74 percent of Georgian citizens support EU membership, with only 5 percent opposed. Joining the 27-member bloc would eventually opening the door for Armenia to do the same, Tumasyan said, since Armenia is landlocked. Ironically, as the Georgian government drifts closer to Russia, Armenia — a traditional ally of Russia — is moving in the opposite direction.

On December 2, Brussels and Yerevan adopted a new Strategic Agenda for the EU-Armenia Partnership, “marking a significant step forward in the deepening of political, economic and sectoral cooperation between the two partners,” according to an EU press release.

Asked about prospects for regional stability following the August 8 signing of a peace treaty between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Tumasyan expressed cautious optimism.

“I believe there’s a possibility to build relations [with Azerbaijan], but only when Armenia is strong enough to defend itself,” he said. “We should become like Israel — an ally of the United States, a self-sufficient military and economic power in order to secure our country’s borders.”

On that subject, Chidilyan the historian is clearly not as optimistic.

“I don’t believe in peace between Armenians and Turks. If a murderer is proud that he has murdered you, and has no remorse, you can’t have peace with him. History has shown that we should rely only on ourselves, and that other powers will use us for their own benefit,” he said.

“We all pray for peace, but we think peace should be just. Our Armenian compatriots have been forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh, and we still have prisoners of war and hostages in Baku,” Chidilyan added. “Under such circumstances, I don’t think a dignified peace is possible.”



An informational panel at the Khojavank Pantheon of Armenian Public Figures lists all 48 people buried at this cemetery in Tbilisi, Georgia (photo Larry Luxner)

in Abkhazia, a Georgian territory bordering the Black Sea that’s been under Russian military occupation since 2008.

That gives Georgia the world’s fourth-largest Armenian diaspora community after Russia itself (1.9 million), the United States (500,000) and France (300,000) — and way larger than Armenian communities in Ukraine, Canada, Argentina, Lebanon, Turkey and Syria.

At the time of the Soviet collapse in 1990, an estimated 400,000 Armenians lived in Georgia. But with the rise in Georgian nationalism, most of them emigrated to Russia, France and Armenia itself. Yet even today, ethnic Armenians represent at least 5

have similar histories and unique alphabets (the Armenian alphabet has 39 letters, the Georgian alphabet 33). They were among the first countries in the world to adopt Christianity, and although they fought a month-long war in 1921, Armenians today see Georgia as the closest nation in the world to Armenia itself in terms of culture and mentality.

According to the Armenian Embassy in Tbilisi, annual bilateral trade comes to around \$850 million and consists mainly of agricultural products, metal ore, food, beverages and vehicles.

Giorgi Tumasyan, a political activist of Armenian origin, said that back in the 19th





# Community News

## New Member Appointed to Armenian Museum Of America Board Of Trustees

WATERTOWN— The Armenian Museum of America announced last week the appointment of Yelena Ambartsumian as the newest member of its Board of Trustees.

As the founder of AMBART LAW plc., a New York-based law firm focused on privacy law, AI governance and art law, she has established a distinguished career at the intersection of law, technology, and creative expression. An active museum member, Yelena has been featured in the New York Times for her passion for collecting artwork by emerging contemporary artists.

She played a key role behind the scenes of our recent exhibitions, assisting in identifying and personally reaching out to Arshile Gorky collectors, efforts that resulted in several prominent loans now on view.



Yelena Ambartsumian photo by Hratch Arbach

Beyond the museum, Ambartsumian champions Armenian artists and displaced artisans from Artsakh. In 2022, Yelena founded QAMI JAN, a design studio that creates contemporary home goods, through collaborations with women-owned ateliers located in the Republic of Armenia. Yelena has provided hundreds of hours of pro bono legal and advocacy services related to preserving and protecting Armenian cultural heritage, through the Armenian Bar Association. Her writings about the destruction of cultural heritage in Artsakh have been published several times by Hyperallergic, and she has presented these issues on panels at Fordham Law School, Columbia Law School, and at numerous legal conferences.

In addition to her professional commitments, Ambartsumian serves on the Advisory Council of Fordham University's Orthodox Christian Studies Center. She is a charter member and a global chapter lead for Women in AI Governance, and a co-chair of IAPP's New York Knowledge Net chapter. Yelena is also active in the Connecticut Chapter of Chamber of Mothers, serving on its Legal & HR and Communications subcommittees.

"We are honored and excited to have an ambitious, creative, and deeply committed person like Yelena to join our Board of Trustees," said President Michele M. Kolligian. "Her involvement in cultural endeavors around contemporary art and cultural heritage in Artsakh is admirable, and we look forward to her involvement in our leadership team."



From left, singer Thelma Houston, Andrea Martin and Dr. Garo Armen

## More than \$8 Million Raised to Support Rural Armenia at 22nd Annual COAF Holiday Gala

NEW YORK — The Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) announced that its 22nd Annual Holiday Gala, Light the Way Forward, held on December 13 at The Plaza Hotel in New York City, raised over \$8 million in support of transformative education, healthcare, and community programs for rural Armenia.

The event brought together COAF's global community of philanthropists, leaders, and advocates for an unforgettable evening of purpose and celebration —



Joe Manganiello

highlighting the life-changing impact of COAF's work across Armenia's villages.

Guests celebrated milestone achievements from the past year, including the opening of the new Harry and Suzanne Mangoian Secondary School in Debed, Lori, and continued progress on the upcoming COAF SMART Center in Armavir. Stories from young beneficiaries underscored how these investments are shaping opportunity, confidence, and hope for children across Armenia's rural regions.

COAF's star student of the year, Sofi Sargsyan, shared her journey to discovering her dream of pursuing medicine in a heartfelt address that crystallized the organization's impact on a personal note. "COAF helped me understand who I am. It helped me find my voice," she shared. "Today, I am confident, hopeful, and ready to fight for my dreams. I know exactly what I want — to become a doctor and heal people — and nothing feels impossible anymore."

Honoring Leaders Who Inspire

COAF honored the Tacorian Family, founders of luxury jewelry house TACORI, with the Empowering a Generation Award, recognizing their enduring commitment to empowering Armenia's youth.

Thelma Houston, Grammy Award-winning Motown icon headlined the evening and received COAF's Lifetime Achievement Award for her artistic

see COAF, page 12

## Bilirakis, Pallone Introduce Armenia Security Act to Strengthen US Oversight of Azerbaijan's Actions

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America welcomes the Armenia Partnership Security Act, led by Armenian Caucus Co-Chairs, Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) and Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), along with Representatives Dave Min (D-CA), Brad Sherman (D-CA), David Valadao (R-CA), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Chris Smith (R-NJ), and Gabe Amo (D-RI). This bipartisan legislation which would significantly enhance U.S. oversight of Azerbaijan's conduct and reinforce America's commitment to Armenia's security, sovereignty, and human rights.

The bill requires the Secretary of Defense to certify that the Government of Azerbaijan has taken "meaningful steps" toward peace, including withdrawing its forces from sovereign Armenian territory, unconditionally releasing all Armenian hostages, ceasing hostilities, and recognizing the right of return for Armenians to Nagorno-Karabakh while protecting their cultural and religious heritage sites.

If Azerbaijan fails to meet these criteria, the Department of Defense must conduct an immediate review of Armenia's security needs and recommend steps to strengthen Armenia's deterrence and defense capabilities. The bill also prohibits the President from waiving Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, ensuring that U.S. taxpayer funds cannot support or enable Azerbaijani aggression.

"Armenia is a key partner in a volatile region and deserves meaningful support as it faces continued threats to its sovereignty and security," said Bilirakis (R-FL). "This legislation sends a clear message that the United States will not turn a blind eye to aggression, human rights abuses, or the forced displacement of ethnic Armenians. Accountability must be at the center of our foreign policy."

"For far too long, Azerbaijan has been allowed to act with impunity to destabilize the South Caucasus, commit horrific human rights abuses, and threaten the Armenian people," said Congressman Pallone (D-NJ). "Our bill is a great step in the right direction to finally hold the Aliyev regime accountable for ongoing crimes against humanity and threats to lasting peace in the region. I look forward to working with Congressman Bilirakis and the rest of my colleagues to pass it into law."

"We commend Congressmen Bilirakis and Pallone for their bipartisan leadership in advancing this vital legislation," said Mariam Khaloyan, Congressional Relations Director of the Armenian Assembly. "Azerbaijan's continued unlawful holding of Armenian hostages underscores the need for this bill and the importance of enforcing Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act, while also strengthening America's support for Armenia's security and sovereignty."



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# CYSCA Hosts Panel on Democratic Institutions as Part of Tavitian Scholars' Term in the US

MEDFORD, Mass. — On October 28, the Fletcher School at Tufts University hosted a panel titled “Building Trust in Democratic Institutions: Perspectives from Law, Justice, and Public Service,” which offered timely perspectives for contemporary times. The event featured three Armenian-American public servants — Peter Koutoujian, Dr. Gabrielle Wolohojian and David Muradian — and was held at the Fletcher School as part of the Tavitian Scholars' program, and co-hosted by the Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City Association (CYSCA).

Both organizations have long histories of supporting common goals, including collaboration, grassroots organizing, and a belief in the importance of credible government institutions. The Tavitian Scholars program was established in 1999 through the Tavitian Foundation, with the goal of providing mid-career public servants in Armenia a multidisciplinary graduate education while in residence at Fletcher. Each year, sixteen scholars from Armenia spend the fall semester in the Boston area learning from Fletcher's faculty about public policy and leadership with the intention of bringing their new knowledge home to Armenia. This year's cohort includes representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Bank of Armenia, and Office of the Prime Minister.

CFYSCA was founded in 1987 by a group of Cambridge residents who believed connections between Americans and residents of the former USSR would be crucial to promoting world peace. The organization continues to promote friendship, mutual trust, and connections between Cambridge and Yerevan, with a particular focus on appreciating diversity in both communities.

The evening opened with a cocktail reception, followed by introductory remarks from Monica Toft, professor of international politics and director of the Center for Strategic Studies at the Fletcher School, CYSCA President Roxanne Etmekjian, and Tavitian Scholar Marine Avagyan, head of the Individual Complaints Analysis Division in the Constitutional Court of Armenia.

