

# Former Karabakh Leaders Handed Long Sentences in Azerbaijan

By Ruzanna Stepanian and Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Five former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh were sentenced to life imprisonment and two others received 20-year jail terms on Thursday, February 5, at the end of their yearlong trial in Azerbaijan condemned by Armenian human rights activists as a travesty of justice.

A military court in Baku handed slightly shorter prison sentences to eight other Karabakh Armenians who have been tried together with them. The defendants include three former Karabakh presidents. Arayik Harutyunyan, Bako Sahakyan and Arkadi Ghukasyan.

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# US Vice President Vance Visits Armenia in Historic First

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

US Vice President JD Vance arrived in Yerevan on Monday, February 9, marking the highest-level visit by an American leader since Armenia gained independence. Vance met with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and following the talks, the two leaders announced plans to deepen cooperation in nu-

clear energy, news of Armenia’s first ever purchase of US military technology, and outlined deals in chip production in Armenia.

Vance headed to Azerbaijan on Tuesday, February 10. (See related story inside.)

Following the meeting with Pashinyan, Vance also met with the Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan.

After the talks on Monday, Pashinyan

and Vance signed a joint statement announcing the completion of negotiations on an intergovernmental agreement between Armenia and the US on cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

“This agreement will open a new page in the deepening energy partnership between Armenia and the US, and will contribute to the diversification of Armenia’s energy resources by involving safe and innovative technologies,” Pashinyan said following the signing ceremony.

Pashinyan described Vance’s visit as having “truly historic and symbolic impor-

tance,” adding that it “reflects the depth of the strong and strategic partnership” that has emerged between the two countries.

Pashinyan also announced that Armenia had made a historic \$11 million purchase of V-BAT surveillance drones from the US, saying their effectiveness had been proven by “rich experience of use” and expressing confidence that they would “significantly contribute” to the strengthening of Armenia’s defense capabilities. It marks the first time that Armenia has bought US-made military technology.

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Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and US Vice President JD Vance shaking hands as Vance pays his first official visit to Armenia (official photo)

# International Attention Turns to Persecution of Armenian Church

*Christian Solidarity  
International Fact-Finding  
Mission Reports*

YEREVAN (Zartonk) — The religious freedom organization Christian Solidarity International (CSI) sent a fact-finding mission to Armenia the first week of February to investigate persecution of the Armenian

Apostolic Church in parallel with the International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington, D.C. The visit concluded with a joint press conference at the Ibis Hotel Center in Yerevan with the Armenia Center for Political Rights (ACPR), a Yerevan-based human rights NGO that has produced a comprehensive legal report on the government’s anti-church campaign.

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# The World of Zabel Yesayan Comes to Boston

By Alin K. Gregorian  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

BOSTON — Writer Zabel Yesayan has been rediscovered in the past couple of decades with the English translation of several of her books. Yesayan’s life coincided with some of the most harrowing chapters in Armenian history, from the Armenian Genocide to the repatriation of many to Soviet Armenia. She was the only woman to be on the list of intellectuals to be rounded up on April 24, 1915 but ultimately met her end somewhere in Siberia, one of many victims of Stalinist purges.

Now, the Boston Playwrights Theatre (BPT) will bring her to life through a new play, “Zabel in Exile,” by R. N. “Bob” Sandberg, with a run of 11 shows scheduled for February 19 to March 8.

WWYesayan, née Hovannessian, was born in 1878 in Istanbul to an intellectual family. She was one of the



Playwright R. N. Sandberg

first women from the Ottoman Empire to study in Paris. She became a writer, journalist and social commentator, thus putting her in the crosshairs of the Young Turk leaders.

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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Parliament Speaker Praises Relations with Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenian National Assembly Speaker Alen Simonyan has praised the current working relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, saying he believes the two countries could face “no problems” in the near future.

Speaking to reporters on February 10, Simonyan was asked about efforts to secure the return of Armenian prisoners in Azerbaijan. He said the authorities prefer not to discuss the issue publicly, stressing that work is ongoing behind the scenes.

“I highly appreciate the working style that we have mutually adopted with Azerbaijan, and I believe that if we continue moving forward along this path, the two countries will have no problems in the near future,” he said.

### Armenian Artifacts To Be Displayed at Acropolis Museum

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Artifacts from Armenia’s History Museum will be exhibited at the Acropolis Museum in Athens, according to Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Zhanna Andreasyan, who spoke during a parliamentary session on February 10 on the ratification of an agreement between Armenia and Greece to prevent the illegal circulation of cultural property.

“In just a few days, our History Museum will sign a memorandum with the Acropolis Museum, and this year, our museum’s artifacts will already be on display there,” she said, as reported by 1lurer.am.

She explained that it establishes cooperation in areas concerning the theft of cultural assets, illegal excavations, imports, exports, transit, and the prevention of unlawful ownership transfers.

### Armenia Ready to Operate Checkpoint

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Chairman of the State Revenue Committee (SRC) Eduard Hakobyan on February 10 addressed recent reports of increased activity on the Turkish side at the Alican border checkpoint, stating that Armenia is technically prepared for the full operation of the Margara crossing. “We are aware of Turkey’s activity to the extent that the public is, and we follow the same open sources. There is clearly movement and work on their side. Once our foreign policy colleagues give the green light and issue formal instructions, we are fully ready to provide customs services at the border,” Hakobyan said. He explained that the SRC regularly visits the Margara checkpoint to monitor infrastructure readiness. Renovation work was completed last year, and a trained team is already in place, ready to operate the site.

# Kapan Museum Provides Unique Perspective On Armenian History and Culture

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

KAPAN, Armenia — The Kapan Regional Museum, known as the Kapan Geological Museum in Armenian, is one of the main tourist attractions in the city of Kapan, the capital of Syunik Province in southern Armenia. This museum is the largest one in the province and was founded in Soviet times, in 1969, to preserve items discovered through excavations in the region as well as items related to geology. It now is basically a regional history museum. Its current director, Alyosha Sasuni Hayrapetyan, assumed office in 2022.

Hayrapetyan said in October 2025 that there are approximately 12,000 items in the museum’s collection, which includes aside from artifacts photos, documents and valuable objects. Only around three percent of the collection can be displayed at present. Artifacts are displayed in one building while a laboratory newly established in 2024 restores and studies newly found objects. A number of stone crosses (*khachkars*) and various types of tombstones are found outside the museum in its courtyard.

The museum provides a way for visitors to learn about the history of southern Armenia in a focused way from prehistoric times until the present. There are also smaller similar regional museums elsewhere in Syunik province such as the Goris Local Lore Museum, founded in 1946, and the Nikoghayos Adonts Sisian History Museum, founded in 1989.

The second or top floor of the Kapan museum contains ancient and medieval archaeological and historical items. The old-

the 10<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. is evidence of far-reaching trade, as the cowry must have been brought from the Indian Ocean area through trade, most likely in exchange for bronze objects.

Perhaps the rarest or most unique item in the museum is a ritual vessel of a woman from the 9-8<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. Nothing similar has been found in Armenia or even the

declared its independence almost 750 years later in 1918.

The princes and princesses of medieval Syunik were buried at Vahanavank, located around 5 km. west of the town of Kapan. Some of their tombs and skulls were found during archaeological excavations. Copies of busts of these leaders are found in the museum which are based on the re-



Museum director Alyosha Hayrapetyan next to a medieval oven or tonir found during excavations in Kapan (courtesy Hayrapetyan’s Facebook page)

broader geographic region. Hayrapetyan said that cholera was common then and the population decreased, so that from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. people began to worship women’s statues as symbols of fertility and society became matriarchal (though this was very rare in Armenia). The vessel was found in Kapan’s Shinarner (Teghut) district. It bears various lines and engraved circles and triangles.

There are also two anthropomorphic vessels made from clay from the 9<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. found in Teghut. These vessels were not practical for everyday use, and so, Hayrapetyan said, they probably were used in rituals to mark the start of spring and the fall and ask the gods for abundant harvests.

Hayrapetyan said that the true Urartians never occupied Kapan but their influence was great. The local people were called the Etiunis. Hayrapetyan believes, following the opinions of various specialists in Armenia, that the Urartians were Indo-Europeans.

An important Urartian-era holding is a bronze horse muzzle of the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. with a cuneiform inscription indicating that it was the property of Argishti, a king of Urartu. It could either be Argishti, son of Rusa,

or Argishti son of Menua. If the latter, that would indicate that he was also the founder of Erebuni, the predecessor of today’s Yerevan. The muzzle was discovered in 2016 in the village of Yeghvard in Kapan.

