

Armenia and Turkey
‘Simplify’ Visa
Procedure for Diplomats
And Other Officials

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Armenia and Turkey will “simplify” the visa procedure for diplomatic, special, and service passport holders as of January 1, 2026.

The representatives of these groups from both countries “will be able to obtain e-visa free of charge,” the Armenian Foreign Ministry reported on Monday, December 29.

“On this occasion, both Armenia and [Turkey] reaffirm once again their commitment to continue the normalization process between the two countries with the goal of achieving full normalization without any preconditions,” the statement continued in what appeared to be a joint statement with Turkey.

The announcement of the simplified visa procedure came shortly after Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said in an interview with Public TV on December 28 that there could be “a symbolic step before the beginning of [2026]” in the Armenia–Turkey normalization process.

Mirzoyan also said that Armenia believes “it is time for us to have great and very tangible progress” in the normalization process.

“I believe that we will definitely have



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meets with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in New York in 2024

very positive progress in this direction. I don’t want to make predictions regarding timelines; I think, let me say it, I think that in the very near future, very soon,” Mirzoyan said.

Mirzoyan refrained from disclosing whether all expected steps would be taken at once or throughout the year, but added that “I don’t think it will take that long.”

Despite a 2022 agreement to allow third-country citizens and diplomats to cross the land border, Turkey has kept the border closed since 1993 and has linked its opening to progress in the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process.

Aside from the announcement of a simplified visa procedure, December also saw another step in the bilateral normalization process, along with high-profile statements signaling further steps ahead.

see DIPLOMATS, page 6

Pashinyan Launches ‘Reform’
Of Armenian Church

Renews Call for Karekin II’s Resignation

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

As Armenia celebrated the holidays, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has published a statement envisioning a ‘reform’ of the Armenian Apostolic Church, renewing calls for the resignation of Catholicos Karekin II. In turn, the Church responded that reforms should not be entrusted to a “self-declared council.”

Pashinyan read the statement at his residence, where he hosted 10 senior clergy members who had called for the resignation of the catholicos.

A video of Pashinyan delivering the statement and the accompanying singing was published on his official social media accounts on Sunday evening.

The document declared the launch of reforms in the Armenian Church, a roadmap for the implementation of reforms, including removal of Karekin II, as well as the formation of a ‘Co-

ordinating Council’ composed of the signatories. The latter is to be entrusted with the organizational functions related to the reform.

The reforms stem from their concern over the “failure” of Karekin II and members of his close circle “to live according to and preach the principles of the gospel, the disruption of



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and eight of the 10 archbishops who support his efforts to unseat Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II

spiritual life, and the manifestation of tolerance toward the glaring facts of moral corruption.”

The statement also condemned what it called the unacceptable and “uncanonical practice of involving the Church in politics and using it to serve various agendas and interests.”

see REFORM, page 4

Eight More Armenian
Oppositionists Arrested

By Naira Bulghadarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The Armenian opposition accused Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on December 30 of continuing to crack down on dissent ahead of next year’s parliamentary elections after eight more opposition members and supporters were arrested overnight.

They include two senior members of the opposition Hayrenik (Fatherland) party led by Artur Vanetsyan, a former head of Armenia’s National Security Service (NSS) who has stepped up his political activities recently.

The Anti-Corruption Committee (ACC) charged Khachik Galstyan



Khachik Galstyan standing next to Hayrenik party leader Artur Vanetsyan (left)

and Aram Kocharyan with trying to buy votes in last month’s local election held in a district just west

see OPPOSITION, page 2

Armenia, Azerbaijan
Still Disagree on
‘Important Issues’

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to disagree on some major issues, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said on December 29, pointing to Baku’s key precondition for signing an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty.

The treaty was initiated during an Armenian-Azerbaijani summit hosted by US President Donald Trump at the White House in August. In a separate document, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan also pledged to open a US-administered transit corridor that would connect Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave through Armenia. It will be called the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP).



US President Donald Trump holds the hands of Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan as they shake hands between each other during a trilateral signing event at the White House, in Washington, August 8, 2025.

Pashinyan has since regularly declared that “peace has been established” between the two South Caucasus countries. However, Baku continues to make the signing of the peace treaty conditional on a change of the Armenian constitution which it says contains territorial claims to Azerbaijan. Mirzoyan singled out this precondition in an interview with Armenian Public Television.

“This should end with the signing and then ratification [of the agreement,]” he said. “They have their ideas. We don’t share those ideas ... We don’t yet have an agreement here. As I said, we have solved many issues and done many things, but there are important issues on which we don’t yet have an agreement and we must keep working [on them.]”

Mirzoyan again insisted that the constitution issue is not on the agenda of Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks. Still, Pashinyan has pledged to enact a new constitution that would conform to Baku’s demands. He plans to put it on a referendum in case of winning Armenia’s parliamentary elections slated for June.

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov reiterated late last week that

see PEACE, page 5

ARMENIA
Art and Artists
Through the
Generations



NEW YORK
The Beauty
Of Christmas,
Revealed
Through Music



NEW YORK
FEMINNO
Expands to
New York City





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Detained Archbishops Call for Unity and ‘Liberation’

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Two detained Armenian archbishops issued a New Year and Christmas message on January 5 from custody, urging national consolidation, faith and efforts towards “liberation and victory.”

In their statement, Archbishops Bagrat Galstanyan and Arshak Khachatryan marked the celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany, calling on Armenians to reject “evil, falsehood, hatred and fear” and to uphold “truth, justice, freedom, dignity and love.”

The senior clerics said 2025 had been a year of “persecution and trials,” which they described as strengthening their resolve, and cited biblical passages encouraging perseverance under hardship.

Looking ahead, they called for 2026 to be a year of consolidation around a single national purpose, invoking the Armenian Apostolic Church, justice and national dignity, and appealed for peace and hope through faith.

More than 60% of Armenian Immigrants Receive US government Assistance, Trump Says

WASHINGTON (news.am) — President Donald Trump has released data on immigrants receiving US government assistance. According to the data, 60.3 percent of families from Armenia who immigrated to the US receive government assistance.

From the other countries of the former Soviet Union, there are respective data also on immigrants from Azerbaijan (37.8 percent), Kyrgyzstan (38.6 percent), Kazakhstan (36.5 percent), Uzbekistan (53.9 percent), Ukraine (42.7 percent), and Moldova (42.6 percent).

Yerevan among Top New Year Destinations For Russian Tourists

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Yerevan was one of the most popular destinations for Russian tourists during the New Year holidays, according to data from the travel service OneTwoTrip cited by Russia’s TASS news agency.

Domestic travel dominated holiday bookings, with Moscow ranking first. The Russian capital accounted for 20.4 percent of all New Year reservations. It was followed by St Petersburg with 16.1 percent, Kazan at 4.4 percent and Adler at 4 percent.

Among international destinations, Istanbul topped the list, attracting 8.6 percent of bookings. Dubai followed with 3.9 percent, Minsk with 3.8 percent, Yerevan with 2.7 percent and Paris with 2.5 percent.

The data indicate a rise in outbound travel this year, with trips abroad making up 35 percent of all New Year holiday bookings.

Russian–Armenian Tycoon Karapetyan Placed under House Arrest

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Russian–Armenian tycoon Samvel Karapetyan has been released on bail and placed under house arrest after spending more than six months in pre-trial detention. He was charged in June 2025 with making calls to usurp power, following a pro-Church statement made amidst tensions between the Armenian government and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The bail amount has not yet been disclosed.

The Yerevan City Court decision to apply alternative preventive measures was announced by Karapetyan’s lawyer, Aram Vardevanyan, in a Facebook post on Tuesday evening.

Vardevanyan said that their legal team had recently submitted a motion to change Karapetyan’s preventive detention.

In a press briefing following the court ruling, Vardevanyan described the house arrest as “a heavy preventive measure,” adding that “communication restrictions have been applied in an intensive manner,” excluding only close relatives.

According to Vardevanyan, restrictions on “freedom of speech” were also imposed, though he said they had not yet received the court ruling and therefore had limited information as to what this would mean in practice.

Since June, Karapetyan’s pre-detention has been extended several times. Through it all, he was kept in the Yerevan-Kentron Penitentiary Institution, commonly known as the National Security Service (NSS) detention center.

How did it all start?

Since his detention, Karapetyan has faced charges of incitement to seize power, with additional financial crime charges added later, all of which he denies.

Karapetyan, the owner of Tashir Group and one of the wealthiest Armenians globally, has an estimated fortune of \$4.4 billion — roughly half of Armenia’s annual public budget.

The charges followed his pro-Church statement made in an interview with News.am on June 17 when he said: “if the politicians fail, then we will participate in our own way in all of this.”

Tensions between the government and

the Church have reached a peak since late May, with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan accusing Catholicos Karekin II and other senior clergy of breaking their celibacy vows, rendering them ineligible for office. As of December, four high-ranking priests have been detained on various charges. The most serious allegation, however, remains Pashinyan’s claim that Karekin II and his brother, Archbishop Yezras of the Diocese of New Nakhichevan and Russia, maintain ties with foreign intelligence services.

Armenian authorities viewed Karapetyan’s remark in June as a threat, and hours later raided and searched Karapetyan’s mansion in Yerevan, remanding him to pre-trial detention.

Since Karapetyan’s arrest, the authorities have raided, inspected, or threatened to nationalize several of Karapetyan’s businesses, though they have denied that these actions were politically motivated or con-

nected to his arrest.

For decades, Karapetyan has remained largely outside politics, instead gaining recognition for his business empire and as a benefactor who, among other things, sponsored the renovation of the Etchmiadzin Cathedral, Armenia’s oldest and most important church.

Weeks after his detention, Karapetyan announced plans to create a “fundamentally new political force” through which he could cooperate with “like-minded people.”

Although he submitted a political bid while in detention, his dual citizenship effectively prevents him from running for prime minister under Armenian law.

Karapetyan’s nephew Narek Karapetyan is now leading the political campaign called Our Way, echoing Karapetyan’s pro-Church remarks.

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

Christmas Eve Candlelight Divine Liturgy at The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin

YEREVAN — On January 5, on the occasion of the Feast of the Nativity and Theophany, the Christmas Eve Candlelight Divine Liturgy was celebrated at the Cathedral of the Descent of the Only-Begotten under the presidency of Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

The Liturgy was officiated by Bishop Haykazun Najaryan, a member of the Mother See monastic clergy.

Prior to the Divine Liturgy, the Evening Service was conducted, during which various readings from the Holy Scriptures were proclaimed. Following this, four deacons of the Mother See read the prophecy of Daniel.

During the Divine Liturgy, in his sermon explaining the profound meaning of the Lord’s Nativity, Najaryan remarked: “Christianity, above all, is the manifestation of personal faith and spiritual devotion. First and foremost, we ourselves, each of us, must turn to God, find Him in our hearts, become children of light, enlighten our souls, and only then strive to proclaim the Gospel to others by our example. Without this, no nation can be guided on the

path of salvation.”

The officiating bishop then exhorted the faithful, in accordance with their Christian duty, to remember the poor and those in need, to visit the sick and imprisoned, and to offer prayers on their behalf.

“For us, the Holy Nativity is a blessed opportunity to be spiritually renewed, to experience profound spiritual joy, and to renew our pledge before God, so that we may be strengthened in Christ and reaffirm our calling as true children of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church.

“Let us emulate our holy fathers, remain faithful to our sacred traditions, and be prepared, as Christians, to face all kinds of trials while strengthening our faith,” he concluded.

At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, during the pre-feast rite, the Catholicos of All Armenians ascended the Main Holy Altar and lit the candle symbolizing Jesus Christ, the life-giving light of which was shared among the faithful.

Following the Liturgy, the clergy gathered at the Patriarchal Residence, where the first House Blessing of the New Year was performed by the Catholicos.

Eight More Armenian Oppositionists Arrested

OPPOSITION, from page 1

of Yerevan comprising the town of Vagharshapat and 17 nearby villages. The law-enforcement agency did not shed light on the accusations strongly denied by lawyers representing the two men. Nor did it name the six other arrested suspects.

The ACC petitioned a court in Yerevan to allow it to hold Galstyan and Kocharyan in pretrial detention. A court hearing on the request was still ongoing as of Tuesday evening.

Galstyan managed Hayrenik’s election campaign while Kocharyan was second on the list of the party’s election candidates in Vagharshapat. The party fared poorly in the election narrowly won by Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party. Galstyan accused the Armenian government of vote buying, gerrymandering and other foul play in an interview with the Hraparak daily published one day before his arrest.

Law-enforcement authorities already detained on November 17 five members of an-

other opposition group which finished second in the polls. They were all set free hours later after being charged with vote buying.

Vanetsyan shrugged off the accusations leveled against his political allies and claimed that their arrests are the latest manifestation of Pashinyan’s political persecution of his opponents. The claim was echoed by other opposition leaders.

“No citizen with opposition views is now immune to a government decision to arrest them on trumped-up charges,” Vanetsyan told reporters. “This is yet another pathetic criminal case.”

“This must be a wake-up call to all opposition forces because the authorities are thus paving the way for arresting more people on trumped-up charges, intimidating them or halting their political activities in the run-up to the upcoming elections,” he said.

Dozens of other critics of the government, including another opposition mayor, three archbishops and a billionaire busi-

nessman, have also been arrested in recent months. The authorities deny that they are political prisoners.

Opposition fears of more such arrests have been stoked by election-related support requested by Pashinyan’s administration from the European Union. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said earlier this month that he asked for the kind of “help to fight foreign malignant interference” which the EU recently provided to Moldova where two opposition parties deemed pro-Russian were barred from participating in recent parliamentary elections. Pashinyan’s detractors say the Armenian authorities too may disqualify some major opposition groups from the 2026 vote.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry insisted on December 16 that the authorities only want the EU to help them “counter potential hybrid threats” to the proper conduct of the elections. Armenian officials have still not elaborated on those threats or said publicly whether they emanate from Russia.



ARMENIA

Faith and Renewal: A Quarter Century of Achievement Under His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II

Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II has led the Armenian Church since October 1999 as its Supreme Patriarch and 132nd Catholicos of All Armenians, the highest-ranking official in the global Armenian Apostolic Church. For over 25 years, he has guided the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin through restoration, reform, and the pressures of a turbulent new century. In these endeavors, His Holiness earned the trust and confidence of, not only the Armenian faithful worldwide, but also numerous benefactors, donors and partner organizations in the Diaspora and Armenia. This resulted in an array of major achievements in a relatively short time.

Born on August 21, 1951, in the village of Voskehat in Armenia's Armavir Province, Ktrij Grigori Nersisyan grew up in a deeply spiritual environment that shaped his early devotion to the Church. At just 14, he entered the Gevorkian Theological Seminary of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin, where his path to the priesthood began in earnest.

Ordained as a deacon in 1970 and as a priest two years later—taking the name Karekin—he pursued advanced theological studies in Vienna, Bonn, and later at the Moscow Theological Academy. This international education broadened his outlook, instilling in him a global perspective that would later mark his approach to both



His Holiness Karekin II meeting with youth at the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin

its surrounding districts.

Rising to the Challenges of Change

In the difficult years following the collapse of the Soviet system, and in the years following independence and the first Nagorno Karabagh War, the people of Armenia faced dire conditions with a lack of access to education, heat and even food.

In 1992, Archbishop Karekin ensured that as many as 1,000 pensioners, who

strengthen the bond between the Church, the homeland, and the global Armenian Diaspora. It is a vision that places the Armenian Apostolic Church at the center of national life — not as a relic of history, but as an active force for faith, education, and community.

During this critical period, he saw the value in investing in digital media to reach the masses and, in 1995, he launched Shoghakat TV Company from the offices of Araratian Patriarchal Diocese with a staff of three people. Programming was aimed at instilling Christian values, while covering public and current events. Along with the youth centers and soup kitchens, the Shoghakat broadcast platform would remain a priority in the years to come.

Physical Imprints

As critical humanitarian and socio-economic projects continued throughout the 1990s, Archbishop Karekin understood that to bring a post-Soviet society back to the Armenian traditions and religion meant improving access. Among the first projects entrusted to him by His Holiness Vasken I

marked by an unprecedented expansion of church infrastructure. The property of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin quadrupled, with roughly 40 new or renovated buildings transforming the historic complex in addition to countless churches, cathedrals and seminary buildings throughout Armenia and Artsakh.