Nancy Kalajian, a CYSCA Advisor, then introduced the three panelists, representing all three branches of government: Peter



Panelists with Tavitian Scholars and CYSCA members, including president Roxanne Etmekjian and adviser Nancy Kalajian

Koutoujian, Sheriff of Middlesex County, MA (executive branch); Dr. Gabrielle Wolohojian, an associate justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court (judicial branch); and David Muradian, Representative of the 9th Worcester District in the Massachusetts state government (legislative branch).

Koutoujian recollected his experience inheriting a sheriff department that had been through significant turmoil, and reminded the audience that trust cannot be given; rather, it must be earned and modeled on a continuous basis. His reason for this approach is simple: that who and what public servants serve is more important than who they are.

Wolohojian, who served on the Massachusetts Appeals Court before being appointed to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, shared that she finds remaining connected to the fundamentals of the judicial system, such as transparency, education and access, to be a grounding practice in turbulent times. In addition, staying true to

one's convictions requires working to figure out what they are, and that debating multiple perspectives to arrive at sound judgments is crucial.

Muradian, as a Republican in an overwhelmingly Democratic state, spoke to the importance of collaborating with those who have different views, and reminded the audience that common ground is available to those who are willing to look. Like Koutoujian, he also commented on how public servants are a small part of a very big world, and that his constituents are his boss.

The panel concluded with a question-and-answer session that touched on

civics education and the role of media in uplifting democracy.

Ultimately, the evening was a timely reminder that all politics is local. Often, our best attempts to move forward and make progress are grounded in our own communities, wherever they may be.

To learn more about the Tavitian Scholars program and Aso O. Tavitian's legacy, visit <https://fletcher.tufts.edu/academics/executive-education/aso-o-tavitian-scholars-program>.

To learn more about the Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City Association, visit <https://cambridgeyerevan.org/>.



Panelists and the moderator at the CYSCA program with the Tavitian Scholars, from left, Peter Koutoujian, Dr. Gabrielle Wolohojian, David Muradian, and Dr. Monica Toft. (Jared Carney photo)

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OBITUARY

John ‘Jack’ Hajian Jr.  
US Navy Veteran

WALTHAM, Mass. — John “Jack” Hajian Jr. of Waltham, died on December 11, 2025, at age 79.

He was the husband of the late Dzovig (Tuysuzian) Hajian; father of Christopher Hajian and Eileen Melkonian and her husband Sevak; grandfather of Remy and Lia Melkonian; son of the late John M. and the late Nazelie (Zeytoundjian) Hajian; brother of the late Michael Hajian and his

late wife Helen, and Isabelle Hajian Azablar; brother-in-law of Vahe Tuysuzian and his wife Noushig, Tsolig Chamlian and her husband Ara, and the late Shaghig Palanjian and her husband Jack. He is also survived by many cousins, nieces and nephews.

Jack often credited the course of his life to a defining moment at the young age of 7 when he bought himself a movie

ticket to see John Wayne’s “Island in the Sky.” From that film, he drew inspiration in three areas that would shape his future — radio, aviation, and meteorology. Radio became his career, while aviation and meteorology became lifelong passions. He was a graduate of Wentworth Institute of Technology and went on to design and build large-scale audio systems for commercial spaces around the world. Upon



graduation, he proudly served in the U.S. Navy completing multiple transatlantic tours between the United States and Naples, Italy.

After his naval service, Jack’s greatest life’s journey began when he met his wife Dzovig at a party they both attended. Just two weeks later they married and began their shared life together settling in Newton. Their greatest joys followed with the arrival of their two children, Christopher and Eileen.

Jack and Dzovig’s lives were rooted in devotion, love and an open-hearted generosity that touched all who knew them. Throughout their 46 years of marriage, their home was a place of constant hospitality. They often joked that they ran a Bed & Breakfast (lunch and dinner) for loved ones navigating transitions in their lives whether for a few days or several years. Together, they hosted countless dinners, weekly gatherings, joyous celebrations, and moments where heartfelt discussions were shared with love and laughter.

Known to his family as “Uncle Jack,” he was truly a Jack of all trades — always ready to help with household projects, electrical issues, computer troubles, or simply to provide clear straightforward information. He never directed anyone’s decisions but offered honest answers, clear facts and a listening ear to help others find their own way.

The final chapter of Jack’s life journey was the arrival of his grandchildren, Remy and Lia, who became the center of his universe. He took immense pride in them, reveling in watching them grow, cherishing their everyday moments and celebrating their accomplishments. He found immeasurable joy simply in being a part of their lives.

Jack led his family by example, teaching them how to live with dignity, humility, and bravery. He will always remain in his family’s hearts, remembered for a life lived by unwavering integrity, deep devotion, and unconditional love.

Funeral services took place at Saint Stephen’s Armenian Apostolic Church, 38 Elton Ave., Watertown, on Wednesday, December 17. Interment followed at Newton Cemetery, Newton.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to Saint Stephen’s Armenian Apostolic Church,.



To Our Readers:

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Alin K. Gregorian  
Editor

Aram Arkun  
Managing Editor

I/We would like to make a contribution \_\_ \$10,000 \_\_ \$5000 \_\_ \$2000 \_\_ \$1000 \_\_ \$500 \_\_ \$300 \_\_ \$200 \_\_ \$100 \_\_ other By check \_\_ By Credit Card \_\_ Name .....

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

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# Merry Christmas

**May God Bless the Mirror’s Staff and Readers. Best wishes for a blessed New Year**

**Dean V. Shahinian**  
ALEXANDRIA, VA

**Merry Christmas**  
Aroian Family  
AUSTIN, TX

**Merry Christmas and  
Happy New Year.**  
Avedis and Houry Boyamian  
WINCHESTER, MA

**Thank you for the fine work and  
service you provide.**  
David and Myrna Onanian  
HOUSTON, TX

**Best wishes for a Merry Christmas  
and a Happy New Year**  
Roxanne Etmekjian and  
Nerses Joubanian  
WEST NEWTON, MA

**Merry Christmas to all!**  
Dr. Parnag and Nancy Kasarjian  
NEWTON, MA

**On behalf of the Armenian  
Missionary Association of America,  
I would like to wish you a very Merry  
Christmas and a Happy New Year!  
We appreciate all that you do for the  
AMAA and the community at large!**  
Serge D. Buchakjian  
PARAMUS, NJ

**Healthy, Happy, Heavenly Holidays  
for all**  
Dr. and Mrs. Myron and  
Ruth Allukian Jr.  
BOSTON, MA

**Merry Christmas**  
Gregory and Joanna Hartunian  
WAYLAND, MA

**May the spirit of Christmas bring  
comfort, peace and happiness to  
one and all!**  
Dr. and Mrs. Gary Zamanigian  
BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI

**Merry Christmas!**  
Jeff and Nancy Bilezikian  
WATERTOWN, MA

**Merry Christmas!**  
Evelyn Petrossian  
BELMONT, MA

**Wishing Peace on Earth and  
Prosperity in Our Homeland**  
Kevork Keushkerian  
PASADENA, CA

**May Your Christmas Season and  
New Year Be Filled with Hope and  
Happiness**  
Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home  
WATERTOWN, MA

**As we celebrate the glorious birth of  
our Lord Jesus Christ, I extend my  
heartfelt prayers to the Armenian  
community of Boston. May the peace  
of Bethlehem enter every home,  
and may the light of Christ renew  
our hope, strengthen our faith, and  
deepen our love for one another.  
Wishing you a blessed Christmas and  
a New Year filled with health, unity,  
and God’s abundant mercy.**  
Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church  
BELMONT, MA

**Thank you for your in-depth  
reporting of news of interest to  
Armenians in Armenia and the  
Diaspora. Merry Christmas and a  
Happy New Year to all the staff.**  
Jirair and Ani Hovsepien  
BELMONT, MA

**Hope to see a new and clean  
Catholikos this New Year**  
Johnny and Christina Sahagian  
BURBANK, CA

**I look forward to reading the  
Armenian Mirror-Spectator every  
week. Thank you!**  
Richard Mikaelian, D.D.S.  
NEW YORK, NY

**Merry Christmas and a healthy  
New Year**  
Ara and Pam Gechijian and new  
grandson Grayson  
LINCOLN, MA

**Best wishes to you all**  
Nadya Sarafian  
NORTHVILLE, MI

**Best wishes for a bright future**  
Dr. Heratch Doumanian  
CHICAGO, IL

**The Armenian Mirror-Spectator has  
been nourishing our thirst for news  
about our nation and our fatherland  
for almost a century. May it last  
for many more centuries. Merry  
Christmas and Happy New Year!**  
Ernest M Barsamian, M.D.  
and Sonig Kradjian  
BOCA RATON, FL

**Merry Christmas and Peace in the  
New Year**  
Harry and Janice Mazadoorian,  
KENSINGTON, CT

**My best wishes to you for all the good  
work done by your organization.**  
Peter Sarkesian  
BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI

**May the joy of Christmas bring serenity  
to your days, hope to your spirit and  
harmony to your gatherings. Let us  
carry forward the virtues of kindness,  
generosity and faith into the  
coming year. Wishing you all a  
Merry Christmas!**  
Sarkis Kechejian  
DALLAS, TX

**Merry Christmas!**  
Marlene Seferian  
LEXINGTON, MA

**Merry Christmas!**  
Ruth and Wil Swisher  
Newington, CT

**May the spirit of love within our hearts  
spread on Christmas Day and every day  
in the year ahead. God bless and  
Merry Christmas to all!**  
Dina Seredian  
WOODLAND HILLS, CA