#### Medieval Times

The last historic Armenian kingdom existing on the Armenian highland is that of Syunik, which lasted until 1170 (Cilicia lies outside of the traditional Armenian lands). No Armenian principality existed again there until the Republic of Armenia

construction of their appearances by Prof. Andranik Chagharyan. Chagharyan was a heart surgeon who founded an anthropology laboratory in 1970 and developed a method of reproducing three-dimensional images of human faces based on skull fractures. The original busts are located in the Armenian national museum of ethnography at the Sardarabad Memorial Complex.

The Kapan museum displays busts of King Grigor I (1051-1072, Kapan), Princess Dinar (the sister of Prince Gurgun, ruler of Somkheti) and Sbarabed (military commander) Hasan (end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century to beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup>) of the Syunik (Ka-



Bust of Sos Nurijanyan, a native of Vachagan Village near Kapan, who fought at the Battle of Brest during the Great Patriotic War – World War II. Nurijanyan was captured by the Germans, but escaped and joined the French Resistance to continue the fight. The sculptor, Marat Nurijanyan, was also the founding director of the Kapan Regional Museum (photo Aram Arkun).

pan) kingdom.

Medieval pottery and a variety of other artifacts are on exhibit. There are large jars or pitchers (*karas*) shown, which according to Hayrapetyan, were sometimes used to bury people from Urartian times to the early first millennium of our era. Usually one person’s remains were included, though sometimes it could be more than one, with body parts or bones cut into pieces to fit into the pitcher.

*continued on next page*



Ritual vessel depicting a woman, from the 9-8<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., at the Kapan Regional Museum (photo Aram Arkun)

est item is a bison horn dated to 30-50,000 years ago. Hayrapetyan said that the climate in Syunik was much more humid in that period of time, allowing for such animals to live there. The horn was found during construction of the Kapan-Kajaran auto road in 1970 near Baghaberd and given to the museum in 1975.

There are many unique and interesting artifacts from the pre-Urartian and Urartian eras. Daggers are on display which date from the 14-13 centuries B.C., and a vessel in the shape of two connected shoes from the 12-11<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. The latter may have been used in rituals and represented man’s journey to the afterlife. This supposition is based on carvings or sculptures, including some on Urartian belts. The vessel was found in Tandzaver village.

Jewelry using cowrie shells dated to





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Bison horn dated to 30-50,000 years ago (photo Aram Arkun)

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Posters on the walls depict various important medieval historical sites in the Syunik Province and information about the archaeological work and reconstruction that have taken place.

It provides information about the 18<sup>th</sup> century Armenian military leader Davit Bek who fought Ottoman troops and local Muslim tribes and briefly ruled over an Armenian principality in Syunik. It showcases a copper bowl found during

of Davit Bek’s origins being from the local Syunik village of Pekh and from the Melik Parsadianian family.

Modern Times

The lower or first floor of the museum takes the story of Syunik from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. It includes ethnological items as well as information on the Armeno-Tatar battles of 1905-6. Among other items, there is a jug with which a woman named Tazagul Margaryan secretly went twice at night to the Voghji River and brought water to 165 Armenians besieged by Tatars in St. Hakob Church in a village of Kajaran in 1906. Afterwards the woman was given the nickname “the waterbearer.”

There are images and biographies of fighters or leaders during the end of World War I and the first Republic of Armenia like Capt. Gurgen Ter Movsisyan, an important leader at the battle of Gharakilise, Garegin Nzhdeh, who also fought in the 1918 battles and later proclaimed the independence of Syunik and neighboring areas as a leader of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation while fighting the Bolsheviks (buried on Mt. Khustup), and Aram Manukian, a founder of the Republic of Armenia born in Davit Bek village of Kapan. There are medals and pictures of Kapan Armenians who fought in World War II. Philanthropists originating from the Kapan region, including Boghos Nubar Pasha and the Nubar Nubarian family, originally from Shikahogh village, are mentioned. There are names displayed of Kapan Armenians who died during the 44 day war too.

There are photos of notable events in Kapan, such as the first time an airplane landed there in 1924 (a Junkers which came from Tbilisi), the first landing of a YAK-40 airplane in Kapan in August 1970 (the mu-



A poster tribute to those Kapan Armenians who fought and died in the 44-day war of 2020 (photo Aram Arkun)



A poster with photos and drawing in tribute to the 123 Armenians of Kapan who fought at the Battle of Brest (photo Aram Arkun)

excavations of Halidzor inscribed with the name Tsatur. Tsatur is the name of Davit Bek’s father (who later converted to Islam and changed his name to Allahverdi, a Turkish translation of Tsatur), and so this is thought to be supporting evidence



Reconstruction of the appearance of King Grigor I of Syunik, A.D. 1051-1072, Kapan (photo Aram Arkun)

seum holds the personal items of one of its pilots, Sergey Aleksandri Petrosyan, who was born in Kapan in 1937), or the first railroad train arriving in Kapan in October 1932, with a formal opening of the railway line in November of the same year.

The museum has a collection of ethnographic materials pertaining to ordinary life in the Kapan region, including tools, clothing, carpets, furniture and musical instruments. It also has a section with information on mining, which has been such an important part of the local economy.

The museum appears to be gradually modernizing its displays and lighting. It is accessible to foreign visitors, with most items described in both Armenian and English, and some Russian language text is also found.

Director Hayrapetyan is a personable



Reconstruction of the appearance of Princess Dinar, the sister of Prince Gurgen, ruler of Somkhethi (photo Aram Arkun)

guide who provides detailed tours of the museum with intriguing anecdotes and information. Clearly he is doing something right, as the number of visitors has been increasing in recent years – from 1,237 in 2021 to 4,663 in 2024. Hopefully the museum can obtain greater funding to continue to modernize and replace some of the presentation posters and materials that are outdated. The Kapan Regional Museum is well worth a visit for anybody who has the opportunity to travel to Syunik.



## INTERNATIONAL

# International Attention Turns to Persecution of Armenian Church

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Swiss Parliamentarian Erich Vontobel participated in the visit and press conference. The February 3 press conference, conducted in English, translated into Armenian on site by Niery Grace Bardakjian, and moderated by Lika Tumanyan was broadcasted live (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWFUP7VaMn0>).

This took place as religious freedom experts and non-governmental organizations gathered in Washington for the International Religious Freedom Summit, ahead of the visit to Armenia and Azerbaijan by US Vice President J. D. Vance in February.

“Religious freedom conditions have deteriorated sharply in Armenia since this summer,” reported Joel Veldkamp, CSI’s director of advocacy. “We hope to use this visit to put a spotlight on the escalating persecution of the Armenian Apostolic Church for Summit attendees.”

## Brief History

Since June 2025, the Armenian government has imprisoned four bishops and one priest. Dozens of others have also been arrested, including church workers, lawyers

with the Armenian authorities to put an end to their campaign against the Armenian church, and to free the people they have detained as part of that campaign.”

After difficult negotiations with the relevant authorities of the Republic of Armenia, the CSI delegation had the opportunity to meet with imprisoned Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, who handed them letters signed by him addressed to the participants of the IRF Summit taking place in Washington, as well as to the US vice president.

## Press Conference

“The detained Archbishop Bagrat is being held in the same cell where Bishop Bagrat Vardazaryan was murdered by the Soviet Union’s authorities in 1937,” said Eibner. “We have come to carry out consistent work as a continuation of our fact-finding work that we carried out in November. We are here to understand how the crisis between church and state has changed,” he continued.

He stated that during this visit they met with human rights defenders, lawyers, and the Catholicos in the Mother See, declaring “He is determined to protect his flock and

Sevak Hagopian, the editor of *Zartong* daily, asked at the press conference what Eibner had to say about the ban on leaving Armenia that Armenian authorities had imposed on six bishops who were to participate in the upcoming Episcopal Assembly in Austria. Eibner responded: “This is already the culmination of the repressions that have occurred so far, which will inevitably damage the reputation of the Armenian authorities before the international community.” Eibner also emphasized that it remains for the Mother See to find sensible means to circumvent these repressions in order to implement its aforementioned meeting.