Among the most significant projects were the creation of the St. Trdat Open Sanctuary—built to accommodate 1,500 worshippers during the 1,700th anniversary of Armenia's conversion to Christianity—and the renovation of the Holy Echmiadzin Cathedral. The seven-year renovation of this Cathedral, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, involved structural reinforcement, replacement of the dome's cross, and the restoration of murals and frescoes which had been damaged due to age or obscured with multiple coats of paint applied during the Soviet-era. The project, carried out under the supervision of UNESCO, was an internationally coordinated effort unifying donors and supporters of all backgrounds.

New monastic residences, libraries, and educational centers, including the Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Library and the Karekin I Educational Center, further enriched the spiritual and intellectual life of Echmiadzin. Through the generosity of benefactors, major renovations transformed key institutions: the Alex and Marie Manoukian Treasury, the Khirmian Museum, the Old Veharan, the Ruben Sevak Museum, and modern dormitories for seminarians. Together, these projects, among others, would ensure that Echmiadzin would remain both a sacred sanctuary and a vibrant hub for learning and service, as well as positively impact education and managerial capabilities.

Fortifying Internal Foundations

Beyond physical expansion, His Holiness worked to strengthen the internal structures of church governance. Holding regular sessions of the Supreme Spiritual Council both in Echmiadzin and in dioceses abroad reinforced unity and accountability.



His Holiness has welcomed world leaders, spiritual leaders and international representatives at Echmiadzin: Pope John Paul II (Roman Catholic Church), at right, September 2001

faith and leadership. His breadth of training, multilingual ability, and diplomatic composure would later define his leadership style—balancing tradition with global engagement.

His Holiness earned the trust and confidence of, not only the Armenian faithful worldwide, but also numerous benefactors, donors and partner organizations in the Diaspora and Armenia, resulting in an array of major achievements in a relatively short time.

Returning to Echmiadzin in 1980, he was consecrated a bishop in 1983 and named deputy primate in that same year. In 1992, he was elevated to the rank of Archbishop. As a highly trusted leader in the Armenian Church, he became the Primate of the Araratian Pontifical Diocese, the largest and most active diocese of the Armenian Church in a now independent Armenia. He was entrusted by His Holiness Catholicos Vasken I of Blessed Memory—and later His Holiness Catholicos Karekin I of Blessed Memory—with broad pastoral and administrative authority over Yerevan and

once benefited from socialist-era entitlements, would be provided with nutritious warm meals and gathering spaces at what were then called soup kitchens. His ability to mobilize resources on the ground as well as gain the trust of philanthropists from the Diaspora ensured that these early projects could run with efficiency and impact. Such initiatives set the stage for the first large-scale, Church-run humanitarian efforts in newly independent Armenia and an expanded social ministry in the years ahead.

He also used his position to prioritize and address urgent social needs of the youth, for whom conditions were harsh and many were abandoned to life on the streets. Archbishop Karekin moved quickly to reclaim Soviet-era youth centers and converted these buildings into after-school centers where youth could study, gather safely, and reconnect with Armenian cultural and spiritual life, as well as receive healthful meals on a daily basis. 3,000 students were enrolled each year starting in 1993.

His Holiness's guiding philosophy has shaped two decades of initiatives that



His Holiness has welcomed world leaders, spiritual leaders and international representatives at Echmiadzin: Pope Tawadros II (Coptic Church of Alexandria), at left, April 2015

of Blessed Memory, followed by His Holiness Karekin I of Blessed Memory, was the establishment of the St. Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral in Yerevan, which began construction in 1997. The cathedral would be the largest Armenian Apostolic Cathedral in the world and made possible through ongoing donor investment from the Diaspora.

After his election to Catholicos in 1999, His Holiness Karekin II's early years were

ity. Other specialized councils and committees, such as the Monastic Council, the Review and Disciplinary Committees, and the Architectural and Publishing Councils, were created to professionalize church administration. The re-establishment of the Episcopal and Ecclesiastical-Representative Assemblies after a long hiatus marked a renewed era of institutional participation and transparency.

see ACHIEVEMENT, page 4



ARMENIA

Quarter Century of Achievement Under HH Catholicos Karekin II

ACHIEVEMENT, from page 3

Upon his ascension as Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II pledged to rebuild the Church's educational and pastoral foundation, restructuring seminaries, introducing accelerated training programs for priests, and creating new departments of youth ministry and Christian education. With the goal to attract a new

over seven years.

Spiritual Command of Army and Prisons. As codified in the Armenian Constitution of 1995, the spiritual service of the Armed Forces was entrusted to the Armenian Church in 1997. Starting in 1999, the libraries of numerous military units were enriched with spiritual literature, including copies of the Holy Bible, the Echmiadzin



His Holiness visits the Izmirlian Medical Center during the COVID-19 pandemic to give his blessings to the wounded soldiers being treated at the center

generation of priests, His Holiness looked at clergy education through the lens of the modern world. Under his watch, two major seminaries — the Gevorkian and Vazkenian — were revitalized and a new investment in scholarships for higher education degrees in international universities was launched.

Under His Holiness's leadership, the Gevorkian Theological Seminary achieved state accreditation in 2002, full recognition as a higher education institution in 2005, and alignment with European higher education standards in 2007. In 2016, the seminary gained the right to conduct postgraduate and doctoral education, a milestone in theological scholarship.

The Vazkenian Theological School of Sevan was similarly fortified, offering graduate-level programs and producing new generations of clergy and scholars. New educational centers like Turpanjian Theological College of Harich monastery, established in 2012, and the Karekin I Educational Center, opened in 2018, became vital spaces for priestly retraining and intellectual exchange. In addition, His Holiness would ensure that young clergy with high academic potential had the opportunity to study in highly respected institutions like Oxford University, the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome or the University of Louvain in Belgium, not only gaining quality educations but also exposure to different cultures. With placements in secular settings, they could better see the world through a layperson's prism. Over 300 young clergy have benefited from this training and 41 of the 54 Bishops currently serving in the Armenian Apostolic Church were educated and ordained since 1999.

In addition to a thriving Shoghakat TV, investments were made to expand accessibility to Armenian Church's historic resources, publications and digital programming. The Publishing Department of the Mother See, launched in 2006, became an important institution for issuing translations from foreign languages and Classical Armenian, as well as ecclesiology, Armenian studies, biblical commentary, Christian ethics and instructional booklets. In 2012, for the first time, the Mother See published both the modern Armenian and the Classical Armenian editions of Saint Gregory of Narek's Book of Lamentations. More than 30,000 copies were reprinted

Journal, the Christian Armenia biweekly newspaper of the Mother See, as well as various spiritual booklets and prayer books. The number of military chaplains continued to grow, and a cohort of clergymen serve within the spiritual service structures of Armenia's military, included married and celibate priests and deacons. For Armenia's correctional institutions, the Catholicos established the Spiritual Inspectorate of Prisons. Today, those in penitentiary institutions receive regular spiritual ministry from the Armenian clergy.

Humanitarian Relief

Through the Mother See's "Building with Faith" initiative launched in 2008, more than 100 apartments have been built for families in need across Armenia, including those affected by war and natural disasters. The Mother See has also supported free medical care through its Izmirlian Medical Center, a fully operational hospital, and extended aid to wounded soldiers and clergy, including allocating substantial funds for prosthetic limb fittings for those sent to hospitals abroad. Pastoral and mate-



Education has been central to Catholicos Karekin II's vision for the Armenian Church—from securing state accreditation for the Gevorkian Seminary to elevating it to a fully recognized and internationally aligned theological institution.

rial assistance to prisoners and their families were also provided.

His Holiness also spearheaded the founding of educational institutions such as the Eduard Eurnekian School in Echmiadzin (2009) and the Yerevan G. Emin High School (2014), both promoting academic excellence infused with moral and spiritual values. The Mother See also operates numerous boarding schools and youth homes

in cities like Ashtarak, Gyumri, Vanadzor, and Yerevan, where more than 60,000 needy children have received education and care.

In 2014, His Holiness established the Social Services Office at the Mother See, launching wide-ranging humanitarian programs that assist refugees, veterans, displaced families, people with disabilities, and children in need.

The last decade has been marked by successive and historic crises that have tested the leadership of the Armenian Church to play an essential role in humanitarian relief. Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic in Armenia and the 2020 Artsakh War, the Social Services Office of the Mother See has carried out a significantly greater number of in-kind assistance programs than its usual financial assistance programs to vulnerable families and individuals.

World Outreach

With the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian nation uniquely positioned in world history, His Holiness continued a rich tradition of cultural diplomacy through the Church. Within a few short years of his tenure, he organized the unprecedented visit of Pope John Paul II to independent Armenia on September 26, 2001. At Echmiadzin, the Pope participated in celebrations marking the 1,700th anniversary of the state adoption of Christianity in Armenia and signed a joint declaration with His Holiness condemning the first genocide of the 20th century. The relationship with the Vatican would continue to flourish with meaningful engagement with Pope Francis, who also visited Holy Echmiadzin, and most recently with Pope Leo IV, in Rome.

His Holiness has worked to build bridges of understanding among Christian denominations and world faiths. His visits to sister churches, meetings with international leaders, and participation in global assemblies have elevated the voice of the Armenian Church on the world stage. In 2013, he was elected co-president of the World Council of Churches, and in 2019, honorary president of the international organization Religions for Peace, representing over 125 countries. In addition, His Holiness has engaged with dignitaries and representatives of religious, cultural and government institutions from Georgia, the Middle East, Russia, and the West.

Karekin II has personally traveled to locations that link the Armenian Church's past to its present mission and forge renewed bonds to the Mother See. In 2000 and 2005, he visited the Holy Land and the sacred sites of Jerusalem. His 2001 visit to Javakhi, a region in Georgia with a significant Armenian population, made him the first Armenian Catholicos to visit in over a century, a show of determination to reach every Armenian community, no matter how remote. In that same year, he traveled to Deir Zor to honor the victims of the Armenian Genocide. In 2007, he visited Istanbul and publicly reaffirmed the historical truth of the Genocide before journalists.

His Holiness launched several initiatives to connect young Armenians across the globe. In 2001, the World Union of Armenian Youth (WUAY/HYPA) was established to engage young Armenians in church life and community service. Active in Armenia, Artsakh, and throughout the Diaspora—from the Americas, Asia, and Europe to the Middle East and Russia—the Union reflects Karekin II's global outlook and be-

lief in a spiritually united Armenian people. He has made it a priority to be available for candid engagement with young professionals and church leaders, encouraging dialogue for deeper understanding of community needs and priorities.

His Holiness's guiding philosophy has shaped over three decades of initiatives that strengthen the bond between the Church, the homeland, and the global Armenian Diaspora. It is a vision that places the Armenian Apostolic Church at the center of national life—not as a relic of history, but as an active force for faith, education, and community.

(Originally published in the December 2025 issue of AGBU Magazine.)

Pashinyan Launches 'Reform' Of Armenian Church

REFORM, from page 1

The most serious allegation, however, remains Pashinyan's claim that Karekin II and his brother, Archbishop Yezras of the Diocese of New Nakhichevan and Russia, maintain ties with foreign intelligence services.

As of January, four high-ranking priests have been detained on various charges.

In its response on January 5, the Church stated that Pashinyan's initiative "directly violates" the Armenian constitution, as well as infringe the rights of the Church established both internationally and under Armenian law.

"The involvement of bishops in such anti-Church processes, as well as the pressures applied to the clergy, are condemnable," the statement read.

The Church also noted that the 10 clergymen were 'continuing to avoid meetings and discussions regarding the matters that concern them' with Karekin II and the Supreme Spiritual Council, despite having received invitations to the meetings.

"It should be emphasized that the canonical matters and reform of the Church are not entrusted to a self-declared council, but to the Patriarchate of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, through its highest governing bodies," the statement concluded.

Earlier on January 5, in another Facebook post, Pashinyan called for a march in Yerevan on Tuesday, January 6, as Armenia traditionally celebrates Christmas.

The march was scheduled to take place following the Christmas liturgy, with Pashinyan saying it is intended to mark the holiday.

The march is also meant to symbolize the attendees' support to Pashinyan's proposed reforms, and their protest against the use of the Armenian Church 'as a tool of hybrid warfare of foreign forces' by Karekin II and his close circle — as Pashinyan claims it is being used.

"The march will be exclusively peaceful and faithful to the Christian spirit," Pashinyan said.

(This story originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on January 5.) Tensions between the government and the Church reached their peak in late May 2025, with Pashinyan accusing Catholicos Karekin II and other senior clergy of breaking their celibacy vows, rendering them ineligible for office.



INTERNATIONAL

Ishkhanyan Issues Final Statement, as Trial Of Former Karabakh Leaders Concludes

BAKU (Caucasian Knot) — During a hearing at the Baku Military Court at the end of December, former speaker of the Nagorno-Karabakh parliament, David Ishkhanyan, delivered his closing statement, denying the charges. The verdict will be announced at the next hearing.

As reported by the “Caucasian Knot,” the trial of the former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh accused of war crimes concluded on October 31. The prosecution requested life imprisonment for Arayik



David Ishkhanyan

Harutyunyan, David Ishkhanyan, David Babayan, Levon Mnatsakanyan, and David Manukyan, and 16 to 20 years in prison for the others. On December 4, the lawyers called the guilt of their clients unproven and called on the court to acquit them. On December 11, eight defendants in the case against the military-political leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh made their final statements before a Baku court. All stated that they did not consider themselves guilty of the war crimes charged against them. On December 22, Babayan and Mnatsakanyan also denied the charges in a Baku court.

The defendants are 15 former Karabakh officials, including Presidents Arayik Harutyunyan, Bako Sahakyan and Arkady Ghukasyan, as well as Parliament Speaker David Ishkhanyan. The case of Nagorno-Karabakh State Minister Ruben Vardanyan is being heard separately. They have been charged under more than 20 articles, and the case contains 2,548 episodes.

At the court hearing, Ishkhanyan stated that he did not participate in the forced eviction of people from their places of residence, illegal settlement, planting mines, planning an aggressive war, preparing new plans for attack, genocide, the extermination of civilians, violation of the laws and customs of war, persecution of civilians, hostage-taking, illegal imprisonment in violation of international law, torture, murder of civilians, plunder of property, participation in a criminal organization, illegal transportation of weapons and ammunition, or other crimes, the Azertaj newspaper reported today.

The accused also spoke about the tragedy in Garakand, which occurred on November 20, 1991. He stated that the explosion of the Azerbaijani helicopter, which was carrying high-ranking officials, was an air crash.

According to the Azerbaijani side, on

November 20, 1991, Armenian armed forces shot down an Mi-8 helicopter carrying Azerbaijani officials over the village of Garakand in the Khojavend district. As a result, 22 people died – prominent government officials, journalists, and members of the Russian-Kazakh peacekeeping mission, the Report news agency reports.

In his speech, Ishkhanyan also touched on the points of the indictment related to prisoners and hostages. He noted that he had no contact with the Azerbaijani prisoners and hostages.

“I do not consider myself guilty; I have not committed any crime,” he stated at the end of his statement.

Presiding Judge Agayev noted that this concluded the closing arguments. The parties indicated they would not submit a draft verdict.

After this, the presiding judge declared the trial closed. The panel of judges retired to the deliberation room. The verdict will be announced at the next hearing.

The defendants are charged under Articles 100 (planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression), 102 (attack on persons or institutions enjoying international protection), 103 (genocide), 105 (destruction of the population), 106 (slavery), 107 (deportation or forced displacement of the population), 109 (persecution), 110 (enforced disappearance of persons), 112 (deprivation of liberty in violation of international law), 113 (use of torture), 114 (mercenarism), 115 (violation of the laws and customs of war), 116 (violation of international humanitarian law during armed conflicts), 118 (war robbery), 120 (premeditated murder), 192 (illegal entrepreneurship), 214 (terrorism), 214-1 (financing terrorism), 218 (organization of a criminal community (criminal organization), 228 (illegal acquisition, transfer, sale, storage, transportation or carrying of weapons, components for them, ammunition, explosives and explosive devices), 270-1 (acts that create a threat to aviation security), 277 (attempt on the life of a statesman or public figure), 278 (violent seizure of power or violent retention of power, violent change of the constitutional order of the state), 279 (creation of armed formations or groups not provided for by law) and other articles of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the publication says.