**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!**  
Mihran and Rosalyn Minassian  
BURLINGTON, MA

**Merry Christmas, Happy New Year.  
Best wishes**  
Jacques Gulekjian  
FORT LEE, NJ

**Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy  
New Year.**  
Robert P. Proodian  
LYNN, MA





# Thank You



**Dean Vahan Shahinian, Alexandria, VA \$10,000**

**Gregory and Joanna Hartunian, Wayland, MA \$1,000**

**Margrit and Nishan Atinizian, Winchester, MA \$1,000**

**Michael and Shelly Norehad, Bay Village, OH \$1,000**

**Nancy Kolligian, Watertown, MA \$1,000**

**Avedis and Houry Boyamian, Winchester, MA \$1,000**

**Garo Gumusyan, New York, NY \$1,000**

**Pamela Avedisian, Lexington, MA \$1,000**

**Dr. Heratch Doumanian, Chicago, IL \$1,000**

**Ajemian Foundation and the Sarkesian Family, Bloomfield Hills, MI \$1,000**

**Sami and Annie Totah Family Foundation, Washington, DC \$500**

**Anonymous \$500**

**David and Myrna Onanian, Houston, TX \$500**

**Jeffrey and Nancy Bilezikian, Watertown, MA \$500**

**Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Watertown, MA \$500**

**Sarkis Satian, McLean, VA \$500**

**George and Carolann Najarian, Orleans, MA \$340**

**Ernest M Barsamian M.D. and Sonig Kradjian, Boca Raton, FL \$300**

**Anonymous, \$250**

**Edward Bedrosian, Needham, MA \$250**

**Richard and Carol Ishkanian, Chestnut Hill, MA \$250**

**Armenian Missionary Association of America, Paramus, NJ \$200**

**Hripsime and Harry Parsekian, Watertown, MA \$200**

**Toufayan Bakery, Inc, Ridgefield, NJ \$200**

**Dr. and Mrs. Myron and Ruth Allukian Jr., Boston, MA \$200**

**Ruth and Wil Swisher, Newington, CT \$200**

**Barbara and Donald Tellalian, Newton, MA \$200**

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**Johnny and Christina Sahagian, Burbank, CA \$200**

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**Leon and Marion Semonian, Newton, MA \$200**

**Robert P. Proodian, Lynn, MA \$200**

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**Jirair and Ani Hovsepien, Belmont, MA \$150**

**Marlene Seferian, Lexington, MA \$100**

**Evelyn Petrossian, Belmont, MA \$100**

**Hermine Adamian, Wellesley, MA \$100**

**Jacques A. Gulekjian, Fort Lee, NJ \$100**

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**Mihran Aroian, Austin, TX \$100**

**Armen and Sylvie Meguerditchian, Winchester, MA \$100**

**Gregory Kolligian Jr., North Reading, MA \$100**

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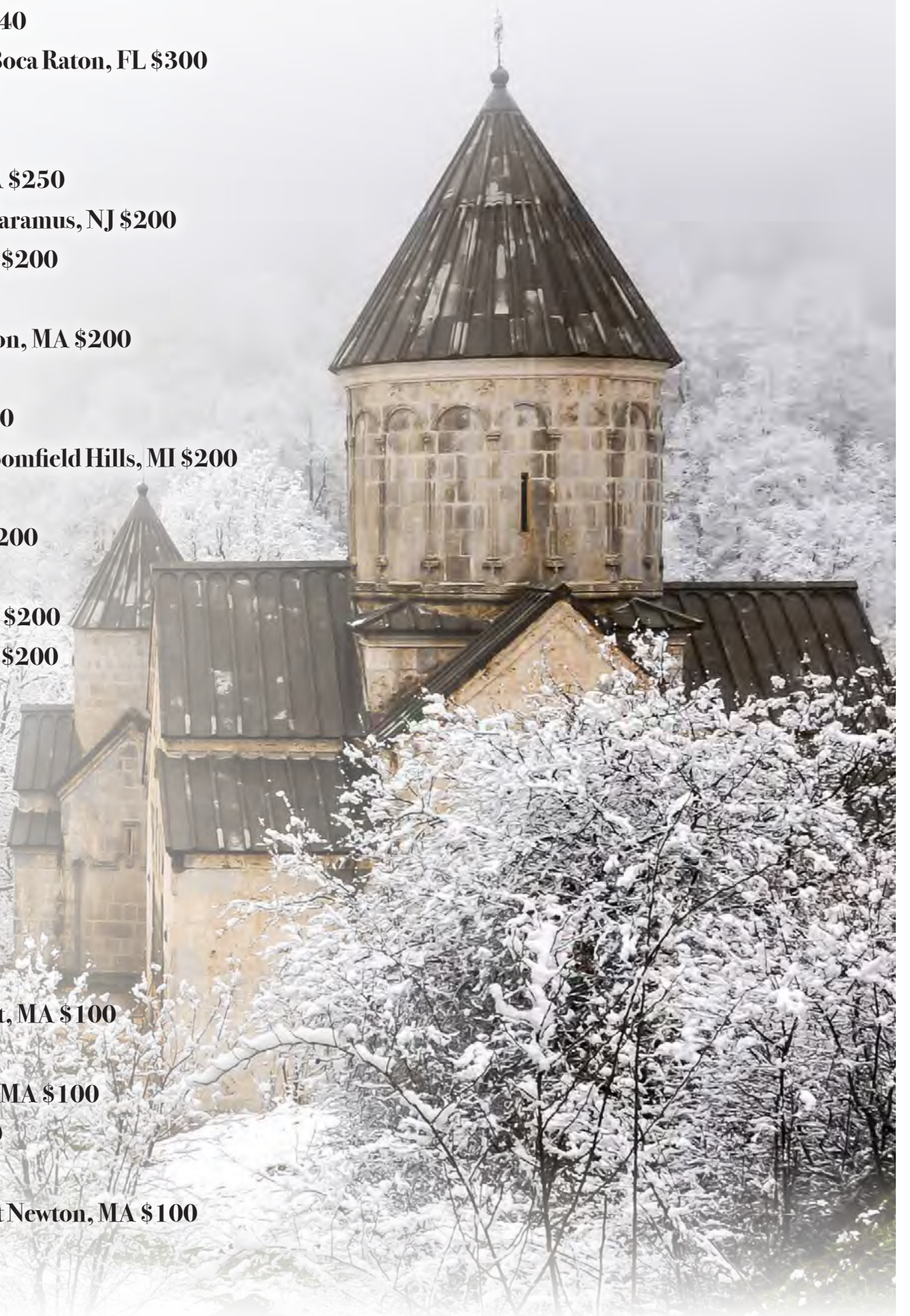
**Sandra Shahinian Leitner, Wyckoff, NJ \$100**

**Dr. John and Sophie Bilezikian, Rye, NY \$100**

**Ara Cherchian, Milwaukee, WI \$100**

**O. H. Bezirjian, Miami Beach, FL \$100**

**Shahan and Elizabet Nazar, Garden City, NY \$50**







COMMUNITY NEWS

# More than \$8 Million Raised at 22nd COAF Holiday Gala

COAF, from page 7  
legacy and decades of advocacy supporting equality, social justice, and humanitarian causes.

COAF also extended special recognition to the LA Times Studios for its support in 2025, acknowledging its role in amplifying COAF’s mission and reaching new audiences worldwide.

The evening was hosted by Araksya Karapetian, Co-anchor of FOX 11’s Good Day L.A., alongside Haig Boyadjian, COAF’s Vice President of Development, and featured special appearances by: Joe Manganiello, acclaimed actor, writer and producer,



Anna Magzanyan, an Emmy Award winner, serves as President of LA Times Studios and NantGames, presenting the Empowering a Generation Award to the Tacorian family at the 22nd Annual COAF Holiday Gala

and COAF Board Member; Andrea Martin, Tony and Emmy Award-winning actress and COAF Ambassador; Kev Orkian, ac-



Haig Boyadjian, COAF Vice President of Development; the Tacorian Family, recipients of the 2025 COAF Empowering a Generation Award; Dr. Garo Armen, Founder of the Children of Armenia Fund; Araksya Karapetyan of KTTV Fox 11; and Anna Magzanyan, President of L.A. Times Studios

claimed British-Armenian comedian and musician; Anna Magzanyan, Emmy Award winner, President of LA Times Studios and NantGames; Exceptionally talented young Armenian musicians Lighting the Way Forward.

Since 2003, COAF has touched more than 120,000 lives across seven regions of Armenia (six active). Its flagship SMART Center in Lori now serves 2,000 children

from 30 communities each week. Construction of the next SMART Center in Armarir is underway and set for completion in 2028, laying the groundwork for future expansion into Syunik.

“For more than two decades, our community has shown that strategic investment in rural regions can change life trajectories,” said Dr. Garo Armen, COAF Founder and Chairman. “The extraordinary generosity

at this year’s Gala will empower thousands more children to define their own futures.”

“Our SMART Centers and holistic programs continue to transform rural Armenia,” added Liana Ghaltaghchyan, COAF Executive Director. “The support we received last night ensures that this impact will grow for the next generation.”

To learn more or support COAF’s ongoing work, visit [www.coaf.org](http://www.coaf.org).



Caitlin O’Connor, actress and television host; Joe Manganiello, actor, producer, and member of COAF’s Board of Trustees; Haig Boyadjian, Vice President of Development at the Children of Armenia Fund; Araksya Karapetyan Good Day LA; and Dr. Garo Armen, Founder of the Children of Armenia Fund — celebrating an extraordinary evening at COAF’s 22nd Annual Holiday Gala, where over \$8 million was raised in support of children and families across rural Armenia





# Arts & Culture

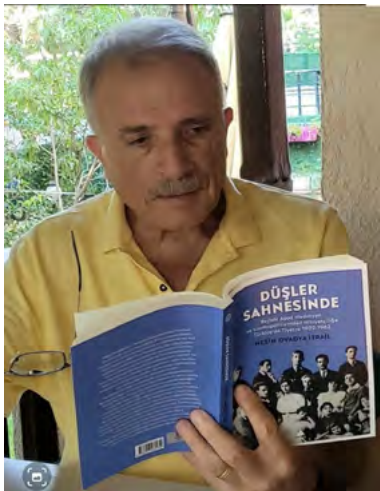
## Nesim Ovadya İzrail

*The Jewish Friend of Armenians from Turkey*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN-ISTANBUL — Nesim Ovadya İzrail is a Turkish-Israeli historian, writer and theatre researcher. He was born in Jerusalem in 1952, but moved back to Istanbul with his family when he was one year old. He graduated from Istanbul Technical University in 1973 with a degree in civil engineering and later complet-



ed postgraduate studies there. He worked as an engineer until his retirement in 2008, after which he devoted himself to research on modern Turkish and Ottoman history. İzrail has written important books in Turkish on the Armenian experience under the Ottoman Empire, especially, on theatre history.