## Artsakh

“In the Republic of Armenia, it is said at the highest level that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is closed. We look at the issue differently. In our opinion, as long as the displaced persons have not returned to their homes and cannot return, the case is not closed and should not be closed,” said Erich Vontobel, a member of the Swiss National Parliament, during the press conference.

According to him, the return of displaced

ies are a memory. They are very important. Therefore, simply saying that the issue is closed is impossible. It cannot be like that. This is the reason why we have the Swiss Peace Commission on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. As long as we are sure and believe that this issue is not closed, we will continue to fight for it. We see the displaced people, we hear their voices, and it is their words that are the motivation that drives us forward,” said Erich Vontobel.

Hagopian asked Vontobel the following about guarantees: “It was the same Christian and democratic Europe that 110 years ago did not lift a finger to prevent the Turks from driving my ancestors out of their ancestral village in Christian Cilicia, as a result of which my father, I and my son were born in Lebanon, while we should have been born on our ancestral lands, which were occupied by the Turks in broad daylight. What guarantees that the same will not happen to the Armenians forcibly displaced from Artsakh?”

In response, Vontobel stated that there are no such guarantees, but they will do everything to prevent that human tragedy from happening again in the case of the Artsakh Armenians. Dr. Eibner also intervened, condemning the Armenian Genocide in the strongest terms.

In turn, Fr. Peter Fuchs, a German Catholic priest and member of the CSI, confirmed this and declared: “Christians in Germany today are concerned about the situation that is happening to the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia.”

## Ishkhanyan of Armenian Center for Political Rights Speaks

“The campaign against the church and its ministers by the authorities is often interpreted as a conflict between the two sides, which puts a certain mark of equality and creates the illusion of competition, while this is not the case,” Rafael Ishkhanyan, president of the Armenian Center for Political Rights (ACPR), declared during the press conference.

He presented the results of the fact-finding mission and noted: “On the one hand, the state has a huge state apparatus, an absolute monopoly on the use of force, a monopoly on controlling the actions of the security forces. On the other hand, the church is a single religious organization. Therefore, equality cannot be drawn between the campaign carried out by the authorities and the actions of the church.”

According to Ishkhanyan, at first glance, the authorities’ campaign through the person of the prime minister was directed against individual figures, but later, it became understandable that this was directed against the church. He said: “When the prime minister brought the issue of changing the Catholicos to the agenda, this also touched on the rights of the faithful. We know that important events of citizens are directly related to the activities of the church.”

Ishkhanyan declared that one probably would not find a single right defined in international conferences that was not limited or violated during the campaign of the Armenian authorities: “The right to personal liberty, fair trial, and detention are the most frequently used means [for pressure]. We had seen violations of the right to fair trial in the case of the members of the same holy struggle, manipulation of facts and wiretapping, which mislead an entire society, creating the image that the members of the group had the intention to commit violence against society – not to mention the complete disregard of the presumption of innocence.”

(This report is the edited version of a translation of the original *Zartong* article.)



CSI and the Armenian Center for Political Rights (ACPR) held a press conference on February 3, 2026, following a fact-finding visit to Armenia

for the arrested clergy, family members of the clergy, and public supporters of the church. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has publicly vowed to remove the head of the Armenian Church worldwide, Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, from his post and replace him with a candidate selected by a state-appointed committee.

Due to the insecurity in Armenia, the Armenian Church recently scheduled its Episcopal Assembly to be held in Austria from February 16-19, instead of Armenia.

During a previous visit to Armenia in November 2025, in conjunction with the Republic of Armenia’s first “Prayer Breakfast,” the CSI delegation met with local civil society leaders, as well as family members and lawyers of those arrested.

“The persecution of the Armenian Apostolic Church by the Armenian government is a grievous sign of things to come, not only for the Armenian people but for all in the international community who value religious freedom,” commented Dr. John Eibner, president of Christian Solidarity International. He said: “If a U.S.-allied government can so blatantly try to seize control over one of the world’s oldest churches with no international pushback, it will set a grim precedent for authoritarian governments the world over.”

He concluded: “We urge participants in the IRF Summit in Washington DC, as well as Vice President Vance, to intervene

his nation. This morning we visited Archbishop Bagrat in prison. We were happy to see Archbishop Bagrat in good health.”

Eibner said: “A few days before signing the document with the prime minister [attacking Catholicos Karekin II], the primate of the Artsakh Diocese said in his meeting with us that the Artsakh issue is not closed.”

Moreover, in response to a question Eibner said that at that time, “He did not express any opposition to the Catholicos.”

To the question of whether they had met with the 10 clergy who sided with Pashinyan and otherwise how could he talk about an objective fact-finding mission, Eibner replied: “We have not met with the ten clergy who came out against the catholicos. We met with the archbishop of Artsakh in November. Although we did not have a personal interview with the prime minister of the Republic of Armenia, we participated in the prayer breakfast in November. We listened to the Prime Minister and others. We are conducting our own research into their speeches. We are studying to understand what the ideology of the ‘Real Armenia’ is. So it is possible to be objective, listening to all sides, and we are doing this.”

Regarding Artsakh, John Eibner emphasized that “human rights can never be abolished.” He said: “If the fundamental rights of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh can be obstructed today, your human rights can be obstructed tomorrow, and they can be obstructed by the state.”

persons should be an integral part of a sustainable peace agreement. He noted that he will do everything to bring the issue of the return of Armenians to the center of international attention.

He said that in October 2024, he met with displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh in Yerevan and “I asked them three things: what happened in September 2023; secondly, what do you want now; thirdly, how can that goal be achieved?” Their unambiguous answer was a roundtable between Azerbaijan and Artsakh on an international platform. Vontobel promised at that meeting that his group would return to Switzerland, and would try to do something.

“What happened in Artsakh in September 2023 was not fair. It was not right,” Vontobel said in response to a journalist’s question.

“People were deprived of their fundamental right — the right to return to their homeland. This was a gross violation of human rights. It was wrong. And now, 2.5-3 years later, if even one person declares that ‘the issue is closed,’ this will not change anything in reality. Such statements cannot change the facts. They cannot deny what happened. They cannot justify what was wrong and even criminal. Simply ask the displaced people whether this issue is closed for them. Their answer is naturally the same: no. They want to return, because their churches are there, their schools are there, their cemeteries are there. And for these people, cemeter-





INTERNATIONAL

# Vance’s \$9-Billion Figure for ‘Exports’ in US–Armenia Nuclear Energy Cooperation Sparks Confusion

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

The translation of US Vice President JD Vance’s remarks, in which he spoke about \$9 billion in funds directed toward nuclear energy in Armenia, has sparked confusion. In his speech on Monday, February 9, Vance said there would be “\$5 billion in US exports, plus an additional \$4 billion in support through fuel and maintenance contracts” — however, the live translation into Armenian changed “exports” to “investment.”

After meeting with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, the two leaders announced plans to deepen cooperation in nuclear energy and signed a joint statement declaring that negotiations on an Armenia–US inter-governmental agreement on the peaceful use of nuclear energy had been completed.

Citing the compilation of the negotiations, Vance added that it would pave the way for US and Armenian companies “to strike deals on civil nuclear projects.”

He further suggested that the US would likely build small modular reactors in Armenia.

The mistranslation sparked confusion, apparently to the extent that journalists asked Vance a follow-up question about the same issue in a brief Q&A session right before his departure for Azerbaijan on February 10.

Vance avoided giving any precise answers, instead focusing on the tech investment.

“One of the things that we signed yesterday, but also one of the things that we are working on in some of our meetings, is a lot of investment that’s going to come to Armenia because of some of the good deals that we have struck between President Trump and Prime Minister Pashinyan,” Vance said.

He also brought the example of the tech deal, saying that “there is going to be a very large data center” in Armenia, “that could rise to \$4 billion in total investment.”

Opponents of Pashinyan’s government have accused the authorities of deliberately misleading the public through an inaccurate translation. In turn, the Armenian government has denied responsibility for the mistaken remarks.

Speaking to the state-run media outlet Armenpress, officials said that Vance’s



Vice President J. D. Vance in Armenia

remarks had been interpreted by the US side’s translator “in accordance with the established procedure.” They added that the Armenian government had published its

own translation and transcript of the statements, which OC Media can confirm used the word “export.”

However, Armenpress, along with sev-

eral other media outlets, initially circulated the inaccurate translation on Monday evening.

Shortly after Vance’s statement, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin reiterated the Kremlin’s readiness to build a nuclear power plant in Armenia.