Karen Avanesyan Sentenced

Karen Avanesyan, who remained in Khankendi after the exodus of Karabakh residents to Armenia, was sentenced by an Azerbaijani court to 16 years in prison on charges of attempting to commit a terrorist attack.

Avanesyan, an armed resident of Khan-

kendi (the Armenian name is Stepanakert) of Armenian descent, attempted to reach an event site in the city but was stopped by police. He threw grenades at them, opened fire, was wounded, and detained, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Internal Affairs reported. Karabakh human rights activists believe the incident was staged. They say the mentally ill man was well known in the city and did not display any aggression. In early December, his case was transferred to the Ganja Grave Crimes Court for consideration.

The verdict was announced at a session of the Ganja Grave Crimes Court chaired by Judge Natig Aliyev, the Report news agency reported today.

According to the court, Karen Avanesyan (born in 1967), a resident of the city, acquired and stored a Kalashnikov assault rifle with components and a large number of hand grenades left over from illegal armed groups operating in the city until September 2023 in the city of Khankendi with the aim of violating public safety, creating panic among the population, and committing acts of terrorism accompanied by explosions, deaths and other socially dangerous consequences.

On September 14, at around 7:00 a.m., Avanesyan left the social shelter where he lived without explanation, took previously hidden ammunition, and at around 9:00 a.m., entered an empty He took up a position and awaited the approach of police officers. From his hiding place, he opened fire indiscriminately with an automatic weapon at the approaching police officers, then threw several hand grenades in their direction.

As a result of the incident, three police officers sustained injuries of varying severity. They were evacuated from the scene and, thanks to prompt medical assistance, survived.

Avanesyan was found guilty under several articles of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan, including attempted premeditated murder of two or more persons by terrorist means, terrorism with the use of firearms, illegal acquisition, storage, and carrying of weapons and ammunition, and resisting a government official with violence. According to the court’s decision, Karen Avanesyan was sentenced to 16 years in prison, the statement said.

Following the exodus of Nagorno-Karabakh’s population, no more than 40 residents remained, including ethnic Armenians, former State Minister Artak Beglaryan stated on October 14, 2023. Earlier, on October 2, 2023, the UN mission stated that between 50 and 1,000 ethnic Armenians remained in Karabakh. The original UN statement, which cited these figures, was published on the “Caucasian Knot.” By early September 2024, only 14 Armenians remained in the region . One of the last Armenian residents of Karabakh, 70-year-old Vera Aghasyan, died at the end of October.

INTERNATIONAL

Ruben Vardanyan Extends New Year Greetings from Prison

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Former Artsakh State Minister Ruben Vardanyan has issued a New Year message from the Baku prison.

An audio recording of Vardanyan was shared on Facebook by Mane Tandilyan, co-founder of Armenia’s Country to Live party on Monday, January 5.

In the message, Vardanyan reflects on faith and resilience, saying people have “lost faith in God and faith in ourselves,” and describing how difficult it is to remain true to oneself without a “pillar of support.”

He expressed hope that people would find such support, adding that he was well despite his imprisonment.

“I want to say that I am alright,” Vardanyan said. “I have no doubts that everything will be fine.”

Red Cross Workers Visit Armenian Prisoners in Baku

BAKU (Caucasian Knot) — On December 26, representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross visited all Armenian prisoners in Azerbaijan. The visit focused on the conditions of detention and the prisoners’ health.

As reported by the “Caucasian Knot,” in March, Azerbaijani authorities notified the International Committee of the Red Cross of their intention to close the organization’s representative office in the country. On September 3, the office’s work ceased. The ICRC announced that it will continue to work with the Azerbaijani authorities to provide assistance to people protected by international humanitarian law, in accordance with our mandate and Azerbaijan’s obligations under the Geneva Conventions.

Representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited all Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan on December 24-25, reported Zara Amatuni, head of the public relations department of the ICRC delegation in Armenia.

According to her, a doctor was also part of the ICRC group.

“According to procedures, during the organization’s visit, as before, this time too, attention was certainly focused on health issues, the treatment of individuals, and the conditions of their detention,” the “Novosti Armenia” agency quotes Amatuni as saying.

She also reported that no parcels from families were delivered; the visit was limited to individual conversations with representatives of the organization, adding, The visit was organized by the ICRC headquarters in Geneva, as well as a result of the organization’s dialogue with the Azerbaijani authorities.

Azerbaijan officially confirms that it is holding only 33 Armenian prisoners of war and civilians, but Armenian human rights activists claim that another 80 Armenian prisoners are being held, the publication states.

Armenia, Azerbaijan Still Disagree on ‘Important Issues’

PEACE, from page 1

Baku will not sign the peace treaty before the change of the Armenian constitution. He made it clear that the signing is also contingent on Yerevan’s implementation of the TRIPP. Echoing Pashinyan’s recent statement, Mirzoyan said the process will get under way next summer.

Crucial details of the transit arrangement have yet to be

worked out, a fact emphasized by Hakob Badalian, an Armenian political analyst. Badalian suggested on Monday that Baku is therefore trying to clinch more concessions from Yerevan that would further compromise Armenian control over the corridor.

“Azerbaijan will strive to have a concrete involvement there,” he told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service.



INTERNATIONAL

Finland Arrests Azerbaijani National in Baltic Sea Sabotage

BAKU (JAMnews) — The Finnish coast guard has detained the cargo ship Fitburg in the Baltic Sea on January 1 after damage was caused to an undersea communications cable between Finland and Estonia by a dragged anchor.

During the subsequent investigation, Russian steel subject to sanctions was found on board.

Finnish telecom company Elisa reported a fault on the Helsinki–Tallinn undersea data cable before 05:00 on December 31. The cargo ship, suspected of involvement in the incident, was identified by a Finnish coast guard dive patrol and helicopters. Authorities then boarded the vessel for inspection.

The 132-metre ship, flying the flag of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, was travelling from Saint Petersburg in Russia to Haifa in Israel.

Reports say that while underway, the ship’s anchor chain was lowered to the seabed and dragged for several hours, damaging a section of the cable.

The crew of 14 was multinational, including citizens of Russia, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan.

Finnish police detained two crew members and imposed travel bans on two others. According to the Finnish news site Yle, investigators have requested the arrest of an Azerbaijani crew member, while a Russian crew member has been

subject to a travel ban.

In an official statement, the Finnish Customs Service said the ship’s cargo consisted of structural steel products of Russian origin, included on the EU sanctions list.

Customs authorities have confiscated the cargo and launched a preliminary investigation into a potential sanctions violation.

In December 2024, the tanker Eagle S was detained on suspicion of damaging the Estlink 2 power cable and several other communications cables. At that time, a Finnish court dismissed the charges, citing lack of jurisdiction because the incident occurred in the country’s exclusive economic zone.

The Fitburg case is seen as a second opportunity to address this legal gap.

Finland’s National Bureau of Investigation is analyzing anchor marks, the ship’s navigation log, and AIS data to determine whether the incident was deliberate. At the same time, customs authorities are investigating the origin of the steel products and how sanctions apply.

The case of the Azerbaijani national will be considered in court; the outcome will determine Finland’s legal authority regarding damage in its exclusive economic zone.

The Azerbaijani government has not issued any statements regarding the arrest.

Russia Closes Criminal Case into AZAL Plane Crash Near Aktau

MOSCOW (Times of Central Asia) — Russia has closed its criminal investigation into the crash of an Azerbaijan Airlines (AZAL) aircraft near Aktau, a move that has drawn sharp criticism from Baku, according to Azerbaijani news outlet Minval Politika.

Citing Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov, the outlet reported on January 1 that a letter from Alexander Bastykin, the head of Russia’s Investigative Committee, notifying Baku of the case’s closure caused “serious surprise”

on the Azerbaijani side. Bayramov stated that Azerbaijan had issued a detailed and principled response to the letter and expects the process to proceed in accordance with public commitments made by Russian President Vladimir Putin in Dushanbe, as well as bilateral agreements between the two countries.

The announcement came just days after Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Transport issued an interim update on its own investigation into the December 2024 crash of the Embraer E190 aircraft operated by

AZAL. The update noted that accredited representatives from Azerbaijan, Russia, and Brazil are participating in the probe, alongside an observer from the International Civil Aviation Organization.

The crash occurred on December 25, 2024, when the aircraft was operating a scheduled passenger flight from Baku to Grozny. After multiple failed landing attempts in Grozny, the crew diverted to Aktau, on Kazakhstan’s Caspian Sea coast. The plane reportedly circled the airfield twice before crashing near the

runway and catching fire.

Of the 67 people aboard, 62 passengers and five crew members, 38 were killed. The remaining 29 survived, including two members of the flight crew.

Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Transport emphasized that the sole objective of its ongoing investigation is to determine the causes and contributing factors of the accident to prevent similar incidents in the future. The final report, including safety recommendations, will be released once all technical analyses are complete.

In September, The Times of Central Asia reported that Russia had begun disbursing insurance payments related to the crash. The Russian Foreign Ministry stated that AlfaStrakhovanie JSC, one of Russia’s largest insurers and currently under Western sanctions over the war in Ukraine, began issuing compensation in February 2025. Azerbaijan Airlines reportedly received full compensation of 1.003 billion rubles (approximately \$12.3 million) for the aircraft.

Baku and Istanbul Announce Major Gas Contract

BAKU (Caucasian Knot) — Azerbaijan and Turkey signed a new agreement for the supply of 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas on January 6.

On July 28, 2025, the Chairman of the Board of the Ukrainian company Naftogaz, Serhiy Koretsky, announced the conclusion of the first agreement with SOCAR Energy Ukraine (a subsidiary of the Azerbaijani State Oil Company SOCAR) for the purchase of gas. The agreement provides for a test supply of a small volume of gas.

What is new in the agreement signed between Kyiv and Baku is that for the first time the Azerbaijani side will supply gas via the Trans-Balkan Corridor. Although the deal is primarily commercial in nature for Azerbaijan, it will allow it to count on political dividends from Ukraine’s Western allies.

Gas supplies from the Absheron field in the Caspian Sea will continue for 15 years, at a rate of 2.25 billion cubic meters per year. “Two days ago, we signed a new agreement with Azerbaijan for the supply of 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas. This agreement will enter into force in 2029 and will remain in effect until the 2040s. “Using the existing infrastructure, we will supply this gas to our country via the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline,” Trend news agency quoted Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Alparslan Bayraktar as saying on January 5.

Human rights activists have seen the EU retreat from democratic values in its relations with Baku. Brussels’ policy toward Baku is based not on democratic values, but on practical interests, according to participants in the “End Repression in Azerbaijan” human rights campaign. They call

on the EU to link energy cooperation to the release of political prisoners and respect for human rights in Azerbaijan.

The Absheron field is located in the Caspian Sea, approximately 100 km southeast of Baku and 25 km northeast of the Shah Deniz field. Condensate and gas production has been underway since July 2023 as part of an early production project using a single deep offshore well operated by JO-CAP, First News Media reports.

Earlier, on December 2, 2025, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced negotiations to extend the contract for gas supplies from Azerbaijan to Georgia, which expires in 2026. The existing agreement with Azerbaijan provides for additional gas supplies to Georgia in the amount of 0.5 billion cubic meters per year, according to the Georgian publication BMG.

Additionally, insurance claims related to injuries and fatalities among 46 of the 62 passengers had been settled. These included payments to seven of the 15 Russian citizens, 35 of the 38 Azerbaijani citizens, all three Kyrgyz citizens, and one of the six Kazakh citizens on board. As of that date, total insurance payouts to injured passengers and the families of those killed amounted to 358.4 million rubles.

Russia’s decision does not affect the ongoing technical investigation being led by Kazakhstan.

Armenia and Turkey ‘Simplify’ Visa Procedure for Diplomats and Other Officials

DIPLOMAT, from page 1

On 22 December, Turkey’s special envoy for normalizing relations with Armenia, Serdar Kılıç, announced in an X post that Turkish Airlines will launch Istanbul-Yerevan flights ‘starting 11 March 2026.’

Kılıç called it “another step forward.”

At present, the only air connection between Yerevan and Istanbul is provided by the low-cost Turkish carrier Pegasus.

Amid reports stemming from early December suggesting that the Armenia–Turkey land border could be reopened, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that Armenia had requested the Russian side to “urgently address” the full restoration of railway sections adjacent to Azerbaijan’s exclave Nakhichevan and the

Turkish border.

Under a 30-year agreement signed in 2008, Armenia’s railway system is managed by a subsidiary of the state-run Russian Railways company.

The issue was also discussed as Pashinyan met with Russian President Vladimir Putin on 22 December during his official visit to Russia.

Again in December, the Turkish media outlet Yeşil Iğdır reported that “preparations have begun for the opening of the Alicant Border Crossing [with Armenia].”

Yeşil Iğdır clarified that the land border crossing was “planned to be opened initially for freight transport via the Margara Bridge, and later to serve passenger crossings.”

Earlier in December, Turkish President

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hinted at an upcoming positive development in Armenia–Turkey normalization process.

“God willing, some symbolic steps will be taken from the beginning of next year,” Erdoğan said in his speech at the 16th Congress of Turkish Ambassadors on 16 December.

At the time, Pashinyan welcomed the

statement and added that “the time has come for symbolic and even non-symbolic, broader, and more concrete steps to take place, and I hope that they will happen.”

(This article originally appeared on the website www.oc-media.org on December 29.)

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INTERNATIONAL

Art and Artists through the Generations

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Is artistic talent heredity or is it learned? In families with several great musicians, like the Bach or the Strauss families, and in the visual arts, as in the cases of Italian Renaissance painters like Fra Filippo Lippi and son Filippino or Dutch and Flemish masters Peter Bruegel the Elder and sons Peter and Jan, creativity seems to have passed from father to son. In modern Armenia, too, many families may boast successive generations of fine artists: Archi Galentz and Marina Vagharshyan as well as the Elibekians represent third and fourth generation talents.

Recently art lovers in Yerevan and Beirut were treated to exhibitions of works by three generations of one family, that of Nona Gabrielyan and her late husband Van Soghomonyan, their daughter Lilit Soghomonyan and her husband, Gagik Ghazanchyan, and their son Guy. The solo exhibition of Nona Gabrielyan's works took place in the second half of September in the Armenian capital and was followed in December by the show in Lebanon of works by daughter and son-in-law, as well as grandson Guy.

First Generation

Nona Gabrielyan's solo exhibition in Yerevan was officially opened on September 12 in the Grand Hall of the Union of Artists of Armenia, by Suren Safaryan, Chairman of the Union. In attendance were members of the entire family, as well as many friends, fellow artists and art lovers, representatives of the German and Lebanese Embassies, the First Channel of Armenian Public Television and press. The magnificent catalogue produced in Armenian, Russian, German, and English was presented at the vernissage.

Not only painter and sculptor, Gabrielyan is also a published author, whose works have appeared in Armenian, Russian and German. The exhibition concluded with a literary evening, during which she presented her books of poetry and prose published between 2003 and 2017. During the event, opened by writer Sevak Olaniyan ("Ar-amazd"), Gabrielyan also read as-yet unpublished autobi-



The Two, Nona Gabrielyan



The Centaur, Pirouette, Friends, Nona Gabrielyan

ographical short stories about the life of an artist and the extraordinary events that accompany it. These texts were written between 1992 and 2022, while she and her husband were living in Wiesbaden, Germany and were completed after her return to Yerevan.

In the opening pages of the sumptuous catalogue for her exhibition, Nona Gabrielyan reflects on the primacy of creativity in human history, from the Stone Age to the present. Quoting, "In the beginning was the Word," she writes, "The Word is the first step in creating the world. Through the Word ideas are born that fill the world with meaning. Thus, humanity follows its path ... united by a single impulse: the desire to create. My reflections on creativity," she continues, "are an attempt to comprehend its profound nature, place, and significance, in each person's



Gagik Ghazanchyan

life. Creativity is a gift, a chance, an opportunity to leave behind a trace or simply a memory. And each of us is free to choose whether to use it or not."