**Dear Nesim, as a representative of the Jewish community in Turkey, could you share some insights into what the Jewish community looks like today and how it preserves its national identity?**

The Jews living in Turkey today are descendants of the Jewish community that once lived under Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula — southern Catholic France, Spain and Portugal — enjoying privileged conditions. When the local Catholics eventually prevailed, Muslim rulers were forced to relinquish power and leave the region. The Jews who lived in cooperation with them were collectively targeted by the new Catholic authorities. Some were killed or severely punished, while others were granted the right to leave the country.

The Ottoman sultan, who at that time ruled the most powerful state in Europe, welcomed these expelled Jews. Being a highly educated community, they were brought in around 1492 as the skilled workforce the Ottoman Empire needed. They settled primarily in Istanbul, the imperial capital, but also in Thessaloniki, Izmir, Bursa, Edirne and other cities.

For 530 years they have maintained their existence as a closed community in this geography dominated by see FRIENDS, page 17



From left: Filmmaker Nairi Bandari, artist Lena Moross, and art restorer Aleksei Tivetsky (Karine Armen photo)

## A Short Film Screening Along with an Art Exhibition

By Karine Armen

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

GLENDAL — Nairi Bandari's short documentary called "Restoring the Past" was screened twice on Friday, December 12, and Saturday, December 13, at the Center for Armenian Arts. The film is about a Russian art restorer, Aleksei, and his artist wife Lena Moross. The film screening was accompanied by an exhibition of Lena Moross' art.

"Restoring the Past" was their university final project for Nairi Bandari and Narek Aghazarian, who studied filmmaking at CSUN (California State University, Northridge). The film screened at the Arpa International Film Festival in Hollywood on November 7th. After the screening, they decided to have an art exhibition and a second screening.

Tivetski is an art restorer with a rich background across Europe and Russia. He was born in Moscow. He moved to the U.S. in 1978. Then he worked in Italy, see BANDARIA, page 15



From left: Moderator Mat Gleason, Aleksei Tivetsky, Lena Moross, Nairi Bandari, and Narek Aghazarian (Karine Armen photo)

## Aaron Poochigian Wins 2025 Anahid Literary Prize

By Christine Vartanian Datian

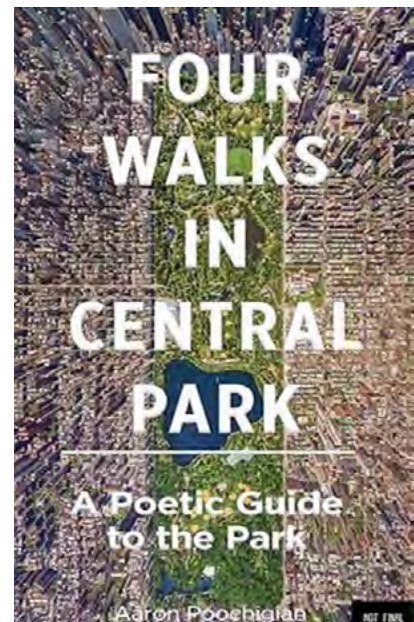
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

NEW YORK — Poet, classic scholar, and translator Aaron Poochigian has won the 2025 Anahid Literary Prize.

The Anahid Literary Prize is a significant award for emerging Armenian-American writers, established in 1988 by an anonymous donor, recognizing excellence in poetry, fiction and drama with a \$5,000 award, presented by Columbia University's Armenian Center to celebrate Armenian culture and talent.

Other "Anahid" named awards exist, like those at Southwestern Law School for teaching and service, honoring specific individuals like Anahid Gharakhanian.

There have been more than a dozen winners in poetry, fiction, playwriting, and screen writing since that



*Four Walks in Central Park: A Poetic Guide to the Park* Paperback – September 9, 2025 by Aaron Poochigian (Author)

time. Past winners include: Leslie Ayvazian, Peter Balakian, Eric Bogosian, Diana Der Hovanessian, and Atom Egoyan.

The Anahid Literary Prize awards ceremony will be held in April 2026, and will include the 2024 winner, Lory Bedikian.

Poochigian's latest book is *Four Walks in Central: A Poetic Guide to the Park* that came out in September of 2025. He attended Moorhead State University from 1991 to 1996 where he studied under the poets Tim Murphy and Dave Mason. He entered graduate school for Classics in 1997 at the University of Minnesota. After doing research in Greece on fellowship in 2003-4, he earned his PhD in 2006. He was D.L. Jordan Fellow at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, from 2008-2009, and lives and writes in New York City. He has published numerous translations with Penguin Classics and W.W. Norton. His work has appeared in such publications as *Best American Poetry*, *The Paris Review* and *POETRY*.

Poochigian's newest translation, *Marcus Aurelius Meditations*, will be available in January 2026.

see PRIZE, page 15



# Recipe Corner



## Hungry Paprikas’ Namoura (Basbousa) Cake

“Here’s an authentic semolina and coconut cake (eggless) baked to perfection and soaked in a simple syrup. There’s nothing like it and it comes together so quickly,” says Amina Al-Saigh, a busy wife, mother of 3, and creative blogger at the Hungry Paprikas food blog. “I’ve created this blog to share my Middle Eastern-inspired recipes. I know how busy life can be today, and how cooking can often be overwhelming. But with knowledge, skill, and the right recipes, you can serve delicious, bold flavors and not spend all day in the kitchen. I enjoy sharing modern, simplified recipes that are approachable and use fresh ingredients and many Arabic spices,” she adds.

“I’m the author of the Amazon Best-Seller and Taste Canada Award Nominated Cookbook Souk to Table. I’m on a mission to use my engineering background and my daily life as a mom to create and share easy, family friendly and accessible Middle Eastern and Mediterranean meals. I began Hungry Paprikas when I was on maternity leave from my engineering job,” she says. “It was mainly to fill my time and use it as a creative outlet. Over the first year, I’ve gained traction on Instagram and started to build a wonderful community. I realized that my community wanted more of what I was sharing. Before I knew it, I was hooked on food blogging and all of the fun elements it entails such as recipe development, food photography, and a meaningful connection with a community of like-minded people. I had to keep it going, balancing it alongside my full time engineering job and motherhood.”

“My parents are both Iraqi, and have passed down authentic Iraqi recipes to our family. But we also grew up in Canada, and therefore mingled with a varied Arab community, experiencing the different food the Middle East has to offer. My mission is to help other busy mothers (and parents) like myself gain more confidence and organized in the kitchen, so they can prepare recipes with self-assurance and still maintain a career/social life/hobbies/etc. I want to expose readers to the diverse range of food within the Middle East, and empower them to try something new using tested, perfected, and easy to follow recipes.”

“I love to travel and explore foods and culinary techniques from around the world. I spent five years living in London and traveling around Europe, and it was an amazing period in my life. I truly believe that food brings people together -- it’s a global language and it always brings happiness and peace with it.”

“Namoura is a one-bowl Lebanese semolina cake that comes together quickly. It has a unique texture and is drenched in a simple syrup after baking, which makes it irresistible. If you love easy desserts, this is for you. Namoura is actually the

Lebanese name for this dessert, but it is known as Basbousa in Egypt, Harissa in Palestine/Jordan, and Revani in Turkey and Persia. Each region has its own take on this dessert, but one thing is common among all of them: it is a semolina cake that is served with almonds on top and drenched in syrup.”

“Semolina is a type of flour made from durum wheat (a type of wheat grown in the Middle East). It is available in various sizes, ranging from really fine to coarse. In this recipe, I use coarse semolina for the best texture, but some people do a mix of fine and coarse. I use thick cream in my recipe because I find it adds richness. It comes in a small can (Puck and Nestle are the brands I use), and it is the consistency of yogurt, but if you can’t find it, you can replace with more Greek yogurt.”

- INGREDIENTS:**
- Sugar Syrup:**
- 2 cups sugar
  - 1 cup water
  - Juice of 1 lemon
  - 1 tablespoon orange blossom water or rose water, optional
- Cake Batter:**
- 3 cups coarse semolina
  - 1 cup sugar
  - 1/2 cup shredded coconut, unsweetened
  - 1 cup melted butter
  - 1 cup full-fat Greek yogurt
  - 1/2 cup thick cream, optional
  - 1 cup milk
  - 1 teaspoon baking powder
  - 1 teaspoon baking soda
  - 15 whole almonds for decorating
  - 2 tablespoons tahini

**PREPARATION:**

**Sugar Syrup:**

Add all ingredients to a pot, stir and bring to a boil. Turn to medium heat and simmer for roughly 10 minutes, stirring. Add the orange blossom water if using, and leave to cool to room temperature on the counter.

**Cake Batter:**

Mix dry ingredients (semolina, sugar, coconut, baking powder, baking soda) together with a spoon. Add the wet ingredients (Greek yogurt, cream, milk, tahini, and melted butter), and mix well. Feel free to use your hands to ensure everything is well incorporated. Allow the batter to rest for 20 minutes.

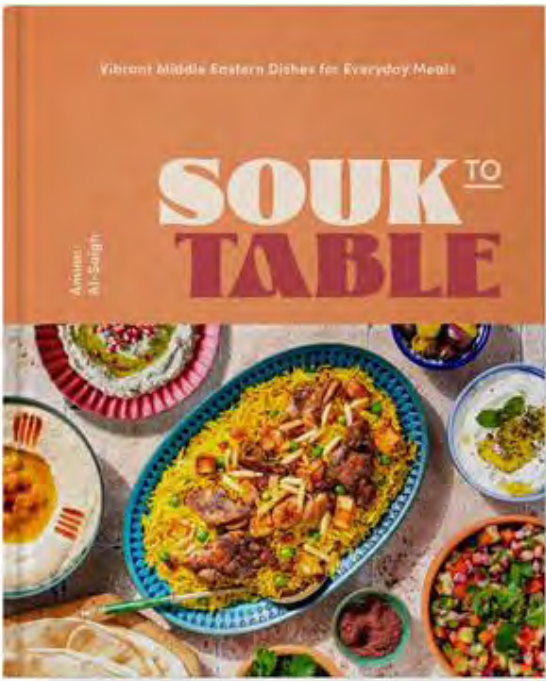
Grease a circular or rectangular pan with tahini or butter (Amina uses a 9-inch round pan but it depends on your preferred thickness -- it rises slightly). Add the mixture into the pan and flatten it using a spoon. Score the top of the batter in diamond shapes to make cutting it easier after baking. You can cut into any shape. Place the almonds in the center of each piece.