It was the second Russian statement on the matter in less than a week. On 6 January, in a meeting with Armenian Parliamentary Speaker Alen Simonyan, the General Director of Russia’s State Nuclear Agency Rosatom, Aleksei Likhachev, offered Yerevan “comprehensive cooperation” on the construction of new nuclear power units.

On Monday, February 9, Galuzin said that building a nuclear power plant “occupies an important place” on the Moscow–Yerevan agenda.

“Rosatom is ready to begin implementing the project in the shortest possible time, of course, taking into account the wishes of our Armenian friends,” Galuzin said.

He also claimed that “real alternatives are not visible,” in terms of having “reliable, already proven technologies, as well as attractive financial parameters, including construction, further operation, and the need to train and retrain specialists.”

(This story originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on February 10.)

## Armenia Slides in Global Corruption Rankings

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Transparency International has slightly downgraded Armenia’s position in its annual survey of corruption perceptions around the world, again finding no progress in the Armenian government’s declared anti-graft efforts.

Together with Kuwait, Montenegro, Namibia and Senegal, Armenia ranks 65th out of 182 countries and territories evaluated in the Berlin-based watchdog’s 2025 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) released on Tuesday, February 10. It occupied 63rd place in the previous CPI released a year ago.

The South Caucasus state’s CPI “score,” measured on a 100-point scale, likewise fell from 47 to 46 over the past year. The Armenian government had pledged to

have it gradually raised to 55 in its three-year strategy of combating corruption approved in 2019.

A Transparency International report gave no reason for the downgrade. It only stressed the need for “strengthening independence and effectiveness of the judiciary and prosecution, alongside sustained enforcement of adopted reforms.” Its two previous surveys also found no improvement in Armenia.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has repeatedly claimed to have eliminated “systemic corruption” in the country since coming to power in 2018. However, members of his entourage are increasingly accused by the Armenian media of using their positions to enrich themselves, their families or cronies.

There is also growing resentment against massive bonuses paid to senior government officials, including Pashinyan. The latter claimed last month that the extra money makes them less prone to corruption. But Varuzhan Hovhanniseyan, a veteran activist affiliated with Transparency International partner organization in Armenia, denounced the practice as “political corruption.”

In 2023, Pashinyan urged senior Armenian officials to sue media outlets “falsely” accusing them of illicit enrichment. Shortly afterwards, hackers hijacked the YouTube channel of the Yerevan newspaper *Aravot* just as it was about to publish a video report detailing expensive property acquisitions by several senior government officials and pro-government parliamentarians.

# US Vice President Vance Visits Armenia in Historic First

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All actions and cooperation with the US “are aimed at peace and stability, and I am convinced that this goal is achievable,” Pashinyan added.

He also confirmed his participation in the first session of the Peace Council scheduled to be held on February 19 at the invitation of US President Donald Trump.

“Peace is not made by cautious people, peace is not made by people who are too focused on the past. Peace is made by people who are focused on the future,” Vance said in turn.

He emphasized that his visit marked “a new beginning” for Armenia and the US, as well as for their mutual partnership. The sentiment was echoed by Pashinyan, who said relations between Armenia and the US were at the highest they’ve ever been, pointing to Vance beside him as evidence.

Vance also talked about the “incredible

tech-deal” created, as part of which the US issued a “number of export licenses for the sale of high-powered Nvidia chips.”

“These are chips that simply do not exist in most countries in the world. They are now going to be developed and the data centers using those chips are going to be built and in fact are already being built,” Vance said.

Vance also said that negotiations on the civil nuclear cooperation agreement were over, which would pave the way for US and Armenian companies “to strike deals on civil nuclear projects.”

“That means up to \$5 billion in initial US exports, plus an additional \$4 billion in long-term support through fuel and maintenance contracts. This is the classic win-win for both Armenia and the USA,” Vance said.

He further suggested that the US would likely build small modular reactors in Armenia.

Discussing the Trump Route and possible timetables for its completion, Vance suggested that money was not an issue, as there is “a lot of interest” from private capital.

“I think the question is really how do we get the peace deal into a good next phase? How do we keep the prime minister in a good place where he can start to focus on the future,” Vance said, mentioning the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for June. He then explicitly offered Pashinyan his endorsement.

Vance also talked about Christianity, referencing his own faith and mentioning the Christian history of Armenia.

### “Free Armenian Christian hostages”

Vance’s visit comes less than six months after the historic Washington summit between Trump, Pashinyan, and Aliyev in August 2025.

The meeting saw the initialing of the

Armenia–Azerbaijan peace treaty, as well as announcement of the Trump Route, intended to connect mainland Azerbaijan to its exclave Nakhichevan through Armenia.

Ahead of Vance’s visit to Armenia, Trump announced that the trip’s purpose was to “build on our Peace efforts, and advance the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity [sic].”

Before Vance arrived, demonstrators gathered near the Presidential Palace in Yerevan where the meeting was set to take place, calling on Vance to “free Armenian Christian hostages” in Azerbaijan and to “bring Armenian hostages back.”

There are currently 19 Armenian prisoners in custody, including former political and military leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh, most of whom were recently sentenced to life imprisonment.

(This story originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on February 9.)



## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL

## Verdict Pending in Vardanyan's Case in Baku Court

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The trial against Ruben Vardanyan, former State Minister of Artsakh, prominent businessman, and philanthropist, has concluded in Baku. The presiding judge Zeynal Aghayev announced on February 10 that the panel of judges has retired to the deliberation room to determine the verdict, according to Minval.az.

It was also reported that “legal successors of the victims” have demanded a life sentence for Vardanyan.

## Monika Harutyunyan to Represent Armenia in Miss World

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Monika Arsine Harutyunyan has won the title of Miss Armenia 2026 and will represent the country at the upcoming Miss World 2026 international competition, the event organizers announced.

Born and raised in Prague, Monika is a professional athlete — a three-time Czech national figure skating champion and a two-time participant in the World Figure Skating Championships as part of the Czech national team.

Alongside her athletic career, Monika is also a qualified dentist, having graduated from Charles University in Prague, one of the oldest universities in Europe.

After the end of the 2020 war, she was involved in prosthetic rehabilitation efforts for wounded soldiers in the Czech Republic.

## New Amendment to Streamline ECHR Ruling Payouts

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Armenian National Assembly is reviewing a proposed amendment to the Law on the Representative for International Legal Matters, aimed at addressing the lack of a formal procedure for paying just satisfaction ordered by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

According to Karen Andriasyan, Armenia's representative for international legal matters, the bill introduces a new government mandate that will enable the establishment of a regulated process for these payments, Armenpress reports.

“Paying compensation ordered by ECHR judgments and decisions is an unconditional obligation of the Republic of Armenia,” Andriasyan said. “However, claimants are required to submit specific documents to receive timely payments, and this process is often inconsistent.”

He noted that the submission of documents is frequently irregular, causing delays in the transfer of funds by the Prime Minister's Office.

Until now, compensation payments have been carried out without a clear legal mechanism, which has repeatedly led to practical difficulties.

# Epstein Files: Did Convicted Sex Offender And Trafficker Visit Baku?

BAKU (JAMNews) — Millions of pages of documents linked to the case of the US financier Jeffrey Epstein, who was convicted of the sexual exploitation of minors, were recently published in the United States. Claims that Azerbaijan is mentioned in the material have become a major topic of public debate in the country.

There have also been rumors that Epstein may have visited Baku.

But do these extensive records — widely referred to as the “Epstein files” — actually confirm any link between Epstein and Azerbaijan? Or do the circulating claims lack documentary evidence?

It is also important to note that in all correspondence where Azerbaijan is mentioned, the references relate exclusively to politics.

Jeffrey Epstein was an American financier who was arrested several years ago on charges of the sexual exploitation of minors and human trafficking. He died by suicide in prison in 2019. But Epstein was not just a criminal. For decades, he built an extensive network of contacts that included politicians, members of royal families, billionaires and celebrities. This is why his case triggered widespread public outrage and sent shockwaves through political and social elites.

The term “Epstein files” refers to the disclosure by the US Department of Justice of investigative materials linked to Epstein and his criminal case. On January 30, 2026, the department released a vast archive under the Epstein Files Transparency Act.

The archive includes 3.5 million pages of documents, 2,000 videos and 180,000 photographs.