The richly illustrated catalogue contains photos of over 120 works from various periods of her activity, including several produced since her repatriation. It provides an overview of Gabrielyan's exploration of creativity in multiple genres and media. Her paintings, which fill the vast rooms of the exhibition, are abstract, and depict human figures, often almost caricatured, flowers, landscapes, interiors; bold primary colors dominate, accompanied by works with multiply nuanced shades of one hue. Although her exploration in styles may seem to echo the cubism of Picasso or Braque, her fine excursions into pastel variations recall that of the French impressionists; but her mastery of color is distinctly Armenian, and her style is uniquely her own.

Second and Third Generation in Dialogue

Just two months following Gabrielyan's exhibition, in Beirut the Lucy Tutunjian Art Gallery welcomed guests to an exhibition announced on a large poster: "Gazanchyan Family Gagik, Lilit Soghomonyan, Guy" — the first time the three had presented their works together as a family. The invitation to exhibit together came from Hamazkayin, and the family accepted immediately. The fact that, as they point out, each has a very distinct artistic language, different style and individual way of seeing and interpreting the world, does not lead to conflict, but rather to fruitful exchange. The exhibition emerged as a rich, multifaceted, and engaging artistic dialogue. In total, they presented more than fifty works.

Indeed, their works as shown in the gallery halls seem to enter into dialogue. Gagik Ghazanchyan's bold, broad strokes across massive canvases speak an abstract language, whereas Lilit Soghomonyan's figurative paintings depict warm emotions, tender love, as mother embraces child. Delicately drawn strokes trace the contours of Cupid or a female figure, and soft pastel tones lend body and warmth to the gestures. Son Guy experiments with subjects in several directions, from female figures, birds, haunting faces and historical portraits; from a stylized realism to the abstract, as if engaging in reflected exchanges with statements of both mother and father. The mastery of technique, and of techniques, in all members of the family testifies to years of study in Armenia and abroad.

Vitality of Art in Times of Crisis

The opening ceremony brought together artists, representatives of cultural institutions, and members of the Armenian community in Beirut. As reported in the Armenian newspaper Aztag, the exhibition was held under the patronage of M. Philippe Jabre, founder and CEO of the Jabre Foundation.

Anita Mouchoyan, a lecturer at the Lebanese and American Universities of Beirut, delivered a welcoming address. Stressing the uniqueness of this premier family appearance, she reviewed their individual artistic journeys, noting that each member is a prominent figure at home



Violinist Armen Jenterejian

and abroad.

Gallery director Yakob Havatyian later honored Jabre with a special memento. The fund he created is noteworthy also for its inclusiveness, fostering the development of young people from all Lebanon's many communities.

The mere fact that such an ambitious exhibition could take place in a country located in a politically turbulent region deserves mention. Yakob Havatyian, in delivering final remarks, referenced the limitations that had been imposed on the gallery's activities in recent years by political crises, and expressed hopes that, as conditions improve, it would resume former activities. As Aztag reported, he singled out the importance of this particular exhibition, which "injected new passion and energy into this activity," fostering confidence that through joint efforts, the gallery would be able to further its mission. The exhibition was originally scheduled to run from November 24 to December 6, but it has been extended until January 15.

The Source of Creativity

In her writings, Nona Gabrielyan has always stressed the universality of creativity and has actively contributed to promoting cultural dialogue through art. In the thirty years she and her husband lived in Germany, their atelier was a meeting place for art lovers and painting students, who attended classes she gave regularly. In addition to exhibiting widely throughout Germany and abroad, she promoted exchange programs for students, accompanied her own students to Armenia, and in 2016 collaborated on an exhibition in Wiesbaden's Haus der Heimat, of works by six young Armenian artists, among them her grandson Guy.

Guy had been to Wiesbaden with his mother and grandparents in 1992 and stayed for a year. In December 2016, while he was in Wiesbaden again for the group exhibition, he was asked about how he became an artist. "I spent my entire childhood in my family's atelier," he said, "with my parents, and with grandma and grandpa." Art was the natural environment in which he grew up. He had certainly inherited talent from his parents and grandparents, but there was more: art was an integral, necessary part of family life. "I always thought everybody was an artist," he said quite matter-of-factly, "I began to talk and to scribble at the same time."

(Photos courtesy of Lilit Soghomonyan, Union of Artists of Armenia, Lucy Tutunjian Art Gallery)



Community News

Jebejian-Ayvazian Family Foundation Awards Major Gift to Armenian National Institute

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) announced recently the award of a major donation from the Jebejian-Ayvazian Family Foundation Endowment directed to the benefit of the Armenian National Institute (ANI).

The \$100,000 gift was made to support the expansion of ANI services and of the online Armenian Genocide Museum of America (AGMI) site expressly related to the latest tragedies that saw the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh.

Chair of the ANI Board of Governors and Chair Emeritus of the Armenian Assembly Van Z. Krikorian welcomed the gift: “I want to express our deep gratitude for this significant endorsement of the methods and projects of the Armenian National Institute, with very special thanks to Ms. Shake Jebejian, who approved our plans and proposals. This meaningful investment by Shake and her family exemplifies the value of teaching our past to protect our future.”

“The events surrounding the destruction of Nagorno-Karabakh are well documented but are being actively denied. Much of the most damning evidence comes from Azeri and Turkish sources, including admissions of genocidal intent before, during, and after September 2023. If there were any reasonable doubts before, today it is clear from their own words and deeds that the perpetrators’ ultimate objective has always been the eventual elimination of the Armenian people, our Christian presence, and culture in Artsakh as a precursor to moving against the current Republic of Armenia,” Krikorian added. “Having achieved their material objectives, genocidal regimes immediately resort to distorting the evidence and manufacturing a denial industry. This site and our ongoing, fact-based work pre-empt the crude denial efforts to date and the more sophisticated denials and false narratives we expect over time from the authoritarian Aliyev and Erdogan governments.”

Shake Jebejian, age 93, is the sole surviving member of her branch of the Jebejian and Ayvazian families. In 1915, her grandparents and their young children fled the genocide, settling in British controlled north Africa, where her parents met. Shake was born in 1932 and her sister, Azniv, followed shortly thereafter. The Jebejian sisters’ story is a testament to the initiative and tenacity of the Armenian diaspora. Shake and Azniv attended a school organized by the Armenian community in a rural area of what is now Sudan. Because she was an excellent student, Shake transferred to a British mission school in Khartoum, where she came under the guidance of a British Christian

see GIFT, page 9



One of the young vocalists

The Beauty of Christmas, Revealed Through Music

NEW YORK — St. Vartan Cathedral’s sanctuary was filled to capacity with an appreciative audience on Friday, December 19, as the Eastern Diocese presented its annual concert of soaring seasonal music, “Christmas at the Cathedral.”

An uplifting program, which alternated between modern and traditional styles, and Armenian and European selections, immersed listeners in the joy and beauty of the season.



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Diocesan Primate

Hasmik Mekanejian directed the chorus of voices of the St. Vartan Cathedral Choir, with featured performances by a roster of splendid soloists; students from the Manhattan School of Music and the Juilliard School; and organist Deacon Ari Terjanian.

Young students of the St. Vartan Cathedral Sunday School added their delightful talents to the evening. Violinist Nune Melikian and conductor and composer Konstantin Petrossian also graced the evening with their artistry.

This was the first Christmas concert since the passing of the cathedral’s long-time music director Khoren Mekanejian — but his spirit was poignantly present see CONCERT, page 10



Conductor Konstantin Petrossian

Americans for Artsakh Petition UN Working Group for Release Of Artsakh’s Former Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON — Americans for Artsakh (AFA) on January 5 submitted a petition to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) requesting the release of Davit Babayan, former foreign minister of the Republic of Artsakh, who is currently held in an undisclosed detention facility in Baku, Azerbaijan. This petition follows a November 14, 2025 announcement by Azerbaijani prosecutors that they would seek sentences of up to life imprisonment for 15 former leaders and officials of Artsakh, including Mr. Babayan.



Davit Babayan

Babayan is among 31 individuals held in detention in Azerbaijan in connection with the recent conflicts involving Artsakh. The petition requests, among other measures, an end to reported solitary confinement and restrictions on basic needs, access to medical care, family members, and legal counsel, as well as a prompt and independent review of the lawfulness of his detention.

The Republic of Artsakh declared its secession from the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991 during the break-up of the Soviet Union and functioned with de facto self-governing institutions for more than 30 years. The region was the scene of major hostilities in 2020 and 2023, which resulted in the displacement of the indigenous Armenian population and the effective depopulation of Artsakh.

The petition argues that Babayan’s detention is incompatible with Azerbaijan’s obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It further notes that, given Babayan’s prior role as Foreign Minister, his case raises additional questions under the Articles on Diplomatic Protection adopted by the UN International Law Commission in 2006.

AFA also expresses concern over the insufficient responsiveness by the WGAD to other submissions concerning individuals detained in connection with the Artsakh conflict, including the initial appeal filed April 24, 2024 on behalf of Mr. Babayan. The organization warns that perceived inaction on such petitions may have broader implications for the prevention of mass atrocities and the objective enforcement of international human rights principles and laws.

“Even-handed and full-bodied see PETITION, page 9



COMMUNITY NEWS

Jebejian-Ayvazian Family Foundation Awards Major Gift to Armenian National Institute

GIFT, from page 8

minister who helped her become fluent in English. In the early 1950s, Shake immigrated to the United Kingdom as a refugee. She eventually immigrated to the United States in 1957. Alone in the US, Shake settled into the Armenian community in suburban Philadelphia. She found work as the administrative assistant to a senior partner in a prestigious law firm, where she worked until retirement in the late 1980s. After she became an American citizen, Shake sponsored the immigration of her mother and sister. In America, Azniv continued her work for British Airways. Neither sister ever married, and both were life-long humble Christians and staunch supporters of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

In 2024, ANI announced the launch of a new webpage documenting the unfolding of the genocidal process that resulted in the destruction of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Housed on the main ANI website, which in over 25 years has become a preeminent authority documenting international affirmation of the World War I era Armenian Genocide, the new site is based entirely on formal records attesting to the

genocidal nature of the events that resulted in the complete expulsion of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The new section of the ANI website is titled The Ethnic Cleansing and Destruction of Nagorno-Karabakh: The Latest Chapter of the Armenian Genocide, and contains thousands of pages, photos, and more than

Armenian National Institute

370 formal records from official, international, and public entities that observed or reported about the course of events. A wide array of documents is offered, ranging from UN and OSCE records to United States, European, and other countries' legislative and executive documents, human rights organizations' reports, American universities' research documentation projects, and other vetted, relevant material.

With the focus on the final compulsive exodus of the Armenian people in Septem-

ber 2023, the records cover a wide array of documents attesting to the consequences of the 44-Day War in 2020 and the succeeding stage by stage complete blockading and threatened starvation of the Armenian population, through the final genocidal ethnic cleansing in September 2023 by Azerbaijan and Turkey, and continuing desecration and destruction of historic Armenian churches and Christian presence.

A wide-ranging compilation of official records from across many international institutions and human rights organizations attest to the ethnic cleansing of the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh, including seven rulings from the International Court of Justice. A joint October 11, 2023, statement by the United States and 33 other countries submitted to the United Nations stated: "According to the report of the UN Mission to the region, nearly the entire ethnic Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh has fled to Armenia — more than 100,000 people. Their report rightly notes the suffering this experience must have caused. This massive displacement of ethnic Armenians from their homes stems from Azerbaijan's military operation launched on Septem-

ber 19th and a nine-month long blockade of the Lachin corridor leading to dire humanitarian conditions." And in November 2024, Freedom House reported: "The Azerbaijani state's actions constitute ethnic cleansing using forced displacement as a means. It acted upon a comprehensive, methodically implemented strategy to empty Nagorno-Karabakh of its ethnic Armenian population and historical and cultural presence. The documented evidence meets the criteria for ethnic cleansing as defined by a UN commission of experts...The September 2023 displacement of 100,000 ethnic Armenians was the culmination of an intensive, yearslong campaign."

Despite the abundant international record, Azerbaijan has followed up its genocidal campaign against the Armenians with an equally aggressive campaign of denials paralleling the now century-long Turkish government's distortions of the 1915 genocide in the Ottoman Empire. As part of this perverse strategy to rewrite history, Azerbaijan has been holding a series of unlawful trials of the Armenian leadership of Nagorno Karabakh that was taken captive by Baku's forces when they overran the region. These methods of deliberate falsification mirror the denialist program of the Turkish government, whose consequential lessons of genocide denial have become emblematic of the behavior of repressive governments that commit gross human rights violations.

The Nagorno-Karabakh Genocide webpage complements the premier Internet resource on the Armenian Genocide that already contains extensive information on the events of 1915 and their consequences, including historic records, an extensive database of affirmation statements from around the world, another database of Armenian Genocide memorials across the continents, freely downloadable exhibits based on authenticated photographic evidence from U.S. archives, an interactive museum component as an introduction to the Armenian Genocide, an entire set of instructional resources for educators to rely upon depending on the needs of their schools and students, as well as an introductory bibliography to the extensive scholarly literature on the subject of human rights and genocide as related to the Armenian Genocide, among many other useful components. The ANI website is also available in Turkish, Arabic, and Spanish, and is constantly expanded as more records are translated.

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Americans for Artsakh
Petition UN Working Group
For Release of Artsakh's
Former Foreign Minister

PETITION, from page 8

application of international legal norms is essential to protecting vulnerable indigenous populations from future large-scale violence," said Jacob Bournazian, attorney for Americans for Artsakh. "We respectfully urge the Working Group to review this petition on its merits and to take all appropriate steps within its mandate."

Americans for Artsakh, Inc. was founded in 2003 and is a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) tax-exempt public charity headquartered in Washington, D.C. The organization supports the people of the former Republic of Artsakh and advocates accountability and redress for those affected by the 2023 displacement and related human rights violations.

For more information, visit american-s4artsakh.org



COMMUNITY NEWS



The soloists with Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan

The Beauty of Christmas, Revealed Through Music

CONCERT, from page 8
through his compositions, notably Avedis from his Christmas Oratorio, and his powerful hymn Krisdos Dzunav.
The concert featured spectacular vocal performances by sopranos Anahit Zakaryan, Anoosh Barclay, Hasmik Asatryan,

altos Alvard Mayilyan, Maro Partamian, AddieRose Brown, and Jbid Lyons; tenors Ethan Fran, Ergys Mita and Kevin Ray; and baritone/basses Vagharshak Ohanyan and Christopher Nazarian.

A string quartet composed of Angelina Tozlian and Junyi Yuan on violin, Hanna Tytarenko on viola, and Jilun Wang on cello, enriched several of the evening's selections.

The young voices of the St. Vartan Cathedral Sunday School included Angela Adamites, Davit Akopov, Ophelia Akopov, David Asatrian, Maria Andreasyan, Anna-Eva Couzian, Elina Couzian, Karine Dolinyan, Vahe Dolinyan, Maria Gabriel, Arianna Karaeva, Milania Karaeva, Hakob Karamyan, Rafi Karamyan, Anthony Kostanian, Robert Kostanian, Arpi Kotanjian, Lucy Kotanjian, Sofia Manukyan, Graydon Mitchel, Sebastian Mitchel, and Ella Papazian.

Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan offered his own reflections at the conclusion of the concert.



Vocalist Vagharshak Ohanyan

an, Maria Sahakian, Zovinar Aghavian, Stephanie Keledjian, Eva Papazian, Angela Grigoryan, and Heghine Mirzoyan;



Conductor and composer Konstantin Petrossian with violinist Nune Melik

“For many years now, we have gathered in St. Vartan Cathedral to celebrate the miracle of Christ’s birth through this splendid Christmas concert,” he said. “Music and children have such a great significance during this season—and bringing them together in the warm embrace of our church is the ideal reminder of the beauty and hope of the Nativity.”