Bake at 400°F for 45 minutes or until golden brown. Note that baking time will vary depending on your pan size. If using a larger pan and the namoura is thinner, start by halving this baking time and check it regularly.

Remove from oven and pour sugar syrup on top right away and leave it 30 minutes to soak it all in. Cut using a sharp knife to avoid crumbling and serve.

### 15+ Middle Eastern Rice Recipes (For Everyday and Special Occasions!)

A staple ingredient in almost every cuisine is the ever delicious and ever satisfying rice. Here is a collection of the best Middle Eastern rice dishes. All of these are tested to perfection and guaranteed to succeed in your kitchen. From easy weeknight recipes, to sides, and to main dishes where rice is the star; you’ll enjoy the authentic taste of rice from the Middle East. To help you on your rice discovery journey, Amina has handpicked and organized 15 rice recipes for you to enjoy. There are easy recipes for a quick meal, special occasion rice entrees, and for when you have some more time on your hands, stuffed rice recipes.







ARTS & CULTURE

Aaron Poochigian Wins 2025 Anahid Literary Prize

PRIZE, from page 13

Poochigian’s prizewinning second collection of poetry, *Manhattanite*, examines New York’s juxtaposed symbols of towering achievement and monumental desolation, and then traverses the country to California’s Central Valley, where the poet reclaims his grandparents’ home. Poochigian consistently entertains, whether his theme is lamentation or celebration—a grizzled urban pigeon (scavenging for ‘the

the 2016 Able Muse Book Award.”

His poetry collection, *American Divine*, the winner of the Richard Wilbur Award, came out in 2021. He has translated Sappho for Penguin Classics (2009) and Aratus’ *Phaenomena* for Johns Hopkins University Press (2010). Penguin Classics UK put out *Stung with Love*, his translation of Sappho in the fall of 2009. His translations of Aeschylus, Apollonius and Aratus appear in the Norton Anthology *The Greek Poets: Homer to the Present*. His work has appeared in such newspapers and journals as The Financial Times, Poems Out Loud, and Poetry Magazine.

Four Walks in Central Park invites readers to experience the park not just as a destination, but as a living poem. Through four thoughtfully crafted walks—each aligned with a season or mood—this guide blends poetry, history, and personal reflection to illuminate the hidden rhythms of Central Park. Join Poochigian on a walking tour of New York City’s Central Park and experience the sights, the history, and

the healing power of a walk and a poem. Including maps, historical images, an index, and an exploration of other literary references to Central Park, *Four Walks in Central Park* is unlike any tour you’ve ever experienced.

For a review of *Four Walks in Central Park* by Aaron Poochigian, go to: [https://newversereview.substack.com/p/a-review-of-four-walks-in-central?r=ixk4n&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://newversereview.substack.com/p/a-review-of-four-walks-in-central?r=ixk4n&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web)

Also see: <https://joycesmysteryandfictionbookreviews.blog/2025/08/14/four-walks-in-central-park-by-aaron-poochigian/>

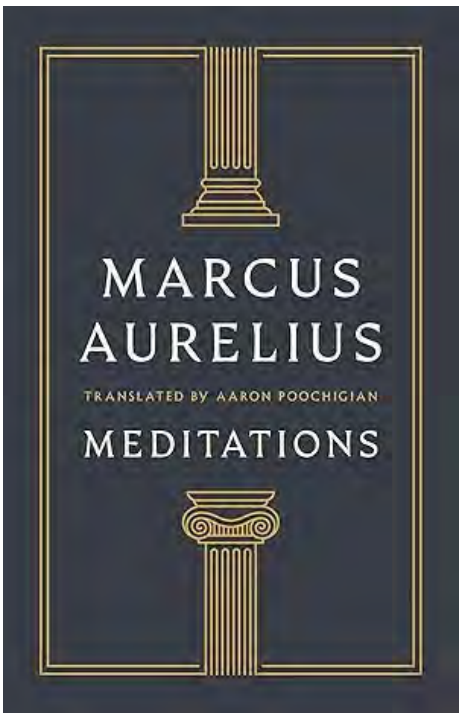
For excerpts, see: <https://newversereview.substack.com/p/four-walks-in-central-park>

To order, go to: <https://www.amazon.com/Four-Walks-Central-Park-Poetic/dp/B0DWJGKLY2>

To order, go to: <https://www.amazon.com/Meditations-Marcus-Aurelius/dp/132409639X>

For The Helping Families be Happy Podcast with Aaron Poochigian, go to: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-K\\_3Yrx-GoI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-K_3Yrx-GoI)

Full-length collection of original poetry from Aaron Poochigian, now available for pre-order from Able Muse Press, Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Foyles, and other online



and offline bookstores worldwide. To see a list of Aaron Poochigian’s publications, visit <https://www.aaronpoochigian.com/> Also see: [https://www.amazon.com/stores/Aaron-Poochigian/author/B00DX-78BIU?ref=ap\\_rdr&shoppingPortalEnabled=true](https://www.amazon.com/stores/Aaron-Poochigian/author/B00DX-78BIU?ref=ap_rdr&shoppingPortalEnabled=true)



Aaron Poochigian

sort of faith/that holds for here and now and vibes like song’) or an Ohio wind turbine (an ‘ungatherable/iron flower’ seen ‘juggling . . . / three arms’ worth/ of gale-force wind’). *Manhattanite* is the winner of

A Short Film Screening Along with an Art Exhibition in Glendale

BANDARIS, from page 13

mastering the art of restoration from 1985 to 1995, and returned to Los Angeles. This documentary examines the meticulous craftsmanship, the strict code of ethics, and the challenges of restoring damaged masterpieces while staying true to the artist’s original vision. Aleksei’s work for top auction houses worldwide, such as Sotheby’s and Bonhams, showcases the delicate balance between preserving history and restoring it for the future.

Moross was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, and studied at the Academy of Art in Leningrad. Moross immigrated to the U.S. in 1974. She spent many hours in the Hermitage Museum studying the masterpieces there. She also studied at the Pasadena Art Center and the prestigious CalArts (California Institute of the Arts). Moross had several art exhibitions in the Los Angeles area.

Bandari, an Armenian from Iran, studied

documentary filmmaking and television production. She volunteered in Artsakh and photographed the local scenery and lives. She had a photo exhibition at the Center for Armenian Arts on March 28, 2024.

Aghazarian pitched the idea and did the cinematography. They shot the film in four days, and it took five months to edit. The film professor Judy Korin attended the event and said, “Both Nairi and Narek have exceptional talents. I tell them to continue being creative. Don’t let anything stop you.”

Taline Olmessekian, the curator of the show, welcomed the audience and said, “We are thankful to Stepan Partamian, the owner of the Center for Armenian Arts, for his support for the arts and young artists and filmmakers.” She invited the panel to the stage for the Q&A moderated by television personality, author, and art critic Mat Gleason. He was familiar with both Aleksei and Lena and added humor to the conver-

sation.

Bandaris said, “I wish we had more time to shoot the film. I could capture more of Aleksei’s work.” Aghazarian added, “During the cinematography process, Nairi and I did not talk. We let Aleksei and Lena be in their creative zone.”

During the question-and-answer session, Moross said, “Aleksei and I are very different, but we complement each other.” The art and film event included a reception featuring Russian foods and drinks. The international audience enjoyed the space and the ambiance.



From left: Art critic/author Mat Gleason, art restorer Aleksei Tivetsky, artist Lena Moross, filmmakers Nairi Bandari and Narek Aghazarian, and film professor Judy Korin at the Armenian Arts. (Karine Armen photo)

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



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Armenian Museum Presents Blockbuster Gorky Exhibition

GORKY, from page 1

The exhibition starts with Gorky's roots in his native Van. It displays a 15<sup>th</sup>-century illuminated manuscript, on loan from the Melikian collection, as an example of what the artist may have seen as a child, along with an embroidered outfit from 1915 which belonged to a child of Van (on loan from Adrienne Amirian) and early 20<sup>th</sup> century needle lace doilies (gifts of Vicki and Paul Bedoukian).

It then provides a little of the background to the life of Armenian immigrants like Gorky to Watertown in the period after World War I and the Armenian Genocide. One rubber shoe produced by the Hood Rubber Company (on loan from Roger Hagopian), along with a number of pamphlets and photos of the rubber factory, symbolize the hard work the Armenians carried out. Gorky worked at the factory himself for a short time in 1921.

Three interesting works from Gorky's early period show how the artist rapidly learned various styles of representation, starting with a self-portrait (1923-24) on loan from a private collection. Two still life paintings from the late 1920s are influenced by the post-Impressionist French painter Paul Cezanne while the creation of another still life in this period was affected by the works of Pablo Picasso in his Cubist period. Even later, four "Christmas Card" variations from 1941 indicate inspiration from the biomorphic forms of the Catalan Surrealist painter Joan Miro.