The files are wide-ranging in scope. They draw on court proceedings in Florida and New York, reports related to the investigation into Epstein's death, as well as the case of his former associate Ghislaine Maxwell. The material contains information about Epstein's international network, his personal correspondence, travel plans, witness testimony and investigative records.

Among the millions of pages released recently, several notable references linked to Azerbaijan have been identified.

In a number of emails written by Jeffrey Epstein over different years, Azerbaijan and Baku are mentioned. This has fueled claims that Epstein may have visited Baku and met with officials.

### August 2011: a plan to travel to Baku?

The documents include an email dated 30 August 2011, in which Epstein writes to a businessman from the United Arab Emirates, Sultan bin Sulayem: “Is your Azerbaijani friend flying to Paris, or shall we go to Baku this weekend?”

The exchange suggests that Epstein discussed the possibility of travelling to Baku with his associate and even asked about flights. However, no subsequent documents contain flight records or official data confirming that Epstein actually visited Baku that weekend.

It therefore appears likely that Epstein did not travel to Baku at that time.

### September 2011: the wedding of an “Azerbaijani friend”

The identity of the “Azerbaijani friend” mentioned in the email has also attracted attention. An examination of the materials indicates that the correspondence referred to a wedding ceremony scheduled for September 9, 2011 in Baku. On that day, the city hosted the wedding of Taleh Heydarov,

the son of Azerbaijan's minister for emergency situations, Kamaladdin Heydarov. The event was attended by figures from the country's political and business elite.

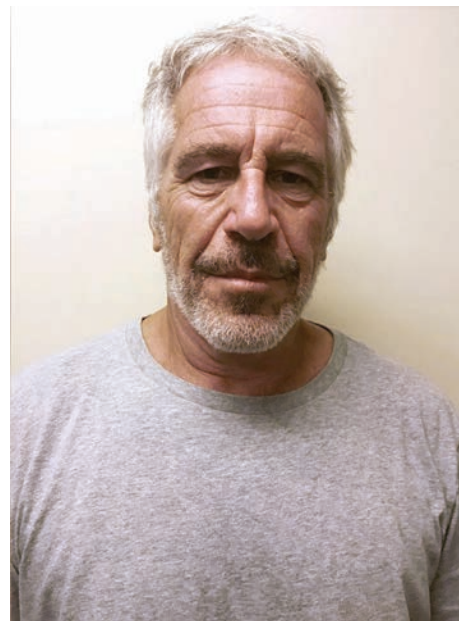
In his reply, Sultan bin Sulayem tells Epstein: “He is now preparing for his son's wedding. I will go on September 9 and then visit him again for a few more days on the 12th.” This confirms that bin Sulayem did travel to Baku to attend the wedding.

Epstein, however, appears not to have joined the trip. Had he done so, the materials would likely contain corresponding records. No such evidence has been found.

Another notable exchange between Jeffrey Epstein and Sultan bin Sulayem is dated September 19, 2015.

The Dubai-based businessman tells Epstein that he is visiting Baku, sends photographs of the city and shares his impressions.

“Baku is a very beautiful city — more beautiful than Paris, believe me. If you ever want to go there, I will join you. The president is a very good friend of mine. He is



very smart. He reminds me of Sheikh Mohammed,” he writes.

With this message, bin Sulayem signals that Azerbaijan's president, Ilham Aliyev, is a close acquaintance and suggests that a joint trip to Baku could be arranged at any time.

Epstein replies: “I can fly to Dubai on October 29, and then go from there?”

However, it is important to stress that there is no evidence confirming any subsequent visit by Epstein to Azerbaijan. In the available materials, Baku appears only as a potential destination discussed in correspondence, rather than a confirmed stop in Epstein's travels.

### The link between Sultan bin Sulayem and Aliyev

Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem is a prominent figure. He is the head of DP World, one of the world's largest logistics operators, and is closely connected to the ruling families of the United Arab Emirates.

Bin Sulayem does maintain friendly relations with President Ilham Aliyev, and the two have met repeatedly in recent years. Most recently, on 19 January this year, Aliyev held talks with bin Sulayem on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, where they discussed joint projects.

In this sense, the “very good friend” referred to in the email to Epstein does indeed appear to be the president of Azerbaijan.

### 2014: the Merante-Baku email and a planned visit by members of Congress

Another notable reference to Azerbaijan

in the Epstein files concerns a planned visit by members of the US Congress to Baku.

According to the documents, a trip by a group of American lawmakers to Azerbaijan was scheduled for May 21 to June 4, 2014. In the end, however, only one congressman agreed to take part, while the others declined. The materials show that Mark Epstein received an email marked Merante-Baku-Important and forwarded it to his brother, Jeffrey Epstein.

The email says Azerbaijani sponsors were unhappy with the lawmakers' refusal to travel and suggested inviting prominent figures from the media, finance, banking and education sectors instead. It also stresses that all travel expenses would be covered at first-class level.

These records shed light on the resources Azerbaijan devoted to lobbying efforts and so-called “image-building trips”. It later emerged that the visit was organized with the involvement of SOCAR through the firm AzPod. While in Baku, the delegation met members of the Milli Majlis, including the then foreign minister, Elmar Mammadyarov.

At the same time, the documents do not indicate that Jeffrey Epstein played a direct role in organizing the trip. It appears that Mark Epstein merely informed his brother, possibly in an effort to involve people from Epstein's circle.

### The “Epstein files” in Azerbaijani media

After references linked to Azerbaijan were identified in the Epstein case documents, local media outlets covered the story in markedly different ways.

Media close to the authorities either downplayed the Azerbaijani angle of the Epstein scandal or ignored it altogether. Instead, they focused on sensational details from the Epstein files that had no bearing on the country's domestic politics.

Many news websites and television channels, for example, circulated reports claiming that Jeffrey Epstein had obtained fragments of the Kaaba's covering and sent them to his villa. The documents do show that in 2017 Epstein acquired three fragments of the *kiswah* — the sacred cloth covering the Kaaba in Mecca — through contacts in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, registered them as works of art and shipped them to his residence in the US Virgin Islands.

Pro-government media also highlighted sections of the Epstein files related to Russia. Some outlets reported that Vladimir Putin was mentioned 1,056 times in the documents and that Russia appeared 9,629 times, as well as claims that Russia was “one of the channels through which women were supplied to Epstein”. Such assertions do appear in the materials as one of the investigative hypotheses.

At the same time, state media framed the story largely as a domestic political scandal in the United States, publishing articles along the lines of “the Epstein files fuel tensions between Donald Trump and Republicans”. This shifted attention away from Azerbaijan and presented the affair as a clash among major powers.

Overall, media in this camp paid little attention to the emails from Sultan bin Sulayem, which indirectly reference President Ilham Aliyev, or to the episode involving Elmar Mammadyarov. Instead, they published commentary portraying the Epstein case as part of a broader narrative about the “moral decay of Western elites”.



## Armenian Bank Faces EU Sanctions

BRUSSELS (Azatutyun) — An Armenian commercial bank is among entities blacklisted in a new round of economic sanctions against Russia proposed by the European Union’s executive body.

The 20th package of EU sanctions put forward by the European Commission late last week is meant to further complicate Russian exports of oil, gas, metals and other commodities. It also calls for punitive measures against 20 Russian banks and several banks in third countries accused of facilitating Russia’s foreign trade.

RFE/RL learned on Monday, February 9, that Armenia’s Unibank is one of those banks. The European Commission wants to freeze their assets and ban their



European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen

transactions in the EU. The sanctions proposed by it are expected to be approved by the bloc’s member states later this month. Armenian companies and individual entrepreneurs have taken advantage of the Western sanctions against Moscow by re-exporting various Western-manufactured goods to Russia. Also, Russia has exported large quantities of gold and diamonds to world markets via Armenia.

As a result, Russian-Armenian trade has skyrocketed since the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. This has been the main factor behind a robust growth of the Armenian economy registered in the last few years.

Increased cash flows from Russia have also greatly benefited the Armenian banks. They tripled their combined profits to a record 253 billion drams (\$665 million) in 2022. The figure fell slightly in 2023 but rose again in the following years.

Unibank is the country’s 12<sup>th</sup> largest bank by profit. It reported about 11.4 billion drams (\$30 million) in net earnings last year.

European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen

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## Vance Lands in Azerbaijan as Caucasus Peace Deal Visit Continues

BAKU (RFE/RL) — US Vice President JD Vance arrived in Azerbaijan on February 10 as he continues a trip to the Caucasus aimed at shoring up support for a US-brokered peace deal with Armenia and to push a strategic transit corridor Washington sees as central to reshaping trade, energy, and influence in the region.