He thanked the audience and artists; the benefactors and committee members who made the concert possible; and cathedral

vicar Fr. Davit Karamyan and conductor Hasmik Mekanejian for assembling such a meaningful program.

“Christmas at the Cathedral” went forward under the generous benefaction of the Dadourian Foundation; Vicki Shoghag Hovanessian; Ida Tjeknavorian; and the Rakoubian Family. The organizing committee included Fr. Davit Karamyan, Yn. Alla Karamyan, Hasmik Mekanejian, Seta Paskalian-Kantardjian, Nayda Voskerijian, and Elizabeth Akian.



Perfect little angels listen to the music.



Artists waiting in the wings



COMMUNITY NEWS

FEMINNO Expands to New York City

NEW YORK — FEMINNO, the global female innovation platform founded in Armenia, has officially launched its New York City chapter, continuing its international expansion following successful growth in Armenia and Los Angeles. The NYC launch reflects FEMINNO’s evolving role as a year-round global platform connecting women, ideas, and technology across borders, while remaining deeply rooted in community and culture.

The New York gathering in December brought together leaders, innovators, part-

and collaboration naturally intersect. The speaker lineup reflected FEMINNO’s focus on leadership at the intersection of policy, technology, and social impact. Houry Geudelekian, UN Coordinator at Unchained At Last and Past Chair of UN NGO CSW/NY, shared reflections on collective power, policy influence, and the importance of sustained advocacy for women and girls globally.

Kristina Ayanian, executive producer and host at Nasdaq, spoke from her experience within global financial and innovation institutions, highlighting the role women play in shaping systems from within.

A central and forward-looking perspective was offered by Siranush Kostanyan, NYU Adjunct Professor and Chief Digital & AI Officer, who focused on the evolving relationship between artificial intelligence and human intelligence. She emphasized that AI should not replace human judgment, creativity, or empathy, but rather enrich and amplify them, underscoring the responsibility of today’s leaders to ensure that technology development remains human-centered, ethical, and inclusive.

The FEMINNO NYC launch also marked the introduction of FEMINNO’s new membership model, designed to support a growing global community through structured opportunities for learning, leadership, collaboration and visibility.



Audience members listen to a speaker at the program

ners, and allies for an evening that blended meaningful dialogue with Armenian wine and food, celebrating FEMINNO’s achievements while highlighting the growing partnerships being formed on the ground in New York. The event underscored FEMINNO’s commitment to building bridges between Armenia and the diaspora, and to creating spaces where innovation, culture,




From left to right - Zarui Chopuryan (guest), Seda Papoyan (FEMINNO founder), Houry Geudelekian (NYC speaker), Karine Sargsyan (guest)

Another key highlight of the evening was the presentation of FEMINNO’s AI Girls program - an initiative empowering teenage girls with AI literacy, confidence, and future-ready skills. With the establishment of the New York City chapter, AI Girls is set to expand further through mentorship, partnerships, and diaspora engagement, strengthening its mission to ensure that girls are not only users of technology, but active shapers of the human-centered, AI-driven future.


Reflecting on the milestone, FEMINNO founder Seda Papoyan stated: “FEMINNO

began in Armenia as a vision to create space for women to lead, to innovate, and to be visible. Bringing FEMINNO to New York City is not just geographic growth—it’s a responsibility. A responsibility to build meaningful connections, to shape ethical innovation, and to ensure that women and girls are at the center of the future we are creating, especially in the age of AI.”

With chapters now active in Armenia, Los Angeles, and New York City, FEMINNO continues to grow as a global movement grounded in innovation, culture, and impact.



Merry Christmas



The following Christmas Messages to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* were received after the last issue went to press.

To Nancy Masarjian Porter - It is said that god is everywhere, but to look after his sons he enlists mothers. I am unable to send you anything but my love, so I send a heartfelt. I love you - your son

JOSHUA PORTER
BELLEFONTE, PA

Armenia needs a moratorium on metal mining and rehabilitation of old mines.

ANNE SHIRINIAN-ORLANDO, PHD
FREEHOLD, NJ

Trust in Jesus

John Pehlivanian
BAY HEAD, NJ

The following Christmas donations to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* were received after our last issue went to press.

Arlene Avakian, Boca Raton, FL \$1,000

The Vartkess and Rita Balian Family Foundation, Arlington, VA \$500

Aram Adourian and Anna Ohanyan, Concord, MA \$500

Yervant Chekijian, Watertown, MA \$500

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Victoria S. Hovanessian, Fort Lee, NJ \$100

John and Joanne Pehlivanian, Bay Head, NJ \$100

Vatche Semerdjian, Glendale, CA \$100

Hagop and Noyemi Isnar, Haworth, NJ \$100

Anne A. Shirinian Orlando, Freehold, NJ \$80

Joshua Porter, Bellefonte, PA \$50

John and Debra Saryan, Andover, MA \$50



OBITUARY

Jack Bousian

Oldest WWII Veteran and Artist in Bay Area

HAYWARD, Calif. — Jack Bousian of Hayward, the San Francisco Bay Area's oldest World War II veteran and oldest living artist, passed away of natural causes at 105 years old on October 22, 2025.

Jack was a beloved husband, father, grandfather, friend to many, and Armenian-American community member.

A California native, Jack was born on January 14, 1920 in Sanger in Fresno County, where many Armenian families had settled after escaping the Armenian Genocide. His grandparents were killed in the Genocide, but his parents, Boghos (Paul) and Zarouhie (Rose) Bousian narrowly escaped, coming to the United States.

When Jack was five, he moved with his parents and older brother Lee to the Bay Area, where he grew up during the Great Depression, working as a child in his father's grocery store to help make ends meet.

Jack graduated with honors from the California College of the Arts in 1942. Immediately after graduation, he was drafted to serve in the U.S. Army in World War II. When the Army discovered that he had graphic design skills, they assigned him to draft maps for the war effort with Company B, 660th Engineers Topographical Battalion, stationed in London. The unit's main task was to create the maps for the June 6, 1944 Allied invasion of Normandy. Due to the secrecy of this work, Jack and other servicemen were put in isolation while they worked on the maps. After the D-Day invasion, the company designed maps for the Allies' movements through France and across the Rhine River into Germany. With the liberation of Paris in 1944, the company moved its base to Paris, where they focused on mapping Bavaria and northern Austria. The company continued its mapping work right up until V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day). During his time in the Army, Jack

made many lifelong friends with the men in his unit.

After the war, Jack pursued a career in advertising. In the 1950s and 1960s, known as the "golden era" of advertising, he worked in New York and San

Francisco as one of the original "Mad Men" ("Madison Avenue men") of adver-



tising. During this time, he worked as an art director at the industry-leading firm BBDO.

Jack married his wife Barbara Boyajian Bousian at St. John Armenian Church in San Francisco in 1965. They lived on Diamond Heights, where they had their son Mark. In 1970, they moved to the charming coastal town of Westport, Conn., where they had their daughter Adrienne.

Jack started his own graphic design business, Graphics One Associates, in Stamford, Conn., and worked there as Creative Director in the 1970s and 1980s.

Jack matured as an artist in the 1980s and was a prolific Abstract Expressionist painter

and sculptor of bold and fascinating pieces. He explored figurative and nonfigurative artwork through acrylic painting, mixed media collages, pen and ink drawings, and wooden sculptures. As trends moved toward Pop Art and Minimalism, he remained inspired by the expressionist tendencies of controlled spontaneity, bold brushstrokes, freeform composition and unconventional materials. True to form, when asked what his paintings meant, Jack usually replied, "whatever you want them to."

Jack and Barbara moved back to California in 1988, settling in the Central Valley, where Jack became a grape grower. In 2004, they returned to the San Francisco Bay area, settling in Hayward to be closer to their daughter Adrienne, husband Alex, and granddaughter Sophia, their pride and joy.

Jack began jogging daily in the 1950s, before it was popular. He ran every morning, even during snowy winters in Connecticut, and he continued to do so until he was 100 years old. After that, he switched to walking one to two miles daily without walking aids up until a few months before he passed. Jack strongly believed that vigorous daily

exercise is the key to maintaining good physical and mental health.

Until a few months before he passed, Jack would accompany Mark on trips to Trader Joe's, the public library, and other local spots. He attracted a lot of public attention on these trips, as people in the community knew his age and were amazed whenever they saw him walking out and about.

Jack continued to make regular visits to his doctors and dentist until he passed. The staff in the offices were amazed when they saw him walk in the door, and they wanted to know what his secret was.

In recent years, with more time available

to him, Jack had been especially active with his painting. During the COVID pandemic, he quarantined at home in Hayward and produced more than 400 unique pieces. When he was unable to get art supplies during the early stages of the pandemic, he did whatever it took to continue creating art in his backyard "art laboratory," often on the back of paper grocery bags. In the last years of his life, Jack created a groundbreaking series of mixed media compositions depicting the horrific and emotional story of the 1915 Armenian Genocide, juxtaposing words of the Turkish perpetrators with graphic photographs and emotion-laden abstracts.

Jack's art works have been displayed at the California College of the Arts alumni exhibit, Gump's San Francisco, Fresno State University, Silvermine Guild Arts Center in Connecticut, Western Advertising Show, Armenian Museum of America in Massachusetts, and more. In 2024, the California College of the Arts honored him as their oldest living alumnus at the age of 104.

Jack was a devoted father and grandfather who always put family first. He was hardworking, disciplined, understated, caring, energetic, funny, and unfailingly positive and upbeat. Jack was a member of the Armenian Trex Fraternity Golden Gate Chapter, St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church in Oakland, and St. John Armenian Apostolic Church in San Francisco.

Jack was predeceased by both parents and his brother Lee. He is survived by his wife of 60 years Barbara Bousian and son Mark Bousian, both of Hayward; daughter Adrienne Bousian, son-in-law Alex Long, and granddaughter Sophia of Berkeley; brother-in-law David Boyajian of Belmont, MA; three nieces and their families; and many extended family members. In lieu of flowers, donations in Jack's name may be made to the Armenian Trex Fraternity Golden Gate Chapter, St. Vartan Armenian Church in Oakland, St. John Armenian Church in San Francisco, or the California College of the Arts in San Francisco. Memorial service forthcoming.

Arie Orchanian

Man of Faith, Dedicated to Creativity

LEXINGTON, Mass. — Arie Orchanian, age 32, of Lexington, passed away on December 23, 2025, in a tragic automobile accident in Watertown. He was returning with his beloved aunt, Anie Manoushagian, to the Armenian Memorial Church following a funeral when the accident occurred. They entered eternal rest together.

Arie was born in Cambridge and was the cherished son of John and Maral Orchanian.

He grew up in Watertown and Lexington, where he formed lifelong friendships and deep roots within the Armenian and Evangelical communities.

He attended St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School and Lexington Public Schools, later earning his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Boston University. Arie was pursuing his MBA at Northeastern University, and would have graduated in a few months.

Professionally, Arie worked at Mintz as a senior marketing technology specialist, where he was respected for his intelligence, precision, and exceptional attention to detail.

Arie had a deep love for music and photography, passions that reflected his thoughtful and creative spirit. He will be remembered for his peaceful and special smile, one that left a lasting impression on all who knew him.

A devoted man of faith, Arie loved Jesus



Christ and lived with a sincere desire for others to believe in God.

He is survived by his loving parents, John and Maral Orchanian; his brother, Johnie Norayr Orchanian, and sister-in-law, Garin Haidostian Orchanian; along with extended family and many dear friends.

Funeral services for both Arie and Anie were held on Monday, January 5, 2026, at the First Armenian Church, Belmont, followed by interment at Ridgelawn Cemetery, Watertown.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Armenian Memorial Church of Watertown, in Arie's memory.

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Arts & Culture

Simon Abkarian to Star as Charles de Gaulle in Two-Part World War II Biopic Set for Release in 2026

PARIS (Public Radio of Armenia) — French-Armenian actor Simon Abkarian will portray General Charles de Gaulle in “De Gaulle,” a French-language, two-part historical biopic set for release in 2026, with dialogue in both French and English, as Pathé unveils the first official images and a teaser from what it describes as its most ambitious film project to date. Directed by Antonin Baudry, the epic production revisits decisive moments of World War II through de Gaulle’s leadership of the French Resistance. The two films, titled “De Gaulle: Tilting Iron” and “De Gaulle: The Sovereign Edge,” are scheduled to open in French theaters on June 10 and July 3, 2026, following more than five years in development.

“De Gaulle” examines the French Resistance during World War II through the eyes of Charles de Gaulle, tracing his rise from a French army officer to the symbolic and strategic leader of Free France. Billed as a historical saga and geopolitical thriller, the films revisit decisive epi-



Actor Simon Abkarian as Charles de Gaulle (social media photo)

sodes of the war, focusing on the men and women who refused to surrender as the French nation collapsed under Nazi occupation, a period that would ultimately shape de Gaulle’s path toward becoming president of France.

The story opens in June 1940, as France signs the armistice and de Gaulle, then a little-known general, flees to London driven by an unwavering conviction that the battle for France is neither over nor lost. The films also explore de Gaulle’s complex relationship with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, portrayed by Simon Russell Beale, highlighting the political and personal tensions between the two wartime leaders.

The film is directed by Antonin Baudry and written by Baudry and Bérénice Vila. The screenplay is adapted from British historian Julian Jackson’s book, “De Gaulle, une certaine idée de la France” (“De Gaulle: A Certain Idea of France”), widely regarded as one of the foremost reference works on de Gaulle and Free France and praised by both French and British critics. The project is produced by Axelle Boucaï. Pathé, one

see ABKARIAN, page 17



Tertanush or Qyavari pakhlava (photo courtesy Kristine Grigoryan)

Tertanush: The Unique Pakhlava Produced in Qyavar

By Kristine Grigoryan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In one of the most beautiful corners of Armenia, along the scenic, sapphire-blue shores of Lake Sevan, lies the town of Gavar, home to warm, hospitable, generous, and deeply traditional people. Gavar, known in earlier times as New Bayazet, has long been affectionately called Qyavar by the locals. Its history as a settlement reaches back to the Urartian era, when it was the site of the fortress of Khaldi. It is one of the rare Armenian towns whose founding is documented: an inscribed cuneiform tablet left by King Rusa I of the Kingdom of Van at the Berdikhlukh fortress, dated to 732 BC, serves as its “birth certificate.”

Throughout the centuries, amid turmoil and invasions, this settlement, along the other parts of Armenia, was repeatedly depopulated and left desolate. However in 1828–1830, when Eastern Armenia came under Russian rule, the abandoned lands were repopulated with Armenians from Persia and Western Armenia. During this period, several hundred families from the fortress-city of Bayazet in Western Armenia, led by Barsegh Agha Artsruni, migrated to Eastern Armenia. By imperial decree, they were granted permission to settle in the Gavar/Gavarreni district of Gegharkunik, renaming it New Bayazet.

The people of New Bayazet brought with them their dialect, customs, rituals, and, of course, their culinary heritage. The masterpieces created by the women of New Bayazet — Qyavari pakhlava (also known as tert’anush), kyufta, gata, and shakarlokhum — have become treasured jewels of Armenian cuisine. The great-grandmothers of the Bayazet Armenians perfected the art of baklava-making, and their descendants faithfully preserved this tradition in New Bayazet. Nowhere in the world does there exist a pastry quite like Qyavari pakhlava; it is unique both in its method of preparation and in character.

The origins of baklava or pakhlava trace back to ancient Mesopotamia — Babylon and Assyria — where early texts describe layered pastries filled with nuts and sweetened with honey. These can be considered the prototypes of today’s baklava. Through trade routes it spread across the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Armenian Highlands. Linguists suggest that the word baklava/pakhlava is rooted in Persian, Arabic, or even Mongolic languages, all conveying the idea of layering or dividing. The old Armenian names for pakhlava included tsagh, tsaltsul, and tert’anush. Tsagh meant “sweet,” while tsaltsul derived from the root tsal — “to fold.” The name tert’anush, meanwhile, referred directly to its manner of preparation: thin sheets (tert) of dough are paired with honey (anush).