The exhibition includes portraits of family, friends and Gorky himself, such as "Portrait of a Girl" (c. 1927), "Study for Mother and Son" (c. 1936, referring to Gorky's mother whom he frequently sketched or painted), the sketch "Portrait of a Man" (1937) and the profile ink drawings of Mr. and Mrs. De Hirsh and Blanche Margules on paper doilies. Gorky's friendship with artist Saul Schary is shown through their portraits of one another, as well as Gorky's ink drawing "Mountain Landscape" (1942), which curator Theriault writes is representative of outings Gorky made with Schary from the latter's house in New Milford, Connecticut



"4 P.M.," the front of a two-sided drawing by Arshile Gorky from 1945-1946 on loan from Aileen Agopian (graphite pencil and crayon on paper, 14 3/8 x 21 1/2 in.). Pictured are, from left, Alexei Agopian, Cultural Advisor of the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia Vicki Shoghag Hovanessian, Aileen Agopian and Alessandra Agopian (photo Natalie Nigito).

in the Rose and Gregory Archie Kolligian Media Room, visitors can also view Atom Egoyan and Mary Kouyoumdjian's film "They Will Take My Island" (2020, 31 minutes). Its name is that of a 1944 painting by Gorky, and the film, envisaged as a "musical documentary hybrid," explores Gorky's life through that painting. This short film was commissioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where it premiered in 2020.

## Opening Night

The evening started with a small reception for lenders of artworks and special donors. A little later, as guests already arrived and had a chance to see the exhibition, a larger reception took place upstairs on the third floor of the museum, where multitalented musician Haig Hovsepien inspired guests with his saxophone performance during a reception on the museum's third floor.

Museum director Jason Sohigian welcomed guests to the exhibition there and acknowledged members present from the museum's board of trustees, lenders and staff, as well as Theriault, the curator of the exhibition. Sohigian declared that the exhibition was more than two years in the works and "it was a real leap of faith for our museum."

Development Director Sarah E. Hayes thanked those present for becoming members and showing their support, and encouraged people to keep coming back to the exhibition and get others

to see it too. Arshile Gorky Foundation Managing Director Parker Field expressed his thanks as well to all those involved in the exhibition.

Michele M. Kolligian, president of the museum, took the microphone and recognized many of the behind-the-scenes people, including Collections Curator Gary Lind-Sinanian. She recalled the memory of his wife, Susan, formerly the textile curator/conservator at the museum, who sadly passed away this year. Kolligian also introduced a new member of the museum board, Yelena Ambartsumian, and noted

the presence of representatives of the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston.

Kolligian recalled an interesting coincidence in her life with regard to Gorky. As a young girl, her mother took her family to visit her mother's elder sister in Chicago. One of the latter's girlfriends was a woman named Vartoosh with her son named Karlen [Mooradian]. At the time, Kolligian only knew that Vartoosh's brother was a man named Gorky but didn't know much else about him. She only later learned about Gorky's accomplishments.

## The Preparation of the Exhibition

A few days after the inaugural evening, Sohigian related that the idea of the exhibition came when Watertown resident Jack Dargon approached the museum in 2023 to honor Gorky's Watertown roots. Sohigian said that he himself had thought about doing this since the two-family house Gorky lived in remains standing on Dexter Avenue. The city and a number of partners, including the Mosesian Center for the Arts and the Arshile Gorky Foundation, quickly got involved.

As part of the plan for "100 Years of Arshile Gorky," aside from this exhibition, the city council announced an Arshile Gorky Day, installed plaques in front of the two houses where he lived, a mural project was completed and the Mosesian Center held two events.

After the 2022 exhibition of the collection of Jack Quinn and Joan Agajanian Quinn in the museum, several more exhibits were mounted of modern art. Sohigian said that the JHM Charitable Foundation, which



Gorky's "Portrait of a Man," 1937, ink on paper (8 1/2 x 5 1/4 in.) on loan from Raffi M. Manjikian (photo courtesy Armenian Museum of America)

was supporting the museum, encouraged a focus on contemporary art as a way of bringing new people into the museum, and to complement the existing exhibits of artifacts from earlier periods of Armenian history on the first and second floor galleries. Consequently, the foundation as well as the museum's own president and board of trustees were enthusiastic about the Gorky project.

*continued on next page*



Michele Kolligian speaking at the opening reception (photo Natalie Nigito)

for outdoor painting.

One particular element of interest in "Portrait of a Man," on loan from Raffi M. Manjikian, is that it bears a personal dedication written on it in the Armenian language.

A highlight of the exhibition is a piece of white paper 17 3/8 by 21 1/2 inches with graphite pencil and crayon drawings on both sides from the 1945-1946 period. The drawings are considered preparations for Gorky's painting "4 P.M." completed in 1947 and are on loan from Aileen Agopian.

In a small quiet corner of the museum,



Sarah Hayes and Jason Sohigian (photo Aram Arkun)





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Nesim Ovadya İzrail: Jewish Friend of Armenians

FRIENDS, from page 13

Islam. Speaking Ladino — a blend of the Spanish they brought from their old homeland and Turkish, European and Arab cultural influences of their new one — they have carried their language into the present.

**Yes, once in Istanbul I met a girl named Sara and I asked her if she was Jewish and whether she knew Hebrew. I was surprised when she answered that she didn't speak it herself, but her grandparents spoke Spanish.**

Yes, many people call Ladino 'Spanish'... The Ottoman Empire preserved its existence with its multilingual, multi-cultural structure, without interfering in the religious structures of Jews and other non-Muslim communities — though it occasionally intervened as issues arose. Ottoman Jews also preserved their presence through their quiet and conciliatory social character.

In the early years of the Turkish Republic, a nation-state founded in the 20th century, Turkish Jews faced pressure to assimilate, including bans on speaking Ladino. They managed to survive through the policy of Kayades ("Silence"), the hallmark of compromise. Although there are individual differences, I believe they still maintain this stance. Especially when cold winds begin to blow between Israel and Turkey, the tendency toward silence becomes even stronger within the Jewish community.

Today, the opposite trend has also emerged: Avlaremöz ("Let's Talk").

**You speak several languages, including some Armenian. What sparked your interest in the Armenian language and culture?**

Although I am a leftist, a socialist by worldview and despite my engineering education and career, my true interest has always been the history of the final century of the Ottoman Empire and the founding years of the Turkish Republic. My youth passed reading and researching these topics.

During those years, like many others, I had almost no knowledge of the Armenian deportations of 1915. To be honest, I could not fully understand the motivations behind the attacks carried out against Turkish diplomats between the 1970s and 1990s, which resulted in deaths.

Finally, in 1995, when I read Vahakn

N. Dadrian's book *Genocide: The Armenian Problem of 1915 and Its Legal Consequences*, I was deeply affected. I began reading more works on the topic. The Agos newspaper in Istanbul also played an important role in my enlightenment.

The murder of Hrant Dink in 2007, in broad daylight on a crowded street in Istanbul, made it clear — just as everyone felt — that this issue was far from resolved and was still being actively discussed. I then began to research, learn and write myself. And I still continue.

**It is well known that Armenians were founders of Turkish theater and there are books in both Armenian and Turkish documenting this. For my father, Dr. Henrik Bakhchinyan, and myself, it was a pleasant surprise to learn that our edited volume by Yervant Tolayan — his autobiography and memoirs as an editor and actor in Constantinople and Paris — has been translated into Turkish, with you as one of the editors. How do you assess the significance of this book?**

I have been researching the history of Armenians as the founders of theatre in the Ottoman Empire for 15 years. Once I understood how crucial it was to know Armenian to access primary sources in both Armenian and Turkish, I began learning the language. While I do not have much speaking practice, I have made substantial progress in reading and translation.

When Tolayan's memoirs were published in Armenian by Aras Publishing in 2019, they greatly benefited my ongoing work on my book *Mardiros Minakyan in the Theatre of the Tanzimat, Abdülhamid (Istibdat) and the Constitutional Era (Meşrutiyet)*. Having translated almost half of Tolayan's book at the time, I realized how important it was. When Yetvart Tomasyan, the publisher, later invited me to serve as editor of the Turkish edition, I was delighted.

Gavroşname was not just an ordinary memoir. While certain parts of the memoirs could be found in other sources, Tolayan presented Armenian theatre history from a perspective rarely seen before. It offered a narrative outside the viewpoint of major Armenian political parties of the late Ottoman years. Reading Armenian theatre history from this angle introduced a fresh perspective.

Earlier sources had very limited political analysis of Armenian theatre. Tolayan, however, openly stated his worldview while recounting the story of Armenian theatre. The fact that he wrote his memoirs outside Turkey — first in Paris, then in Yerevan — likely played a major role.

Through this work, I came to better understand why figures like Mardiros Minakyan, Hagop Vartovyan and many other Armenian theatre artists chose not to publicly declare political positions, instead reaching compromise with the Ottoman state and with Turks in order to continue performing.

**You have published studies on theater directors Mardiros Minagian and Aşod Madatyan, as well as the Şahinyan family. What distinguishes these figures in the history of Turkish theater?**

For the first sixty years after its establishment, the Ottoman stage was entirely dominated by Armenian artists. Turkish artists were only able to take on these roles afterward. When the Turkish Republic was founded, its theatre scene was already prepared thanks to Armenian artists.

However, just as the Republic refrained from embracing the Ottoman legacy, it also almost erased the legacy of Armenian theatre artists. Aside from a few Turkish theatre historians, most Republican-era historians ignored Armenian contributors. Yet there exists a massive pre-Republican theatre history. Today, although theatre historians remaining, they are striving to communicate this truth to new generations.

Is there progress? Yes, there is. As one of these historians, I am trying to help restore the missing pieces of Turkey's theatre history. My books on Mardiros Minakyan, Aşod Madatyan and the Şahinyan family are not simple biographies — they are works that narrate the theatre history of both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic.

**Beyond theater studies, you have addressed the sensitive topic of Armenian writers who were victims of the genocide in your book 24 April 1915: İstanbul, Çankırı, Ayaş, Ankara and in your volume on Krikor Zohrab. How have Turkish scholars and readers responded to these works? Have you faced any threats as a result?**

1915: A Journey to Death — Krikor Zohrab was my first published book. Through this work, Krikor Zohrab became widely known and admired in Turkey. As you know, although he was not among the 250 Armenian intellectuals arrested in Istanbul, many people mistakenly believe he was.

Zohrab is the protagonist of the book I cherish most and am most proud of. He is someone whose character I admire and would wish to emulate.

My book *24 April 1915 – İstanbul, Çankırı, Ayaş, Ankara* is also very important — a work that presents the Armenian deportations of the Ottoman Empire through documents, in an accessible format. When it was published in 2013, Turkey's atmosphere was more moderate. Approaching the centennial of 1915, both society and the governing elites were more open. The book — printed twice — is now out of stock.