Vance made the short flight from Yerevan to the Azerbaijani capital of Baku following two days of meetings with Armenian officials where he signed an agreement to cooperate in the civil nuclear sector that will allow up to \$5 billion in initial US exports to Armenia, plus an additional \$4 billion in longer-term fuel and maintenance contracts.

The vice president, the first sitting US vice president to ever visit Armenia, called the trip to Armenia “very productive” and said he’s “optimistic about the peace deal based on where we are compared to where we were just a few months ago.”

In June, Armenia signed a US-brokered a deal with Azerbaijan aiming to end more than 40 years of conflict over

the Karabakh region.

The centerpiece of the agreement is a proposed 43-kilometer road-and-rail corridor, to be called the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), that would run through Armenia and link Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave while opening a new East-West trade artery bypassing Russia and Iran.

Armenia and Azerbaijan had been locked in conflict since the late 1980s over Nagorno-Karabakh, a region internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan but long controlled by ethnic Armenian separatists.

In September 2023, Azerbaijan retook full control of Karabakh following a military offensive.

Last summer, leaders from the two countries agreed on a major deal — brokered by Washington — aimed at ending decades of conflict, including two full-scale wars.

The agreement gives the United States leasing rights to develop the transit corridor, which would run through southern Armenian territory along the border with Iran.

The corridor would eventually include a rail line, oil and gas lines, and fiberoptic lines, allowing for the movement of goods and eventually people.

Vance said “a lot of investment that’s going to come to Armenia because of some of the good deals that we’ve struck.”

Azerbaijani media reported Vance was holding a brief meeting with President Ilham Aliyev in Baku to start the second leg of the trip.

Ahead of Vance’s arrival, Aliyev said the visit is part of “a new era in bilateral relations which is very promising.”

The peace agreement has boosted Washington’s position in the region at a time when Russia’s influence has faced setbacks in Baku and Yerevan. Vance’s arrival also coincides with other regional developments -- such as US-Iran tensions amid ongoing peace talks in Oman and a new US-backed critical minerals initiative -- that analysts say has placed the South Caucasus at an unlikely nexus for US policy priorities.

(With reporting by Alex Raufoglu in Washington)

## Azerbaijani National Convicted in US of Healthcare Fraud

By Nate Ostiller

BAKU — A dual-citizen of Azerbaijan and the US has been convicted of conspiring to launder more than \$8 million in funds acquired from Medicare fraud at a New York City bank. Renat Abramov pleaded guilty to the charges on Tuesday, February 10; he now faces a prison sentence of up to 20 years.

Abramov, who worked as a bank manager in the New York City neighborhood of Sheepshead Bay, “used his position to aid a sophisticated international scheme,” the US Justice Department said.

He “was a member of a TCO [transnational criminal organization] that allegedly submitted more than \$10 billion in fraudulent Medicare claims by stealing the identities of over one million Americans, including elderly and disabled citizens in all 50 states.”

“Abramov helped execute the scheme by opening bank accounts for individuals — many not lawfully present in the United States — who posed as owners of fake medical equipment companies using fake corporate registration documents. The bank accounts were used to deposit fraudulently obtained insurance checks, which

appeared legitimate because they came from Medicare and established insurance companies. Once deposited, members of the TCO transferred the money into offshore accounts and cryptocurrency,” the Justice Department said.

Abramov’s conviction was “the first time the Health Care Fraud Unit has charged and convicted a former bank employee for conspiring to launder health care fraud proceeds.”

(This story was originally published on February 10 on the website [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org).)

## Former Karabakh Leaders Handed Long Sentences in Azerbaijan

SENTENCES, from page 1

They as well as Ruben Vardanyan, an Armenian-born billionaire and philanthropist, were captured by Azerbaijan right after its September 2023 military offensive that forced Karabakh’s entire population to flee to Armenia and restored Azerbaijani control over the region. Vardanyan, who is standing a separate trial, is expected to be sentenced to life in prison later this month.

The Azerbaijani court gave life sentences to Harutyunyan, Levon Mnatsakanyan, a former commander of Karabakh’s army, his ex-deputy Davit Manukyan as well as Davit Ishkhanyan and Davit Babayan, who served as the unrecognized republic’s parliament speaker and foreign minister respectively. Sahakyan and Ghukasyan were jailed for 20 years because of being over 65. All seven men have denied a long list of war crimes charges leveled against them.

The Azerbaijani authorities have not allowed independent media or observers to cover the trials. Vardanyan charged that they were accompanied by “egregious due process abuses” when he went on hunger strike in prison a year ago.

Siranush Sahakyan, a Yerevan-based lawyer representing Armenian prisoners in the European Court of Human Rights, said

that with its verdict the Azerbaijani court simply rubber-stamped decisions made by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

“These verdicts cannot practically hinder or prevent the repatriation of the Armenians [held in Azerbaijan] because this process has never been legal,” Sahakyan told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service. “The Azerbaijani courts have shown that this issue is highly political and they are incapable of ensuring a fair trial.”

The Armenian Apostolic Church was quick to condemn them and pledge to continue campaigning for the release of all Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan.

“Holy Etchmiadzin expresses its support to the Artsakh state figures held hostage, prisoners of war and their families,” read a statement released by the church’s Mother See.

Aliyev and Pashinyan again claimed to have established peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan when they received a UAE peace prize following their talks in Abu Dhabi. Gegham Manukyan, an Armenian opposition lawmaker and brother of the jailed Karabakh General Davit Manukyan, scoffed at the event.

“There is no other country in the world that has been humiliated in this way and

whose government is burying its head in the sand as if everything is alright,” said Manukyan.

Pashinyan’s government waited for weeks before criticizing the “mock trials” of the former Karabakh leaders a year ago. The Armenian premier claimed in January 2025 that an explicit condemnation would only harm the defendants. His critics insisted that he is simply afraid of angering Baku.

They have since continued to accuse Yerevan of doing little to secure the release of these and other Armenian prisoners. The total number of prisoners currently stands at 19.

Prospects for their release anytime soon remained uncertain even after the initialization of an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty in Washington last August. Neither the treaty nor a separate declaration signed by Aliyev and Pashinyan at the White House commits Baku to freeing them.

Armenia’s government pointedly declined to react on Friday to Azerbaijan’s lengthy prison sentences.

Only one of more than a dozen parliament deputies from Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party contacted by RFE/RL’s Armenian Service commented on it. The law-

maker, Vahagn Aleksanian, said only that Pashinyan’s government will continue to seek the release of all Armenian prisoners “without additional noise and publicity.”

The jail sentences were announced the day after Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev received a United Arab Emirates peace prize following fresh talks held in Abu Dhabi. They again claimed to have established peace between their nations.

“We have Nikol Pashinyan, who went [to the UAE] and became brothers with Aliyev the day before,” said Artur Khachatryan, a lawmaker representing the opposition Hayastan alliance. “They went on stage with their families, and 24 hours later Aliyev sentenced those people to life imprisonment.”

Khachatryan claimed that the Armenian premier has no desire to push for the release of the prisoners. Edmon Marukyan, the leader of the opposition Bright Armenia party formerly allied to Pashinyan, likewise blamed him for their captivity.

“It’s the last 35 years of Armenia’s life that have been sentenced to life in prison in Azerbaijan,” said Marukyan. “This is all you need to know about the so-called ‘peace process.’”





# Community News

## ANCA Demands Records on Dr. Oz's Anti-Armenian Video, as Schiff and Others Blast Oz

WASHINGTON — The Armenian National Committee of America filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services demanding transparency on who approved CMS Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz's video posts scapegoating Armenian Americans and what evidence, if any, he relied upon to defame an entire community.

The FOIA demands all records behind Dr. Oz's January 27–28, 2026 social media posts — including who wrote the scripts, who approved the content, what legal reviews were conducted, and what evidence, if any, supported the ethnic targeting of Armenian-owned businesses. The request also seeks records relating to any CMS or HHS investigations, audits, enforcement actions, or intelligence assessments allegedly cited as the basis for Dr. Oz's claims.