In Qyavar, pakhlava was traditionally called tsagh. This name survives in the wedding custom of preparing a large tray of pakhlava — tsaghi pakhlava — sent to the groom’s home as part of the bride’s dowry. Today, the “tsagh basket”

see TERTANUSH, page 15

The Woman Behind the Sherlock Holmes Museum: Remembering Grace Aidiniantz With Linda Riley

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN–LONDON — Grace Aidiniantz (1927–2015), the late London-based businesswoman of Armenian descent, is best known for her founding of the Sherlock Holmes Museum on Baker Street in 1990, a landmark that has since attracted visitors from around the world.



Grace as a young actress in Calcutta

Aidiniantz spent her early years in Iran and India. Under the stage name Miriam Stark, she appeared in Indian films such as “Michael Madhusudan” by Modhu Bose (1950) and “Vidyasagar” by Kali Prasad Ghosh (1952). Moving to London, she served as director and secretary of AID Armenia Limited and AID Armenia International Limited organizations.

To learn more about this remarkable woman, I reached out by email to her daughter, Linda Riley, a British journalist, publisher, and LGBTIQ+ rights advocate, who kindly agreed to this interview.



Linda Riley

Dear Linda, I am delighted to share with our readers my admiration for your mother’s personality and work. Her obituary mentions uncertainty about whether Grace Aidiniantz was born in Armenia or London, noting that her family moved to London to escape persecution — first by the Ottoman Turks and later by the early Soviet regime that came to include Armenia. Given the “-iantz” ending of the surname, it is clear that her roots were in Eastern Armenia. What can you tell us about her ancestors?

Yes, my mother’s family was from Eastern Armenia. Grace was born in Iran. As a small child, she trekked from Iran to Kolkata, India. Unfortunately, Grace’s birth certificate was destroyed in an arson attack at the church in Iran. In 1956, Grace traveled to London on a one-year visa from India. When that visa expired, she received a deportation order and spent approximately fifty years living

see AIDINIANTZ, page 14



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



Art’s Almond Crescents

When it comes to cookies, there are few cookies that are more anticipated at the holidays than these buttery treats. A beloved holiday favorite in many Armenian households, these cookies should not be chewy or tough; they should just melt in your mouth when you eat them:

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons almond extract
- 2 1/3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup ground almonds, to taste
- 1 cup powdered sugar

PREPARATION:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray several cookie sheets with cooking spray. With a mixer, beat the butter with sugar until light and fluffy. Add vanilla extract

and almond extract, beat until incorporated. Stir in the flour and almonds. Work flour mixture into a firm dough.

Working with one or two tablespoons of dough at a time, roll it into a short log and then bend around the edges creating a crescent shape. Place on greased or parchment paper covered cookie sheets and repeat until all dough is used. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes or until light brown. Do not burn.

Sift powdered sugar into a small shallow bowl. While the cookies are still warm, roll them in the powdered sugar, if desired.

For this recipe, go to: <https://www.facebook.com/armenianandmiddleeasterncooking/photos/pb.100064551169859.-2207520000/10159399638190794/?-type=3>

SHAKARISHEE - ARMENIAN SUGAR COOKIES

From The Gutsy Gourmet by the late Dr. Buzz Baxter

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 3/4 cups sugar
- 1 cup softened butter (unsalted)
- 1 egg (yolk only)
- 1/2 cup finely chopped walnuts (optional)

PREPARATION:

In a large bowl, beat together the butter, egg yolk and the sugar until smooth and almost white in color. Add flour and blend well. If you are using the nuts, this is the time to add them in. Shape into small rectangles about 3/4” by 1 1/2”.

Bake in 250°F oven on an ungreased cookie sheet. Cookies are done when the bottoms turn pink in color, about 35-45 minutes. Do not burn.

NOTE: A blanched almond or walnut half can be placed on top of the cookie before baking.

For this recipe, go to: <https://www.thegutsygourmet.net/shakar.html>

For more Armenian and international recipes, go to: <https://www.thegutsygourmet.net/armenian.html>



THE ART TEAM is proud to launch its newly revitalized Facebook page. They have redesigned it with readers in mind. They encourage everyone to visit and explore the ART page. Since 2010, they have been expanding their resources to deliver the most updated and relevant information for the Armenian & Middle Eastern Cooking, culture and history. They will continue to do so with the same level of dedication and expertise.

Connect at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCI6XpU1sovD2I-B2o-WbQulw/videos>

Also see:

<https://www.armenianmuseum.org/armenian-recipes>

<https://hadiaslebanesecuisine.com/newsite/recipe-items/chocolate-chip-crescent-cookies-these-melt-your-mouth-buttery-cookies-are-loaded-chocolate/>

The Woman Behind the Sherlock Holmes Museum: Remembering Grace Aidiniantz

AIDINIANTZ, from page 13
in England as an undocumented immigrant. In the late 1990s, she decided to apply for British citizenship and was officially recorded as having the longest-known deportation order at that time for someone applying for citizenship. Due to the lack of a birth certificate, she ultimately received leave to remain.

My younger brother, sister, and I were all named Riley because our mother had to change her name to Riley to avoid being detected as an illegal immigrant. Only later in life did my elder brother change his name from Riley to Aidiniantz. Despite this, we have always considered ourselves Armenian, as our mother insisted that we never lose our Armenian identity.

In 1990, when your mother sold her house and invested most of her savings in establishing the Sherlock Holmes Museum, how did the family react to such an unusual and bold undertaking?

The family was very happy. Grace immersed herself in every Sherlock Holmes novel she could find, carefully noting every detail of each room described. She then traveled to the UK’s finest auction houses, collecting Victorian memorabilia and furniture to recreate the rooms, all of which, I believe, remain in place nearly forty years later.

I assume that many tourists believe Sherlock Holmes was a real person and ask amusing questions when visiting the Museum!

Yes, they did, back when I was a director and worked there. Grace used to say it was like telling children that Father Christmas isn’t real, as visitors were often so disappointed to learn that Sherlock Holmes was a fictional character. I no longer have any involvement with the Museum due to a significant falling out with my brother John Aidiniantz, which is well documented.

Could you please share some informa-

tion about the Armenian organizations in which Grace Aidiniantz was involved?

Grace did not share many details with me, but I know she donated to numerous Armenian charities and contributed significantly to Armenia’s Earthquake Fund. She once mentioned that, in recognition of her donations, the government had granted her an honor, though I do not have further details about this.

Was there something distinctly Armenian in your mother — her character, language, or cuisine?

Yes, everything about my mother was distinctly Armenian, as it was deeply rooted in her culture, and she passed this on to her children. She sent my brother Stephen, my sister Jennifer, and me to the Armenian Saturday School at Gulbenkian House on High Street, Kensington, and also had us baptized there. Although being raised first in India and then in the UK created a certain sense of separation, the moment she finally received

her leave-to-stay passport, the first thing she did was arrange a trip to Armenia. I vividly remember her dropping to the ground, kissing the soil, and crying when we set foot on Armenian land.

Yes, it was exciting that you replied to my English greeting with “barev.”

We all consider ourselves Armenians and part of the diaspora. Grace always celebrated Armenian Christmas on January 6th, and when we were younger, we would all go together with her to the Armenian Church on High Street, Kensington, to join in the celebrations. I have visited Armenia several times, and it was my mother’s wish that her ashes be scattered over Mount Ararat when she passed away.

Thanks for your answers, Linda. I hope the Sherlock Holmes Museum visitors, alongside enjoying Conan Doyle’s characters, will also learn about its founder, the passionate and charismatic Armenian émigré lady!



ARTS & CULTURE

Tertanush: The Unique Pakhlava Produced in Qyavar

TERTANUSH, from page 13
customarily includes not only pakhlava, but also elegant gifts for each member of the groom’s family.

In old times, tert’anush was prepared only in wealthy households, as sugar, butter, honey, and walnuts were expensive ingredients. Ordinary families made it only for New Year celebrations or weddings. To create this exquisite pastry, women with the greatest skill would gather together, following age-old techniques and rituals. The recipe for Qyavari pakhlava was revered almost like a sacred heirloom, passed down faithfully from grandmothers to their children and grandchildren.

Qyavari pakhlava stands apart from all versions made in other regions of Armenia or in world cuisines. Its uniqueness begins with the preparation of walnuts, which is the most labor-intensive step. The walnut kernels are scalded in boiling water, and the thin brown skins are meticulously removed. This step ensures both the unmatched flavor of the baklava (the skin can impart a slight bitterness) and its beautiful, light color (the skin darkens the pastry).

The dough must be made with natural sourdough — never with dry yeast, which produces an entirely different texture. In the final stage of kneading, the baker dips their hands into melted butter and finishes the kneading with buttered hands. This prevents the addition of excess flour and preserves the dough’s delicate lightness—a technique reminiscent of French brioche-making. Once matured, the dough is divided into 22 or 24 balls, each rolled into paper-thin, nearly transparent sheets.

And the final touch: as soon as the pakhlava is removed from the oven, it is brushed with pure honey while still hot. This unites all the flavors into a harmonious whole. This, too, distinguishes Qyavari pakhlava, for most other traditions use simple syrup rather than honey.

My childhood memories of witnessing the creation of this “queen of pastries” — Qyavari pakhlava — are lovingly captured in my cookbook *Tales from the Armenian Table: Recipes, Traditions, and Heritage*. There, I have also included its detailed recipe, which follows below.

Qyavari Pakhlava ‘Tertanush’ Recipe

INGREDIENTS:

- (The size of the pan is 30x40 cm)
For the dough:
6 eggs
50 g of sourdough starter
150 ml of warm water
100 g sour cream
50 g of plain yogurt
¼ teaspoon of baking soda
100 g softened butter
1 kg of all-purpose flour (more or less depending on the quality of the flour)
2-3 tablespoons of melted ghee

For the stuffing:

- 700 gram cleaned and skinned walnuts
500 gram of sugar cubes, broken into smaller pieces
500 gram of melted ghee
500 gram of pure melted honey
1-2 egg yolks

METHOD OF PREPARATION:

Put the softened butter in a large bowl and whip it by hand until it turns white.
Add the eggs and mix well.
Dissolve the sourdough starter in the water and pour it on the resulting mass. Stir well, add sour cream and yogurt, mixed

with baking soda.
Gradually sift the flour, kneading to get a very soft dough. You now need to look at the density of the dough. If the dough does not stick to the hand, then stop adding flour.
At the end, dip your hands in melted ghee and continue kneading for another 6-8 minutes. Put the dough in a bowl, cover it with plastic wrap and a kitchen towel and put it in a warm place for 3-4 hours.
Heat the oven to 200°C.
Lightly sprinkle flour on the surface of the table. Transfer the proofed dough to the table, knead it slightly, divide it into 18 balls, making 4 of them slightly bigger.
Cover the pan (30x40 cm) completely with ghee.

Roll the first 2 big balls very thin, and spread them carefully on the pan, rubbing 1-2 tbsp melted ghee onto the entire surface of each layer and sprinkling sugar between them.

Starting from the second layer, pour 2-3 tablespoons of ghee and 1-1.5 cups of filling on all the layers until you have two large balls left.

Roll out these balls thinly, lay them carefully onto the pastry top. Spread ghee and sprinkle a little sugar between these layers (as you did with the first two).

Cut the pastry into diamonds with a sharp knife.

Add 1-2 teaspoons of water to the egg yolk and whisk well.

Brush the egg wash carefully on the surface of the baklava.

Put the pan with Tertanush in a hot oven. Cook for 10 minutes at 200 °C, then lower the heat to 180 °C and continue baking for another 15 minutes, until golden.

Remove the ready Tertanush from the oven, and immediately pour honey over the entire surface and the cuts. Return to the oven for 3-5 minutes.

Take it out and leave it to cool until lukewarm. Then, with the help of a sharp knife, cut and separate the pieces, and transfer them to an enameled dish or a glass bowl. Cover with a lid and store in a cool place until serving.

Tip:
Tertanush can be stored in a cold place for a long time, thanks to honey, which has preservative properties.

It can also be stored in the freezer. 1 day before serving, take it out of the freezer and put it in the refrigerator. Then heat it in the oven for 5 minutes and serve.

In Qyavar, Tertanush is often eaten wrapped in lavash, especially by men.

(Recipe credit: *Tales from the Armenian Table: Recipes, Traditions, Heritage* by Kristine Grigoryan)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristine Grigoryan, born in Gavar, Armenia, is a historian, researcher, and author of the culinary book *Tales from the Armenian Table*. A graduate of the Faculty of History of Yerevan State University, she began her career as a television host and history teacher, later co-authoring three books developed through an IREX fellowship at George Mason University. Now based in Colorado, USA, she serves as the Administrative Coordinator of the Aero-Digestive Program at one of the nation’s top children’s hospitals and is a certified member of the American Association of Professional Medical Coders (AAPC).

For more than two decades, Kristine has dedicated herself to researching and preserving Armenian culinary heritage. Through her longstanding blogs and cultural work, she introduces global readers to Armenian traditions, flavors, and the art of



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.

FEBRUARY 8 — The Arlington Philharmonic Orchestra, led by Music Director Orlando Cela, will present a concert entitled “Armenia”, on Sunday, February 8, at 3 p.m. Arlington High School Auditorium, 869 Massachusetts Ave., Arlington. The entire program will feature works by Armenian composers, including Arlington’s own Alan Hovhaness, and will include: Ballet Suite by Geghuni Chitchyan (world premiere); Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra by Eduard Bagdasaryan featuring violin soloist Sargis Karapetyan; Elegy in Memory of Aram Khachaturian by Arno Babajanian/Arr. S. Arakelian; Symphony No.1, “Exile”, by Alan Hovhaness. Tickets are available at the door: \$20 General Admission, \$15 Students/Seniors, \$5 Children 17 & Under. Wheelchair Accessible. The Arlington Philharmonic Orchestra is part of the Philharmonic Society of Arlington, Inc. a 501(c)3 non-profit community organization which also includes the Arlington-Belmont Chorale and the Arlington-Belmont Chamber Chorus. For more information, visit www.psarlington.org

FEBRUARY 14 — Poon Paregentan (“Great Carnival”) Dinner-Dance. Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church, 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. A terrific family evening of great food, music and dancing. Featuring Leon Janikian, clarinet; Greg Takvorian, oud/vocals; Dave Anisbigian, guitar/vocals; and Art Chingris, Dumbeg. Latest dance tunes from Armenia and America Pop music by DJ Gar-en. 6 p.m. Adults: \$40. Students: \$15. Children under 6: free. Paid reservations must be made by February 11 either on the church website, stsvartanantz.com, or by contacting Corie Horan, coriehoran@gmail.com, 978-967-6423.

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

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



ARTS & CULTURE

Palyan Architects’ Arrata Garden Project Receives International Jury Honorable Mention

YEREVAN/DORNBIRN, Austria — The Aratta Garden project by Palyan Architects has received an Honorable Mention from the international jury in the Future Projects category at the SHARE Architecture Awards, held on December 3–4, 2025, in Dornbirn, Austria.

Over the course of two days, the SHARE Architecture Awards brought together 250 architects from 20 countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, creating a unique platform to exchange ideas, challenges, and innovations, and to explore how diverse



Tigran Palyan receiving the award

cultures influence architecture, space, and identity.

The SHARE Architecture Awards were held for the second year, with four architectural studios from Armenia selected for the Final List. Among them, Palyan Architects’ Aratta Garden project was recognized with an Honorable Mention award.

Tigran Palyan, founder and CEO of Palyan Architects, traveled to Austria to personally present the Aratta Garden project. The project was developed by a multidisciplinary team of professionals, including architects Palyan, Vrezh Tamazyan, and Lilit Sukiasyan; interior designers Mary



Palyan and Hasmik Karapetyan; Gor Tamazyan who did exterior visualization; structural engineer Vaspurak Karapetyan; and engineer Armen Grigoryan.

Aratta Garden is a cultural and architectural complex consisting of four distinct structures organized around a large open space designed to host festivals and attract tourists. The project’s core concept is to present Armenian culture, traditions, and heritage through a contemporary architectural language.