I received positive messages from Turkish academics and readers regarding both books. Perhaps a couple of negative comments appeared, but overall, I have had no problems so far. Of course, things could change tomorrow. One must always keep that possibility in mind.

**What is your perspective on the future of Armenian and Jewish minorities in Turkey?**

My surname is İzrail, inherited from my father. I have never thought of changing it. I have relatives in Israel. In the past two years, I have disagreed with many of Israel's policies and voiced my opposition on social media. But as I noted earlier, circumstances can change and I am aware that I may face difficult days.

With these observations, I can say that both Armenian and Jewish minorities in Turkey experience periods of increased anxiety. It is like sitting on a bed of nails. Both communities have been shrinking steadily and systematically.

Today, Armenia–Turkey relations are moving toward a more comfortable space. Israel–Turkey relations may not look great for the moment, but with the United States involved, they may head toward a smoother path.

If my predictions are correct, Armenian and Jewish minorities in Turkey will continue to maintain their presence.

from previous page

Artworks were obtained from 15 lenders and three works were donated to the Armenian Museum. All this, Sohigian said, was largely driven by Hayes, who was supported by Theriault as curator, Field from the Arshile Gorky Foundation, and



Gorky's "Still Life with Pitcher and Pears" c. 1926-27 (photo Aram Arkun)

various art collectors, including the new museum trustee Ambartsumian. Theriault then wove a compelling narrative around

the 26 works to be displayed, Sohigian said.

Kolligian in turn concluded, "As the first Armenian museum to host an exhibition of Arshile Gorky's work, we are honored to share this remarkable collection with our members and visitors to the Museum.

Gorky's life and art reflect resilience, creativity, and the enduring power of community. This exhibition celebrates his extraordinary contributions to modern art and offers us an intimate look at the relationships and experiences that shaped him and his art. The entire Museum organization is filled with deep pride and excitement in being given the opportunity to present these rarely seen works and to invite visitors to engage with Gorky's story in a meaningful way. We extend our profound gratitude to the JHM Charitable Foundation for their sponsorship of this very special exhibition, and for their continued support of our mission."

"It is our hope," she added, "that visitors — from near and far — feel how delicately



Melanie Dadourian and Sandra Shahinian Leitner, present at the opening on behalf of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern), which loaned 3 Christmas cards made by Arshile Gorky (photo Natalie Nigito)

and intentionally Gorky's life and art were woven together in 'Redrawing Community and Connections,' and how his vision continues to foster dialogue, connection,

and shared understanding."

The exhibition runs from December 12 to April 26, 2026. See [armenianmuseum.org/arshile-gorky](http://armenianmuseum.org/arshile-gorky) for more information.



## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**  
SINCE 1932



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# Armenia Continues in the Eurasian Economic Union

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

This week, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan traveled to St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, on a working visit to participate in the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council. The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), of which Armenia has been a member since 2013, continues to remain a unique economic bloc of its kind. Despite ongoing public and political debates suggesting that Armenia is moving toward withdrawal from the EAEU and deeper integration with the European Union, such assumptions have not materialized in practice.

In fact, Pashinyan participates every December in the EAEU leaders' annual year-end summit. The messages he delivered during his speech at this year's meeting were particularly noteworthy. "The current meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council is taking place at a stage when EAEU integration processes have reached a qualitatively new phase. The implementation of the Strategic Directions for the Development of Eurasian Economic Integration through 2025 has enabled the accumulation of not only significant institutional and regulato-

to pursue major foreign policy realignments. A number of constraining factors stand in the way – most notably the absence of a common border with the European Union, which significantly complicates Armenia's prospects for EU membership. Among EU member states, only Ireland, Cyprus, and Malta lack a land border with another EU country. However, all three have direct maritime access, which substantially mitigates this limitation.

Admittedly, Armenia also lacks a land border with the EAEU. Nevertheless, within the EAEU framework, specific mechanisms have been developed to address and manage this issue. Consequently, Armenia's potential withdrawal from the EAEU and accession to the EU faces not only political obstacles, but also serious geographic and structural constraints.

The situation would be fundamentally different if either Turkey or Georgia were EU member states, which would naturally alter Armenia's strategic environment. However, as of today, such a scenario appears highly uncertain.

It is obvious that the EAEU is a structure of critical importance to Russia, and Moscow can be extremely sensitive to any perceived encroachments on the union's cohesion by its member



ry experience but also the identification of structural constraints that continue to affect the depth and effectiveness of integration. Under these circumstances, the reassessment of future development benchmarks has moved to the forefront — particularly with regard to maintaining a balance between the application of supranational mechanisms and the preservation of national sovereignty and jurisdiction, which remains a key prerequisite for the sustainability of the integration process," Pashinyan stated. Concluding his remarks, he reaffirmed Armenia's commitment to cooperation within the EAEU framework, stating that it is aimed at "the benefit of economic stability and sustainable development of our region.

Such statements indicate that Armenia's prime minister is not only refraining from discussing Armenia's withdrawal from the EAEU but is instead emphasizing the Union's expansion, further development, and the need to address existing problems and barriers. They do not indicate the intention to steer Armenia toward the European Union but rather leave the opposite impression — that Armenia feels more comfortable operating within the framework of the EAEU. Although Armenia often uses tough rhetoric and sharp formulations in its relations with Russia, it has consistently refrained from taking concrete steps that could be perceived in Moscow as actions against Russia's vital interests. Despite persistent discussions about Armenia potentially withdrawing from the CSTO and the EAEU since the 2018 change of government, none of these narratives have materialized in practice over the past eight years.

In the short to medium term, Armenia has very limited room

states. Russia has invested significant resources into establishing this organization and remains highly vigilant regarding its stability.

Moscow wants EAEU to serve as a unique counterbalance to the EU — not necessarily in terms of scale, but at least symbolically. Ideally, Russia would like to see the EAEU balancing the EU and the CSTO serving as a counterweight to NATO. For this reason, despite the firm tone toward the CSTO and the EAEU, Armenia has so far taken no concrete actions, apart from summoning the CSTO Secretary-General and issuing continuous demarches against Belarus within the frameworks of the EAEU and CSTO.

It can be concluded that in the short term, Armenia is unlikely to leave the EAEU but instead will maintain its membership and take advantage of the opportunities it provides for Armenian businesses. As long as no viable alternative has been realistically offered by the EU, it would be pointless for Armenia to exit a structure that functions, albeit imperfectly, for one in which it would not even be fully welcomed. Therefore, discussions about Armenia leaving the EAEU are largely political PR — pleasant to European ears — but at this stage, with little chance to be translated into concrete action.

(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.)





## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Pashinyan Orders His Gestapo To Invade The Sacred Grounds Of Holy Etchmiadzin

Last week, for the second time in recent months, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan dispatched hundreds of police officers and undercover agents in civilian clothing to invade the sacred grounds of Holy Etchmiadzin. They are supposed to serve the public, not Pashinyan's personal interests. They should not obey unlawful orders. Regrettably, Pashinyan now has more police officers acting as his bodyguards than soldiers defending Armenia's borders.

Once again, the police were forced to retreat from Etchmiadzin when faced with a very large crowd that had come to defend the Armenian Apostolic Church from the unwelcome intruders. So far the score is: Church 2, Pashinyan 0.

When Pashinyan first assumed power in 2018, he used to come to the Prime Minister's office on a bicycle, alone: no bodyguards, no security, and no police. Since then, the minute he puts one foot out the door of his headquarters, he is shielded by hundreds of police officers. The fears for his security are triggered by his sinking popularity from 82 percent in 2018 to a little over 10 percent now. He refuses to resign because he knows that when he is no longer in office, he will be held responsible for violating hundreds of laws as well as the constitution. The next patriotic and competent leader will have to declare null and void all of Pashinyan's promises and concessions to Armenia's enemies.

Last Thursday, more than 10,000 faithful defenders of the Armenian Apostolic Church who had gathered in Etchmiadzin confronted the dissenting bishops with chants of "Judas." The church followers outnumbered Pashinyan's supporters by a factor of 20 to 1, despite the fact that he had ordered his partisans, including party members and government employees, to go to Etchmiadzin. Since over 90 percent of the population in Armenia and the Diaspora are members of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Pashinyan's small number of followers does not stand a chance against them. By opposing the Church, he has unwittingly laid the ground for a growing movement against his rule, thus finally awakening the apathetic public.

What Pashinyan has done is very dangerous, with potentially bloody consequences. A clash between his dispatched hundreds of security forces and the much larger crowd could have resulted in dozens of casualties on both sides.

There was no reason for Pashinyan to send so many police officers to Etchmiadzin to defend the small group of dissident bishops who had announced that they were going to the church headquarters to demand the resignation of the Catholicos. Once again, Pashinyan meddled in an internal church dispute which is none of his business, thus violating the constitutional provision of separation of church and state.

Last week, Catholicos Karekin II removed three of the dissenting clergymen from the Church's 21-member Supreme Spiritual Council. In my view that is not sufficient. The Armenian Apostolic Church should immediately defrock all 10 dissident bishops because they have violated several Church regulations. They cannot and should not remain members of the Armenian clergy. After being defrocked, they can visit Etchmiadzin as regular tourists.

It is unbelievable that these dissident clergymen are complaining for the first time in decades, claiming after 26 years that Catholicos Karekin II was elected fraudulently in 1999. What prompted them to wake up now and raise this issue 26 years later? Many of them were present during that election and even voted for Karekin II. In the meantime, they have enjoyed the perks that come with their high offices in the Church as bishops, archbishops, and primates. Rather than trying to force the Catholicos to resign, the dissident bishops are the ones who should resign before they are defrocked.

These dissident clergymen are opposing the Catholicos only now because the National Security Service, at Pashinyan's instigation, has probably met with some of them and threatened to expose to the public the secrets of their private lives. Ironically, while Pashinyan is saying that he is opposed to the Catholicos on moral grounds, he is planning to replace him with one of the 10 dissident bishops, several of whom have committed much more serious transgressions. Rather than reforming the Armenian Church, Pashinyan is harming it by planning to bring an unsavory character as a replacement.