"Dr. Oz used the power granted him as a public servant — the platforms available to him as an employee of the U.S. government — to scapegoat California Armenians, a community with deep roots, a proud legacy, a century-long record of remarkable achievement across the Golden State," said ANCA Executive Director Aram Hamparian. "As Americans we have the right to know what's behind these reckless charges. What evidence, if any, he relied upon when defaming our community; who scripted this hateful video; and who, exactly, greenlighted it for posting on official U.S. government social media accounts. We deserve answers to each of these questions, and more."

The ANCA noted that Dr. Oz's video was filmed during an official CMS fraud-prevention tour in Los Angeles' Van Nuys neighborhood and posted through CMS-affiliated accounts. In the video, Dr. Oz claimed that "quite a bit" of hospice and home care fraud was run by the "Russian Armenian mafia," while referencing Armenian-language signage and asserting it "highlights the fact that this is an organized crime mafia deal," despite no verified evidence tying the featured Armenian bakery or surrounding community businesses to fraud.

ANCA's FOIA request follows the organization's January 30, 2026 civil-rights complaint to the HHS Office for Civil Rights (OCR) under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, alleging that Dr. Oz's official conduct constitutes national origin discrimination and creates a hostile environment for Armenian Americans in federally assisted health programs. California Governor Gavin Newsom has publicly condemned the claims as "baseless and racially charged," warning that such rhetoric targets Armenian Americans without substantiation and undermines trust in federally funded health services. He also filed a formal

see OZ, page 10



Sev Ohanian speaks at TEDxLittle Armenia

## TEDxLittle Armenia Showcases Hybridity Across Community

By Jackson Mills

LOS ANGELES (*Daily Trojan*) — In the first week Ani Adjemian went to UCLA, she said she came home crying every day because she couldn't find a place to belong. But Adjemian, now an attorney and Gould School of Law lecturer, said hearing a simple Armenian greeting, "barev," was all it took to make her feel like she belonged.

Fittingly, that was also the word she used to start TEDxLittle Armenia on January 23 at Bing Theatre, with nearly the entire building full. It ran from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., with TED talks from seven speakers.

The event's theme centered on hybridity. For speakers from a variety of industries, all with Armenian heritage, how could the various identities and geographies they existed within become a source of creativity?

TEDxLittle Armenia was a joint collaboration between the USC Institute of Armenian Studies and TEDxYerevan and was the first licensed diaspora chapter of TEDx.

Shushan Karapetian, director of the Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies, said in an interview with the *Daily Trojan* that a key feature of the event was its challenge to what people would expect when they related hybridity to the Armenian community.

"There's a public discourse of hybridity as an Achilles heel," Karapetian said. "And what I want [is] to turn that narrative on its head, and say this is actually our superpower."

Karapetian said that she felt like the event was particularly important for young audiences, who she said would get the opportunity to see an Armenian event where they'd rethink everything from artificial intelligence to the purpose of design.

"The expectation is that there's going to be a story of woe, and then there's going to be a global community that will rally around to patch that hole," Karapetian said. "Very rarely, is it: 'I'm gonna go and meet probably the most inspiring people I've met in my life, Armenian or non-Armenian.'"

The speakers ranged from startup founders to filmmakers, and the event included discussions on topics such as artificial intelligence, ecology and education.

Arousiak Gabrielian, co-founder and design director of Foreground Design Agency, challenged the audience to rethink how systems — especially natural ones — are represented and understood as static and unchanging.

"Maps don't just orient us," Gabrielian said. "They train our perception."

Gabrielian said her work emphasized the entanglement between humans and their environment, with projects that merge from wearable and edible landscapes to shiitake mushrooms that can be grown with human breath. This, Gabrielian said, was an attempt to see living systems as "relational."

"These ideas have been known by indigenous and land-based cultures throughout millennia, including our own ancestors of the Arax River Valley, who understood the river as alive and called her Mother Araks," Gabrielian said.

The event also featured Karen Khachikyan, co-founder and CEO of Robin the Robot — a company focused on using artificial intelligence to provide companionship to hospital patients. In an interview with the *Daily Trojan*, Khachikyan said hybridity is a vehicle for him and others to come to their "authentic self."

Sev Ohanian, a speaker at the event and the first Armenian American to receive a best-picture nomination for his work on "Sinners" (2025), spoke about his journey through filmmaking despite the lack of Armenian representation he initially found within the industry.

see TEDx, page 9

## AGBU Offers Cultural and Service Experience For Armenian Youth With the Discover Armenia Program

NEW YORK — The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) is proud to announce the return of its highly acclaimed Discover Armenia Program, an immersive summer experience designed to connect Armenian youth ages 15 to 18 from around the world with their peers and ancestral homeland.

Through a powerful blend of cultural exploration, meaningful community service, and adventure, the program offers a life-changing summer experience that helps Diaspora teens strengthen their Armenian identity while building lifelong friendships.

Launched in 2003, Discover Armenia has become one of AGBU's flagship youth initiatives, created for teens who have outgrown traditional summer camps but are ready for a purposeful, guided experience in Armenia. Participants travel across the country, explore historic and cultural landmarks, engage in hands-on workshops, and connect with peers from Armenia and the global Diaspora.

"At the heart of Discover Armenia is a commitment to helping young Armenians build authentic relationships - with one another and with their heritage," said Gayane Manukyan, Director of Diaspora Youth Programs at AGBU. "Through immersive experiences and close collaboration with local communities, the program encourages participants to deepen their sense of identity and become invested in Armenia's future."

The Discover Armenia Program offers unique opportunities to participants that stand out from other programs. In addition to the many iconic sites, other adventures include exploring Areni Cave, home to the world's oldest known winery, dating back over 6,000 years; the Wings of Tatev is the world's longest reversible cable car, leading to the stunning Tatev Monastery, an important historic and spiritual landmark, and ziplining at Yell Extreme Park, which offers a range of adrenaline-pumping activities.

A trip to Gyumri, Armenia's cultural capital, provide a deep dive into the city's artistic and historical richness. Participants explore the Kumayri district, where cobblestone streets lead to centuries-old architecture reflecting the resilience and character of the city. A visit to the Dzidzidtsyan Museum of Social Life and National Architecture offers insight into the daily lives of Gyumri's past generations, while the Aslamazyan Sisters Gallery showcases the city's vibrant artistic legacy. Through meaningful interactions with local craftsmen, painters, and musicians, participants experience firsthand the creativity and warmth that continue to define Gyumri today.

see AGBU, page 9





COMMUNITY NEWS

An Ecumenical Prayer for Christian Unity in New York

NEW YORK — On Thursday, January 29, an ecumenical prayer service at New York’s Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity brought together Christian leaders and faithful from numerous traditions to pray for unity and peace. The gathering formed part of the global “Week of Prayer for Christian Unity” observed annually by churches around the world.

Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan joined hierarchs and clergy from numerous Christian traditions for the service, which marked the 58th annual observance of the global prayer initiative. The gathering’s theme — “One Body, One

Spirit, One Hope” — was inspired by the words of St. Paul in Ephesians 4:4.

The Armenian Church was prominently represented through traditional prayers and sacred chants offered by participants from the Diocese, including members of the St. Vartan Cathedral Choir, who joined voices with the Holy Trinity Cathedral Choir in a moving musical witness to Christian unity.

Reflecting on the service, Bishop Mesrop said he was deeply encouraged by the shared prayer. “Hearing so many Christian voices lifted together was profoundly moving—many traditions united in one prayer, guided by one Spirit,” he said. “Moments

like these remind us that unity begins when we come together before God with humility and love.

The service was led by Archbishop Elpidophoros of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, and included participation by Cardinal Timothy Dolan of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Archbishop Daniel of Pamphilon, Bishop Peter Eaton, Bishop Katrina Foster, Bishop James Massa, Monsignor Robert Murphy, Fr. Simeon Odabashian, and Dr. Kirsten Guidero, among other clergy

and ecumenical leaders.

Bishop Mesrop also expressed gratitude for the strong presence of Armenian faithful, clergy, and seminarians who attended the service. “Our Diocese’s participation is an important witness to our commitment to Christian unity,” he said. “When we pray together, we begin to see one another not as separate institutions, but as members of the same Body of Christ, seeking healing, hope, and peace.”

The evening concluded with fellowship among participants, strengthening relationships among Christian communities throughout the region.

TEDxLittle Armenia in Los Angeles Showcases Hybridity Across Community

TEDx, from page 8

Ohanian initially pursued journalism, as he said he felt like it was a more practical path than filmmaking. But over time, Ohanian said that small, deeply personal film projects such as his film “My Big Fat Armenian Family” (2008) began to resonate with audiences far beyond his immediate community, so he switched.