The project, currently under construction, is located near the Khor Virap Monastery, the historic site associated with Armenia’s adoption of Christianity in AD 301, with Mount Ararat rising in the background — an iconic and sacred symbol of Armenian identity.

continued on next page



The souvenir market



Books

New Latvian-language Book Published About Armenia and Armenians

The Academic Publishers of Latvia has released the volume *Latvians about Armenia and Armenians about Latvia: Articles, Memoirs, Travel Notes* (258 pages). It was compiled and edited by the Latvian-Armenian scholar of religion, Associate Professor at the University of Latvia Elizabete Taivāne (see my interview with her in the *Mirror-Spectator* issue of October 12, 2023).

The book consists of two parts. The first section (“Armenians in Latvia and in Latvian Literature”) opens with economist Ruzanna Grigoryan’s article “Armenians in Latvia and the Latvian Environment.” It summarizes information about Armenians living in Riga from the mid-19th century: students of the Polytechnic School, local Armenian merchants, the Armenian church, and notable compatriots who lived and worked there.

In his article “Jānis Rainis and Armenia,” Leons Gabriels Taivāns, Professor of Asian Studies at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Latvia, examines publications about Armenia during Latvia’s independence period, including materials in the Latvian Encyclopedia, some of which were authored by great Latvian poet Rainis himself.

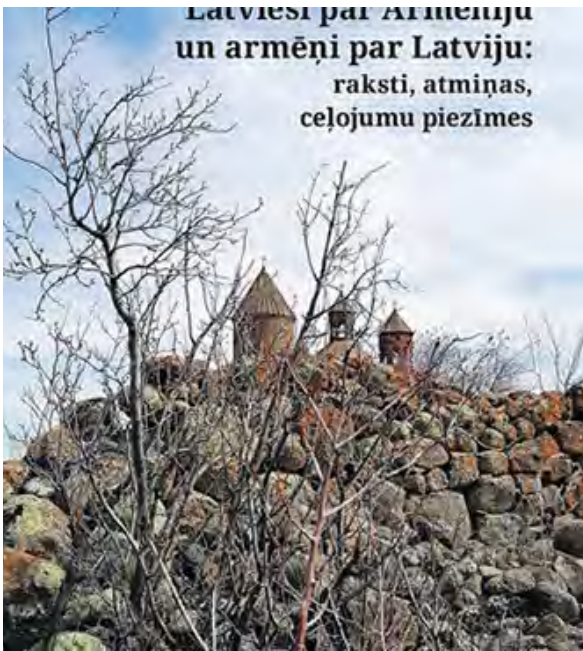
In her article “The Portrayal of Armenians in Latvian Literature,” Armenologist Valda Salmaņa presents literary works featuring Armenian characters, Armenian reality, and customs. The introduction speaks about the making of Rainis’ article “The Most Unfortunate Coun-

try and People: Notes about Armenia.” It mentions the poet’s personal contacts with Social Democrat Ashot Khumaryan, who, at Rainis’ request, prepared materials on Armenian history, press, and literature. The article also discusses Minna Freimane’s travelogue depicting Western Armenia and Gyumri, her encounters with Armenian women; Ernest Birznieks-Upītis’ story “The Little Riders” (about the Armenians of Artsakh), and Pāvils Grūznas’ novella “New Current,” one of whose heroes is the Armenian tavern-keeper Yenovks Kazarov.

The book also includes contemporary authors Lauris Gundars and Luīze Pastore. Drawing on his Armenian heritage, Gundars analyzes the relationship between names and identity in his novella “Becoming a Stranger,” while in Pastore’s children’s story “The Circus on Rainis Street,” the Armenian character Vip Vipatossyan symbolizes cultural distinctiveness and difference.

In her article “The Armenian Artist from Riga: Babken Stepanyan,” Nadezhda Pazukhina presents Stepanyan’s artistic path and his collage technique, which reflects the transformations of the era. Pianist, musicologist, educator, and public figure Rafi Haradžanjans (Raffi Kharajanyan) provides detailed memoirs of his meetings with Latvian composers of middle and senior generations.

The second part of the book is devoted to Latvian travel impressions of Armenia. In 1980, a group of Latvian intellectuals led by Prof. Ojārs Spārītis visited



Armenia, studying its culture, nature, the everyday life of its people, and familiarizing themselves with Armenian history—from Urartu to the adoption of Christianity and the creation of the alphabet. The travel diary, written by ten authors, humorously presents Armenia’s distinctive features, highlighting the cultural differences between Latvians and the peoples of the South Caucasus.

In her article “Searching for the Promised Land—Armenia: Travel Notes 2021–2024,” Elizabete Taivāne recounts her 2021 trip to Armenia. The purpose of the visit was to find her Armenian relatives and convey her scholarly and personal impressions in memory of her grandfather, Hmayak Arakelyan. Taivāne pays special attention to the religious life of local Armenians, noting that the ancient faith is still preserved in small mountain chapels, as well as in each Armenian’s soul and daily life.

from previous page

The four structures include a restaurant with an underground wine-tasting hall, a toneer / lavash bakery, a souvenir market, and a public restroom. While each build-

from traditional Armenian clay salt containers, symbolizing Anahit, the Armenian goddess of fertility and beauty. Its roof reinterprets the historic hazarash-

The main restaurant building features a wine-tasting hall on its underground level. Its architectural form is inspired by a reclining wine vessel, symbolizing the pouring of wine and reflecting Armenia’s thousands-of-years-old winemaking tradition. The bar and lighting design echo the shapes of ancient wine vessels, with references to the historic Areni winery.

The project is named “Aratta,” after an

ancient land mentioned in early Mesopotamian sources and associated with the Armenian highlands.

At the heart of the complex is a large elliptical public square, designed to host national festivals, including wine tastings, dance and music performances, traditional food celebrations, and craft events — positioning Aratta Garden as a living cultural destination.



The souvenir market

ing features a unique architectural expression, all are harmoniously integrated, forming a cohesive ensemble inspired by Armenian history and symbolism.

The lavash bakery draws inspiration

ers in motion.

To maintain visual harmony, the public restroom adopts circular forms inspired by the toneer and souvenir market, reinforcing the project’s unified design language.

Simon Abkarian to Star as Charles de Gaulle In Two-Part World War II Biopic

ABKARIAN, from page 13

of France’s major film production and distribution companies, was established in 1896 and owns a number of cinema chains through its subsidiary Pathé Cinémas, as well as television networks across Europe. Pathé is the second-oldest operating film company in the world, behind Gaumont, which was founded in 1895.

Former French diplomat and director Antonin Baudry, who made his directorial debut with the submarine thriller *The Wolf’s Call*, has drawn on his own background in shaping the project. He said, “I often wondered what kind of person it took to refuse to surrender in 1940, to disobey their own government while devoting their life to France. Few people can do this. I became fascinated by them, so much so that I wanted to make not one film, but two.”



The toneer / lavash bakery, top right, with Armenian salt container models at left and hazarashen roof example bottom right

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
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SINCE 1932



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Armenia Continues in the Eurasian Economic Union

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The previous year was quite rich for Armenia in terms of events and developments, as well as opportunities and challenges. First of all, political processes related to Armenia have intensified, especially from the US side, shaping a new situation in the South Caucasus in terms of US involvement. All this means that developments concerning Armenia in 2026 will be unprecedentedly active and dynamic. At the same time, in the final days of last year, answers to several important questions, predictions, and clarifications that I had raised in my various articles emerged almost simultaneously. In particular, it was announced that Turkish Airlines will open flights to Yerevan — an outcome I had predicted in one of my articles published by the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*. At the same time, it became clear that Turkey is considering introducing a preferential visa regime for holders of Armenian special passports, and Armenia is preparing to implement a similar measure for Turkish citizens.

It was also announced by Armenian officials that the railway route associated with the so-called “Trump route” cannot be operated by the Russian South Caucasus Railway systems. This was an issue I had previously raised, arguing that such an arrangement would be impractical. Most recently, it was officially confirmed that this railway will not be serviced by Russia.

On December 24, I published information on my Facebook account stating that a very high-ranking American official would visit Armenia, noting that the visit would most likely be aimed at the formal opening of the so-called “Trump route.” I did not disclose a name, but I was aware that, in all likelihood, the visit would be carried out by Vice President Vance. This information spread through the Armenian media space at lightning speed and soon became an undisputed report. Importantly, it also provided an answer to a key question — namely, when the Trump route would be formally opened.

As we can see, the beginning of the coming year will be extremely active for Armenia from the perspective of US policy implementation. Against this backdrop, reports regarding the recall of the US ambassador are of particular interest. It was crucial to understand whether the ambassador would remain in office during the visit of the high-ranking official or whether she would be replaced by a chargé d'affaires ad interim, given that the likelihood of appointing a new ambassador within such a short timeframe is virtually zero.

I also recalled that the highest-ranking American officials ever to have visited Armenia were the Speaker of the US House of Representatives and the Secretary of State. Among sitting US presidents, only George W. Bush has visited the region — and that visit was to Georgia. As for US vice presidents, the only two to have visited the South Caucasus was Mike Pence during Donald Trump’s first presidency, again traveling to Georgia, as well as Vice President Dick Cheney, who visited Baku and Tbilisi.

It is also noteworthy that in February the United States will not have an ambassador in any South Caucasus country. In all three states, ambassadors will not yet have been appointed for various reasons — an unprecedented situation in itself. Finally, according to the information available to me at this stage, the American official has no plans to visit other regional countries and will limit the trip exclusively to Yerevan.

One thing is clear; in 2026 the South Caucasus and Armenia will continue to remain within the realm of geopolitical competition of global players, but the US will continue gaining momentum. This is largely driven by the relative weakening roles of Russia and Iran — the key players in the South Caucasus — and by the significant increase in the role of Turkey as a strategic ally of the

United States and the main beneficiary of the Trump route.

At this stage, it is still difficult to predict exactly how and when the war in Ukraine will end, but it most likely has a chance of concluding within the next three to four months. However, this raises the question of what global arrangements the United States and Russia may ultimately reach, and how those arrangements could affect the South

Caucasus.

This also relates to Russia’s potential involvement in the Middle Corridor or the so-called “Trump route,” which could have significant implications for the overall logic and functioning of the Middle Corridor. All of this will clearly remain at the center of our attention in the coming months, and we will seek to assess the realities and develop our own understanding and approaches accordingly.

(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.)



Refutation of a False Premise



By Sergio Nahabetian

A profoundly fallacious argument circulates in certain Armenian political sectors: that the Armenian

Apostolic Church must remain on the sidelines of state affairs, while paradoxically allowing — and even promoting — the government to intervene directly in the church’s internal life. This double standard not only contradicts 1,700 years of Armenian history but constitutes a deliberate attempt to silence the voice of an institution that represents 92 percent of the population and has been the fundamental pillar of national survival.

A Brief History

In the year 301, King Tiridates III proclaimed Christianity as the official religion

of the Kingdom of Armenia, thus becoming the first State in world history to officially adopt Christianity — ten years before Constantine’s Edict of Milan (313 AD) and eighty years before the Roman Empire officially did so (380 AD).

Saint Gregory the Illuminator, who converted the king and was consecrated as the first Catholicos of the Armenian Church, not only established a religious institution but founded the very core of Armenian national identity. The construction of Echmiadzin Cathedral in 303 marked the beginning of a unique architectural, cultural, and spiritual tradition that endures to this day.

After the fall of the last Armenian kingdom of Cilicia in 1375, the Catholicos assumed leadership of the Armenian people in both religious and political senses, as no Armenian king remained. For more than 500

years of foreign domination — first under the Ottoman Empire, then under the Russian Empire — the Armenian Apostolic Church was the only symbol of national continuity.

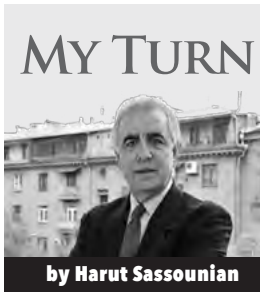
The Armenian Apostolic Church was seen as a national church that has been the principal identity support of the Armenian people, preserving the Armenian language, culture, customs and historical memory when the state itself had ceased to exist. Without the church, the Armenian nation would have disappeared.

Between 1915 and 1923, the Young Turks regime perpetrated the first genocide of the 20th century, murdering more than 1.5 million Armenians. The Armenian Church was the first target of the genocide. The Ottoman government deliberately destroyed 2,000 churches and 200 monasteries, confiscated all ecclesiastical properties, and systematically murdered Armenian religious leaders.

see REFUTATION, page 20



COMMENTARY



MY TURN Persecution of Minorities in Turkey Did Not End in 1915; Still Going On

(Parts 1 and 2 of 3)

Turkey's persecution and systematic violation of human rights of Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Jews did not end in 1915. A century after the Genocide, the Turkish government continues to enforce racist, exclusionary, and discriminatory policies against these minority groups.

In recent months, some pro-Pashinyan Armenians have been claiming wrongly that Turkey has no interest in attacking Armenia. Such claims ignore not only the historical record of the Armenian Genocide, but also Turkey's direct military involvement in the 2020 Artsakh War, which resulted in the deaths of roughly 4,000 Armenian soldiers and left thousands more injured. Furthermore, Turkey's blockade of Armenia, imposed in 1993, is still in place today.

Few people are aware that in 1993, Turkey even considered direct military intervention against Armenia. Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos, Greece's ambassador to Armenia at the time, later described the circumstances of that aborted plan in his memoirs.

Turkish historian Ayşe Hür has compiled an extensive chronology of the Turkish government's anti-Armenian, anti-Assyrian, anti-Greek and anti-Jewish policies. Her list starts in 1923 and ends in 2007, the year Armenian journalist Hrant Dink was assassinated in Istanbul by an extremist Turk. In 2018, Hür herself was sentenced to 15 months in prison for her social media posts — though the sentence was suspended on the condition that she refrain from similar offenses for five years.

Here is the first part of her documented record:

— March 16, 1923: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk declared in a speech in Adana: “The country has finally settled in the hands of its true owners. Armenians and others have no rights here. These fertile lands are purely and truly Turkish lands.”

— June 1923: Jewish, Greek, and Armenian officials were dismissed from government positions and replaced by Muslims. Restrictions were imposed on the movement of non-Muslim minorities in Anatolia. Many who had temporarily left their homes were unable to return. At the same time, obstacles were placed in the path of Jews attempting to migrate to Palestine.

— September 1923: A decree prohibited the return of Armenians who had fled Cilicia and Eastern Anatolia during the war.

— December 1923: The small Jewish community of Çorlu was ordered to leave the city within 48 hours. Although the decision was postponed after an appeal by the Chief Rabbinate, a similar order for the Jews of Çatalca was immediately enforced.

— January 24, 1924: A new law required pharmacists to be “Turkish,” effectively barring non-Muslims from the profession.

— March 3, 1924: Forty French and Italian schools were closed down, following the Law on the Unification of Education. Minority schools faced strict limits on repairs, expansion, and new construction. Their curricula and examinations came under the control of the Ministry of National Education.

— April 3, 1924: Under the Lawyers' Act, 960 lawyers were evaluated for “moral character.” As a result, 460 lawyers lost their licenses. Fifty-seven percent of Jewish lawyers and three-quarters of Greek and Armenian lawyers were forced out of the profession.

— January 29, 1925: Greek Patriarch Konstantinos Araboğlu was forcibly placed on a train and expelled to Thessaloniki, Greece, simply because the Turkish government disliked him. Greece appealed to the League of Nations citing a violation of the Treaty of Lausanne, but withdrew the appeal after Turkey threatened to expel the Patriarchate itself. The incident was later portrayed as a voluntary resignation.

— February 17, 1926: After the adoption of the Civil Code, Armenian, Jewish, and Greek communities were pressured to renounce the minority rights guaranteed to them under the Treaty of Lausanne.

— April 22, 1926: A law requiring all commercial correspondence to be conducted in Turkish led to the dismissal of thousands of non-Muslims who lacked proficiency in written Turkish. Five thousand Greeks lost their jobs under this regulation.

— August 1, 1926: The Turkish government declared its right to confiscate all property acquired by non-Muslims before August 23, 1924 — the date the Treaty of Lausanne took effect.

— August 17, 1927: Elza Niyego, a 22-year-old Jewish woman, was murdered by Osman Ratip Bey, a married man with grandchildren who had been harassing her for a long time. When the Jewish community dared to protest the state's attempt to cover up the crime, a wave of anti-Semitic attacks erupted in the press. Several Jews were prosecuted for “insulting Turkishness.”