It is obvious that Pashinyan's aim is simply political in advance of next June's parliamentary elections. He is trying to eliminate all those who may be an obstacle to his reappointment as prime minister by replacing or prosecuting his opponents.

Last week, Pashinyan stated that he is willing to meet with the Catholicos, "but only to discuss a plan for the Catholicos' dignified resignation." This is not an approach that can lead to a peaceful resolution. The Catholicos can respond by saying, "I will meet with Pashinyan only to discuss his resignation."

I suggest that the two meet without any preconditions to resolve the state vs. church conflict as soon as possible for the good of both the state and church — the two main pillars of the Armenian nation.

## LETTERS

## Diaspora Needs to Understand View of Church in Armenia

To the Editor:

Your recent articles on Prime Minister Pashinyan's criticism of Catholicos Karekin II and the arrests of several clergy highlight an issue that deserves fuller understanding, particularly among Diaspora Armenians. Many in the Diaspora who strongly oppose Pashinyan — especially regarding his confrontation with the Catholicos and the circles surrounding the Church — often overlook the historical context that shapes attitudes within Armenia itself.

A large portion of Armenia's population came of age during the Soviet period, when religious life was suppressed and the school curriculum promoted atheism through Marxist-Leninist ideology. Soviet propaganda was highly effective in shaping public belief, including the notion that religion was "the opium of the masses." During this era, the Armenian Church operated under strict state oversight. Those who lived through it remember that Catholicos Vazgen maintained well-known ties to the KGB, and that valuable gifts to Etchmiadzin from the Diaspora were routinely declared to Moscow or, at times, surrendered to the Soviet "organs." For many Armenians, the Church became associated less with spiritual authority and more with political entanglement.

Even today, many people in Armenia attend church primarily for baptisms or for matakhs, reflecting patterns rooted in Soviet times. The Church remains culturally important, but it is not universally regarded as a central spiritual institution. This historical memory continues to shape how Armenians view the Church's leadership and its political role.

Against this backdrop, it is understandable that some Armenians suspect that outside influence — possibly even from Moscow — still affects the Church's internal decision-making. Whether or not such influence exists, the perception itself is significant. It helps explain why Pashinyan's criticism of the Church resonates with many inside Armenia, even as it appears troubling to parts of the Diaspora.

At a moment when Armenia faces profound challenges, mutual understanding is essential. A more constructive dialogue begins with acknowledging these differing historical experiences.

Armen Dedekian  
Arlington, MA

## National Identity Rethink Confronts Armenians With Hard Truths

By Mikayel Zolyan

Ever since Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan presented his fourteen-point "Real Armenia" concept in a February 2025 address to the nation, he has promoted it at every opportunity. Like a Western motivational speaker, he regularly takes to the stage with visual aids to address a wide variety of audiences, far from all of whom are receptive to the idea, above all those from the vast Armenian diaspora.

The essence of "Real Armenia" is that Armenians should be focusing on the internationally recognized territory of Armenia—not amorphous ideas of a historical homeland. As Pashinyan emphasizes, this means what is encompassed by the former Soviet republic of Armenia. It does not include lands that were part of historical Armenian states but that now belong to Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Iran, or Georgia. First and foremost, that applies to Nagorno-Karabakh, internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, with which Armenia fought two bitter wars over the territory before ethnic Armenians were forced to evacuate it in 2023. Now, argues Pashinyan, Armenians need to forget their unrealizable dreams in order to move forward.

The Armenian leader applies the same logic to the demand that the Turkish government recognize the Armenian genocide committed by the Ottomans in 1915. Despite frequent accusations to the contrary, Pashinyan is not casting doubt on the fact of the genocide itself; simply, he believes Armenia must look to the future. Seeking international recognition of the genocide, according to Pashinyan, should no longer be one of Armenia's foreign policy priorities.

Pashinyan links the "Real Armenia" concept with other goals of his government—in particular, the normalization of relations with Armenia's neighbors, which could allow it to become a trade hub for the South Caucasus and pave the way to economic prosperity. Such a development would,

he argues, also entrench peace. Pashinyan's government has also promoted the cause of EU integration—albeit cautiously. Of course, without normalizing relations with Türkiye and opening the Armenia-Türkiye border, any talk of EU integration is nothing more than a pipe dream.

Finally, Pashinyan links a normalization of relations with Armenia's neighbors and closer ties with Europe to a push to reduce the country's long-standing dependence on Russia. Pashinyan and his supporters have even begun to use the rhetoric of anti-colonialism. While they avoid directly referring to Russia as a "colonizer," they criticize the policies of the Soviet Union and tsarist Russia (often even this is enough to provoke an angry reaction from Moscow).

Ultimately, "Real Armenia" is an effort to align Armenian concepts of statehood and national identity with foreign policy, which radically shifted following the Second Karabakh War in 2020, and the expulsion of Armenians from the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023. It's also a bid to resolve a dilemma over national identity that has haunted Armenia since it gained independence in 1991.

From very early in the history of the post-Soviet Armenian state, national identity was bound up in conceptions of historical justice: specifically, *miatsum*—the unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh—and international recognition of the 1915 Armenian genocide. But such a construction of national identity was inevitably bound up with conflict, and it was conflict with its neighbors that led Armenia to seek security guarantees from Russia. This, in turn, allowed Russia to accumulate huge influence: not only militarily, but also politically, economically, and culturally.

Under Armenian leaders Robert Kocharyan (1998–2008) and Serzh Sargsyan (2008–2018), the principles of no compromise over Nagorno-Karabakh and recognition of the genocide gradually became ossified as tenets of Armenian

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# National Identity Rethink Confronts Armenians With Hard Truths

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life, as did the country’s dependence on Russia. Nor did this change following the Velvet Revolution that brought Pashinyan to power in 2018.

Ironically, it was Moscow that destroyed this political status quo, with the Armenian elite blaming Russia’s hands-off response for the country’s defeat in the 2020 Second Karabakh War and Azerbaijan’s expulsion of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh three years later. Ultimately, it was these events that led Yerevan to seek reconciliation with Azerbaijan and Türkiye.

Will Pashinyan be able to convince Armenians that they should embrace his “Real Armenia” concept? At first glance, it appears to be a deeply ambitious goal. After all, the ideas Pashinyan is seeking to displace have lain at the heart of Armenia’s understanding of itself for decades. They are deeply rooted in Armenia’s education system, state and social rituals, memory politics, and culture. And they will be bitterly defended, not least by their standard bearer—the Armenian intelligentsia.

An amorphous striving for historical justice, as well as recognition of the genocide, are also important for the extensive Armenian diaspora, which has little else from which to construct an identity. Other markers, like language, have been lost for many of the several million Armenians who live outside Armenia—or are on the brink of being lost. It’s unsurprising, therefore, that every time Pashinyan talks about “Real Armenia,” he is met with howls of criticism not only from inside the country, but above all from the diaspora.

Nevertheless, the peace agreement with Azerbaijan announced in Washington earlier this year has strengthened the position of Pashinyan and the Armenian government. Apart from anger, Armenia’s political opposition offers few alternatives.

While the intelligentsia and diaspora are outraged by Pashinyan’s new approach, many Armenians still support the leader’s Civil Contract party (albeit less enthusiastically than before). In recent elections in the city of Vagharshapat, for example, Civil Contract won a convincing victory. There is no reason yet to assume it will not triumph in the 2026 parliamentary elections.

Even if Pashinyan were to fall from power, a new government would have little room for maneuver. There are no viable options for inflicting revenge on Azerbaijan. And there is a growing consensus that the policies pursued by previous governments were a major factor in the tragedy of 2020–2023.

Sooner or later, Armenians will have to accept the new geopolitical reality in which they live. Small countries like Armenia need to be able to survive in an unstable world, and evolution teaches us that it’s not the strongest who survive, but those who are better able to adapt.

Michael Zolyan is a political analyst and historian from Yerevan, Armenia. Since January 2019 Zolyan is a member of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, from “My Step” faction. In 2019-2020 Zolyan served as a member of the Standing Committee on Foreign Relations, and since January 2021 he is a member of the Standing Committee on European Integration. He is also a member of the Euronest Eastern Partnership Parliamentary Forum. In his analytical and academic work Zolyan is specializing in issues of national identity, ethnic conflict, nationalism and ethnicity, as well as democratization and democracy in the post-Soviet context. Zolyan holds a Ph.D. (candidate of science) in History from Yerevan State University and Master’s degree in Nationalism Studies at Budapest’s Central European University. Zolyan teaches UNESCO Chair of Democracy at Yerevan State Linguistic University after Brusov. Zolyan has published numerous scientific articles and chapters in Armenia and abroad, including Armenian, as well as English, Russian and German. His analytical articles are frequently published in Armenian and international media about events in Armenia and the region. This commentary originally appeared on the blog Carnegie Politika on December 10.)

## Armenian Prisoner in Azerbaijan Hospitalized

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — One of the Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan has reportedly been hospitalized on December 23 after what authorities in Baku described on Tuesday as a sharp deterioration of his health.

The 70-year-old Vagif Khachatryan is a former resident of Nagorno-Karabakh who was arrested by Azerbaijani security services in July 2023 as he was escorted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to Armenian hospitals for urgent treatment.

He was subsequently tried and sentenced by an Azerbaijani military court to 15 years in prison for allegedly killing and deporting Karabakh’s ethnic Azerbaijani residents during the 1991-1994 Armenian-Azerbaijani war. Khachatryan, who refused to be represented by an Azerbaijani government-appointed lawyer during the trial, denied the accusations.

Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Justice said that Khachatryan was taken to the hospital on December 22 after complaining of pain in the heart and undergoing “intensive resuscitation” therapy in an Azerbaijani prison. He remains in intensive care there, the ministry said in a statement cited by Azerbaijani state media. It described his condition as “serious.”

The Karabakh Armenian man’s reported hospitalization came three days after he was again allowed to talk to members of his family in Armenia by phone.

Khachatryan is one of at least 23 Armenian prisoners still held in Azerbaijan. They include eight former leaders of Karabakh who are standing trial on grave accusations denied by them.



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