— January 13, 1928: Istanbul University Law students, seeking to ingratiate themselves with the regime, hung banners reading “Citizens, Speak Turkish!” on ferries and trams. Newspapers amplified the campaign and many non-Muslims were prosecuted for “insulting Turkishness” simply for speaking their native languages.

— April 11, 1928: A new law, on the Manner of Practice of Medicine and Related Professions, restricted the practice of medicine to those deemed “Turkish,” effectively, excluding non-Muslims from the profession.

— September 1929: The Treasury decided to tax donations and transfers made to Jewish schools, Or Ahayim Hospital, Ortaköy Orphanage, and syn-

agogues, considering them commercial establishments. The implementation was started retroactively from 1925. The Chief Rabbinate, unable to pay these high taxes, faced foreclosure. Government pressure continued, and donations were closely monitored.

— 1929 and 1930: In 18 months, 6,373 Armenians from Turkey were forced to immigrate to Syria.

Part 2: Turkey's Persecution Of Minorities (1930-1941)

— September 18, 1930: Justice Minister Mahmut Esat Bozkurt uttered his famous maxim: “My opinion, my conviction is that this country itself is Turkish. Those who are not pure Turks have only one right in the Turkish homeland, and that is to be servants, to be slaves.”

— October 1930: During the municipal elections, when the newly formed Free Republican Party (SCF) had six Greeks, four Armenians, and three Jews on its list, the ruling Republican People's Party (CHP) launched a fierce anti-non-Muslim campaign. The party was forced to dissolve itself 99 days after its establishment, but the resentment towards non-Muslims did not end.

— June 11, 1932: The Law on Arts and Services Reserved for Turkish Citizens was enacted, prohibiting foreigners from working in certain professions. It particularly affected Greek citizens in freelance professions, small businesses, and street vendors.

— November 1932: Every Jew in Izmir was made to sign a pledge promising to adopt Turkish culture and speak the Turkish language. The Jews of Bursa, Kırklareli, Edirne, Adana, Diyarbakır, and Ankara followed suit.

— 1933: The Syriac Patriarchate in Mardin, Turkey, unable to withstand covert and overt pressure, moved temporarily from Mardin to Homs in Syria, “in accordance with the wishes of the community” and “due to perceived necessity.” However, it has not been possible for it to return since then.

— June 14, 1934: Following the Settlement Law, which divided the country into three groups: “those of Turkish culture who speak Turkish” (true Turks), “those of Turkish culture who do not speak Turkish” (Kurds), and “those not of Turkish culture who do not speak Turkish” (non-Muslims and others). Greeks and Armenians in various parts of Anatolia were deported to regions deemed suitable for them.

— June 21 and July 4, 1934: Crowds incited by anti-Semitic and racist writings attacked Jews in Çanakkale, Gelibolu, Edirne, Kırklareli, Lüleburgaz, and Babaeski. During these events, Jewish homes and shops were looted, women were raped, and a rabbi was murdered. As a result of events apparently organized by CHF (later renamed CHP, Republican People's Party), Thrace branch, 15,000 Jews were forced to flee to other cities and countries, leaving behind their belongings and property. According to a report prepared by CHF, of the 13,000 Jews living in Thrace and Çanakkale, 3,000 had migrated to Istanbul, and many had lost their belongings in looting and sold their properties at rock-bottom prices.

— July 24, 1937: According to an advertisement in the Cumhuriyet newspaper, one of the requirements for students to be admitted to the Ankara Military Veterinary School was “being of Turkish descent.”

— August 1938: The government issued Decree No. 2/9498, stating that “Jews, regardless of their current religion, who are subjected to oppression in terms of living and traveling in the state territory of which they are subjects, are prohibited from entering and residing in Turkey.” Twenty-six Jewish employees of the country's only official news agency, Anadolu Agency, were dismissed. There was an explosion of articles and cartoons in newspapers and magazines generally blaming minorities, and specifically Jews, for the country's suffering.

— 1938-1939: Non-Muslims living in rural areas of Anatolia were relocated to large urban centers on the grounds that they would threaten national security in the approaching war. Those who could not adapt to the living conditions in the big cities were forced to emigrate from the country.

— July 1939: During the annexation of Hatay [Iskenderoun] by Turkey, Armenians in the region migrated to Syria due to oppression.

— August 8, 1939: The Parita ship, carrying 860 Jewish refugees gathered from various parts of Europe to Palestine, was forced to take refuge in Izmir due to problems encountered en route. Despite the passengers' cries of “Kill us, but don't send us back,” the ship was escorted out of the port on August 14 by two police boats. As the ship was leaving, the Ulus newspaper, close to the CHP, ran the headline “Wandering Jews left Izmir.”

— December 28, 1939: Upon hearing of the great earthquake in Erzincan that killed tens of thousands of people, Jewish communities in Tel Aviv, Haifa, Buenos Aires, New York, Geneva, Cairo, and Alexandria collected money and clothing and sent them to Turkey. However, articles and cartoons mocking this Jewish gesture and suggesting malicious intent appeared in the newspapers.

— December 12, 1940: The Salvador, nicknamed the “floating coffin” (a boat for 40 people), arrived in Istanbul from the port of Constanta, Romania, carrying 342 Jewish refugees. Although it was clear the ship was in no condition to travel even a mile, Turkish authorities forced it to continue its journey. The result was tragic: on December 13, caught in a violent storm off the coast of Silivri, the wreckage of the Salvador yielded 219 dead bodies.

— April 22, 1941: 12,000 non-Muslim men were sent by gendarmes to camps teeming with mosquitoes and malaria, plagued by dampness, mud, extreme heat, and severe water shortages, lacking proper infrastructure. The voices of the sergeants and officers shouting, “Forget Istanbul!” remain etched in the memories of all minorities who lived through that period. These “soldiers,” known as the 20th Reserve, were forced to work in hard labor battalions, such as tunnel construction in Zonguldak, construction of Gençlik Park in Ankara, stone crushing and road building in the provinces of Afyon, Karabük, Konya, and Kütahya, and were only discharged on July 27, 1942.



Refutation of a False Premise

REFUTATION, from page 18

Why was the Church the primary target? Because the perpetrators perfectly understood what some current Armenian politicians seem to have forgotten: the Armenian Apostolic Church is the backbone of Armenian national identity. Destroying the Church meant destroying the nation itself.

Since Christianity was officially recognized, the survival of Armenian national identity has been directly united with the religious factor. The genocide was not only physical extermination but cultural genocide: erasing any trace of Armenian presence, destroying its spiritual heritage, eliminating its historical memory. And yet, the church survived and preserved Armenian identity.

After the genocide, hundreds of thousands of Armenian survivors were dispersed throughout the world. What kept this fragmented diaspora united? The Armenian Apostolic Church.

Armenians first formed the church and from the church formed other institutions or schools. In Buenos Aires, Los Angeles, Paris, Beirut, the first institution that exiled Armenians established was a church. Only afterward came schools, cultural associations, community centers. The Church was — and remains — the nucleus of Armenian identity in the diaspora.

Pashinyan’s Paradox:

Silencing the Church While Interfering in It

The current government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has brought the tension between the state and church to its most critical point in modern Armenian history. After the catastrophic loss of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 — a region Armenians consider an integral part of their historical homeland — Catholicos Karekin II publicly called for the prime minister’s resignation, pointing to his responsibility in the national debacle.

The government’s response was revealing: in June 2025, Nikol Pashinyan publicly called for the removal of Catholicos Karekin II, the supreme spiritual authority of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Additionally, the government has detained Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan and other clerics under accusations of conspiracy against the state, simply for exercising their right to peaceful political opposition.

Here is hypocrisy in its purest form: while the church is accused of “interfering” in politics, it is the government that directly interferes in internal ecclesiastical affairs, attempting to remove religious leaders elected according to Church canons and promoting ecclesiastical voices aligned with political power.

If the church has no right to opine on the nation’s direction, why does the government have the right to decide who should lead the Church?

If there is a “separation” between Church and State, why does that separation only apply in one direction?

If the Church must remain silent before catastrophic political decisions resulting in the loss of historic Armenian territories, why can the State intervene in the election and removal of religious authorities?

This double standard reveals the truth: the problem is not institutional “separation.” The problem is that Pashinyan’s government seeks to silence a powerful critical voice that questions its competence, legitimacy, and disastrous political decisions.

Global Precedent:

Religions DO Legitimately Participate in Politics

Those who argue that the Armenian Church must remain on the sidelines of politics deliberately ignore that in multiple consolidated democracies and internationally respected nations, religious institutions actively participate in public debate without compromising democracy. Let’s examine concrete examples:

Iran is a theocratic state where no separation exists between religion and politics. The system is based on the principle of Wilayat al-Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), where the Supreme Leader combines political authority and spiritual guidance. Although this model presents problems from a liberal democratic perspective, it demonstrates that religious integration in state structure is a contemporary geopolitical reality accepted internationally.

In Israel, though formally secular, laws on marriage, divorce, holidays, and multiple aspects of public life are deeply influenced by Jewish tradition. Religious parties exercise decisive influence in government formation and crucial political decisions. Jewish identity is inseparable from the State of Israel, and no one considers this undemocratic.

In Latin America, the Catholic Church has historically been a fundamental political actor. During the 19th-century civil wars between liberals and conservatives, religion reinforced political motivations. The governments of new

republics recognized Catholicism as the state religion to facilitate governing countries with immense Catholic majorities.

Even today, the Catholic Church has intervened in political processes concerning sexual and reproductive rights in many countries of the region. In Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and other countries, Catholic leaders regularly pronounce on public policies, constitutional reforms, and moral questions, without anyone suggesting they should “remain on the sidelines” of politics.

During Soviet occupation, the Polish Catholic Church was the center of national resistance. Pope John Paul II, Polish-born, was instrumental in the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. The church was explicitly political, and its participation was considered legitimate and heroic. Today, though debates exist about the Church’s role in Poland, no one denies its right to express positions in public debate.

The Comparative Lesson: Participation Is NOT Imposition

These examples demonstrate that religious participation in politics is the norm, not the exception, in the contemporary world.

It is one thing for the church to express moral positions, criticize governmental decisions, or mobilize the faithful in defense of fundamental values. It is quite another to impose its dogmas through state coercion. The Armenian Apostolic Church does the former; Pashinyan’s government attempts to prevent it through the latter.

The argument that the Armenian Apostolic Church should not “interfere” in state politics is historically false, sociologically naive and politically convenient for those seeking to avoid legitimate criticism.

The true motive behind this argument is revealed when we examine who wields it and when. It is no coincidence this discourse intensifies precisely when Pashinyan’s government faces devastating criticism for the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh. Silencing the Church is silencing the government’s most powerful critic. It is censorship disguised as secularism.

The Real Threat:

Subordinating the Church to the State

Twentieth-century history is full of examples of what happens when totalitarian states subordinate churches to political power:

In the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church was infiltrated, controlled, and converted into a KGB tool.

In Nazi Germany, the “German Christians” attempted to Nazify the Evangelical Church.

In Communist China, “patriotic” churches controlled by the State are propaganda instruments.

The pattern is always the same: first the church is accused of “interfering” in politics, then state intervention is justified “to maintain order,” finally the religious institution is subordinated, converting it into an appendage of political power.

Armenia is in the early stages of this dangerous process. Detaining critical clergy, calling for the Catholicos’s removal, promoting ecclesiastical voices aligned with the government: these are classic steps toward subordinating the Church to the State.

Conclusion:

Defending the Church Is Defending the Nation

The Armenian Apostolic Church is the historical guardian of Armenianness. Pretending to separate it now from Armenia’s political life is not modernization: it is denying 1,700 years of documented history.

Religions legitimately participate in the politics of world nations.

In Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu nations, religious institutions have a voice in public affairs. Why should Armenia be the only nation in the world where this is considered illegitimate? Why should the church representing 92 percent of the population be silenced while churches representing minorities in other countries have full freedom of political expression?

Armenia is not — nor should be — the exception. The claim that the Armenian Apostolic Church must “remain on the sidelines” of politics has no precedent in global democratic practice and contradicts the universal experience of all nations that value their religious traditions.

The real problem is not that the church “interferes” in politics, but that the government attempts to subordinate it.

Here is the fundamental hypocrisy that dismantles the entire governmental argument: while the church is accused of “interfering” in politics, it is the State that violates institutional separation flagrantly and dangerously.

When the government detains Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan and other clergy under accusations of “conspiracy against the state” for exercising peaceful political opposition; when Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan publicly calls for the removal of Catholicos Karekin II; when the state deliberately promotes ecclesiastical voices aligned

with political power to divide and weaken the institution, it is violating the church’s institutional autonomy far more gravely than any political declaration the Church might make.

This is not “separation of church and state”: it is subordination of the church to the state. It is the Soviet model of religious control, where churches could exist only as decorative appendages of political power, without critical voice, without real autonomy, without capacity to question governmental decisions.

An Urgent Call to Clarity and Historical Honesty

The Armenian people — both in the homeland and in the diaspora — must confront these questions with brutal honesty:

Do we want to preserve the institution that has been the heart of our identity for 1,700 years, or will we allow it to be reduced to a decorative appendage of political power? The Armenian Apostolic Church is non-negotiable. It is not a cultural luxury we can modernize by eliminating it from public life. It is the backbone of Armenianness.

Do we consider that the 92 percent of Armenians who identify with the Church deserve their institution to have a voice in the nation’s future, or do we believe only temporary politicians should have that privilege? If democracy means representativeness, then the Church — representing practically the entire population — has more democratic legitimacy than any political party or elected official. Silencing it is not secularism: it is anti-democratic censorship.

Do we accept that the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh is a national tragedy justifying criticism from all institutions, including the Church, or do we believe the government should be exempt from accountability? The fall of Artsakh is not a partisan political issue: it is a historic catastrophe comparable to the genocide. The Church has the right — and the moral duty — to raise its voice before such national disaster.

Do we understand that 20th-century history unequivocally demonstrates that subordinating the church to the state is the path to totalitarianism, or are we willing to risk institutional autonomy for temporary political convenience?

The Armenian Apostolic Church has not only the constitutional right but the historical and moral duty to raise its voice when it considers the nation to be in existential danger. This is not “interfering” in politics: it is exercising its millennial role as guardian of Armenian national identity, a role it has performed uninterrupted since the year 301.

When Catholicos Karekin II criticized Pashinyan’s government after the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh, he was not violating any imaginary “separation of powers.” He was doing exactly what Saint Gregory the Illuminator did with King Tiridates III 1,700 years ago: reminding temporary rulers they have responsibilities before God, before history, and before the Armenian people. Reminding them that political power is transitory, but the nation is eternal.

Kings come and go. Prime ministers rise and fall. Governments change with elections. But the Armenian Apostolic Church remains, as it has remained through Persian invasions, Byzantine occupations, Arab conquests, Ottoman domination, Soviet oppression, and the most brutal attempt of all: the 1915-1923 genocide.

It only remains for the Armenian people in every corner of the world to remember the indelible lessons of their ancestors and defend with all their strength what makes their nation unique and indestructible: the indissoluble union between apostolic faith, the millennial Church, and Armenian national identity.

This union is not negotiable. It is not reformable. It is not modernizable. It is the very essence of what it means to be Armenian.

Defending the Armenian Apostolic Church is not blind conservatism or religious fundamentalism. It is defending the survival of the Armenian nation as a unique historical entity with transcendent purpose. It is recognizing there are realities deeper and more permanent than electoral cycles and temporary political fashions.

The Armenian Apostolic Church is Armenia’s immortal soul. When the Armenian State disappeared, it preserved it. When genocide attempted to erase us from history, it kept us alive. When the diaspora was fragmented across the world, it kept us united.

The choice is before us. History watches us. Our martyred ancestors judge us from heaven. Future generations will ask us: Were we worthy heirs of 1,700 years of unwavering faith, or were we the cowardly generation that voluntarily surrendered what no invader could seize from us?

Let each Armenian answer with their conscience, their vote, and their voice: On which side of history do you want to stand?

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