Following the event’s theme of hybridity, Ohanian spoke to the challenges he faced growing up with the pressure to choose a “safer bet,” but also to the help his entire family gave him as his film profession started to grow.

“This is not a story about somebody who had nothing and made it work despite that. It’s a story about someone who had it the

whole time,” Ohanian said. “My Armenian background was never a disadvantage. It was a support to me the entire time.”

Maral Tavitian, managing director of the Institute of Armenian Studies, said the event’s location at Bing Theatre was meant to make the atmosphere of the campus accessible to everyone who came.

“We could have done this event anywhere in [L.A.], but we were very intentional about hosting on campus,” Tavitian said. “It’s important that our Armenian diaspora community comes to USC and experiences the atmosphere of the event on this campus.”

The event received a Certificate of Recognition from the City of Los Angeles, presented by City Councilmember Hugo Soto-Martínez, who represents Little Armenia on the City Council. The award said that

the event’s theme of hybrid identities captured the “diverse intersections of culture and experience,” representative of both the district and the city.

Kristine Sargsyan, founder of TEDxYerevan, said the goal for TEDx is to introduce ideas that are bigger than the speakers themselves, ones that open up “new pathways of thinking.” In an interview with the Daily Trojan, she said that the theme of hybridity was tied to how she had come to love Armenia itself.

“When I first met my diaspora friends, I think I learned to love Armenia thanks to them,” Sargsyan said. “Discovering Armenia from [the] outside in has been [a] very humbling experience for me, and I think we will be better off as Armenians and as humans if we just learn to see these different perspectives.”



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AGBU Offers Cultural and Service Experience for Armenian Youth With the Discover Armenia Program

AGBU, from page 8

Participants also travel to Dilijan, known as the “Switzerland of Armenia,” which offers a refreshing combination of nature, history, and culture. Exploring centuries-old monasteries of Haghartsin and Goshavank, teens learn about Armenia’s medieval history and the scholars who shaped its literary and religious traditions. Beyond its historical sites, Dilijan is a hub for arts, crafts, and environmental conservation. Here, participants interact with local artisans, discovering traditional woodworking and pottery techniques, and gain an understanding of sustainable tourism and nature preservation efforts, highlighting Dilijan’s commitment to conservation and eco-friendly development.

The journey continues through the breathtaking Lori region, where participants visit the Hovhannes Tumanyan House-Museum in Dsegh and explore the monasteries of Hagpat and Sanahin, gaining a deeper appreciation for Armenia’s cultural identity and timeless architectural treasures. To complete the experience, participants embrace the adventure of the homeland by overcoming the challenge of climbing Mount Aragats - building confidence, teamwork, and unforgettable memories in Armenia’s stunning highlands.

The program also includes expert-led workshops that bring Armenia’s rich cultural heritage to life. In the Armenian calligraphy workshop, participants learn the delicate strokes of the Armenian alphabet under the guidance of skilled calligraphers. The khachkar carving session provides hands-on experience with tuff stone, as expert stone carvers teach the techniques behind one of Armenia’s most iconic art forms. Culinary enthusiasts engage in tra-

ditional Armenian cooking, preparing dishes such as dolma, gata, and lavash while exploring the deep cultural significance behind Armenian cuisine.

Alongside exploration, Discover Armenia places strong emphasis on service and meaningful engagement with local communities. Participants contribute to community service projects that may include supporting renovation initiatives that transform community spaces into youth centers, participating in eco clean-up efforts to protect Armenia’s natural environment, and connecting with vulnerable communities through volunteer outreach. These experiences also provide participants with 20 to 60 community service hours, depending on the session. Many participants describe some of the most impactful moments as those spent visiting seniors at AGBU Senior Dining Centers and engaging with displaced families and children from Artsakh, offering companionship, support, and hope through simple acts of care.

By the end of the program, participants leave Armenia with far more than memories. They return home with a deeper sense of identity, a stronger bond with Armenia, and the confidence that their actions can create meaningful change.

Discover Armenia is open to young Armenians worldwide, with applications available on the official AGBU website. Spring dates are March 28 - April 6, Summer Session 1 dates are June 25 - July 13, and Summer Session 2 dates are July 28 - August 15. As spots are limited and sessions fill quickly, interested individuals are encouraged to apply early.

For more information about Discover Armenia and how to apply, please visit <https://agbu.org/discover-armenia>.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

ANCA Demands Records on Dr. Oz’s Anti-Armenian Video, as Schiff and Others Blast Oz

OZ, from page 8  
civil rights complaint with the Department of Health and Human Services. The FOIA filing adds legal pressure as U.S. Senator Adam Schiff (D-CA) pledged to conduct oversight and Congressional Armenian Caucus Co-Chairs called for accountability over Dr. Oz’s “racist” targeting of Armenian-owned businesses.

“Federal officials have a duty to prosecute crimes, not communities,” Hamparian added. “This FOIA will expose who scripted this hate, who approved it, and the full story behind Dr. Oz’s defamation of Armenian Americans.”

Armenian Assembly Condemns Statement

On January 28 Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) condemned targeted attacks on ethnic minorities and the Armenian community. In their letter to Oz, Co-Chairs Talin Yacoubian and Oscar Tatosian, categorically rejected recent remarks that selectively target Armenian Americans.

In the letter dated January 28, the Assembly acknowledged the Administration’s responsibility to address waste, fraud, and abuse, while underscoring that such efforts must not rely on racism and unjust stereotyping.

The Assembly noted that Dr. Oz’s recent statements referring to “Armenian gangs” and “mafia” are “deeply troubling” and “inflicts grave injustice on Armenian Americans who have proudly served this nation and their communities with distinction,” from military service to public office and business to philanthropy.

“Let us be clear: no one condones fraud or criminal behavior of any kind,” the letter states. “But neither can we accept the painting of Armenian Americans as presumptive criminals based on ethnicity. We categorically reject this kind of racism and stereotyping and urge you to reconsider these hurtful and divisive statements.”

Schiff Demands Independent Review

U.S. Senator Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) is demanding an independent review into Ad-

ministrator for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Mehmet Oz’s racist and baseless targeting of Armenian Americans in Los Angeles.

“I strongly urge you to open an independent investigation into this incident, which should include an inquiry into misuse of taxpayer dollars and flagrant targeting of communities based on ethnicity. These allegations peddle a racist conspiracy about California’s Armenian American community and undermine Armenian Americans’ civil rights,” Schiff wrote.

In a letter to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Inspector General T. March Bell, Senator Schiff underscored that he takes allegations of fraud very seriously, but that singling out one community and labelling it as a culprit is no way to identify fraud – it’s indiscriminate slander. Schiff has been a strong champion for the Armenian American community in Congress, representing the largest community of Armenian Americans anywhere in the country for more than two decades.

The full text of the letter follows:  
Dear Inspector General Bell:

I write today regarding Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz’s video, which was posted on an official government social media account on January 27, 2026. In this video, Administrator Oz accuses businesses owned by Armenian Americans in the Van Nuys neighborhood of Los Angeles of being fronts for a \$3.5 billion hospice fraud scheme and implies that the Armenian script on the signage of a popular bakery indicates its affiliation with the “Russian, Armenian mafia.” The video also includes the blurred out faces of people on the balcony of a storefront with Armenian script, implying their participation in fraudulent activity. I strongly urge you to open an independent investigation into this incident, which should include an inquiry into misuse of taxpayer dollars and flagrant targeting of communities based on ethnicity.

These allegations peddle a racist conspir-

acy about California’s Armenian American community and undermine Armenian Americans’ civil rights. California is home to nearly 250,000 Armenian Americans — more than half of the Armenian diaspora in the United States. This community has been subject to discrimination and the deep pain of historical and ongoing injustices. To suggest markers of Armenian culture, language, and identity are indicative of criminality underscores a discriminatory motive that could taint any investigation into fraud and incite the further demonization of the community. The Administrator’s inappropriate amplification of historical tropes and stereotypes in service of the Administration’s agenda is an egregious misuse of official resources and communication channels.

As the top official at CMS, the Administrator’s comments risk real-world consequences for the health and wellbeing of Armenian Americans. In 2024, CMS spending through Medicare, Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) amounted to \$1.7 trillion – roughly one-fourth of the federal budget. As the agency tasked with overseeing such a massive portion of U.S. spending, actions and statements by the CMS Administrator have an outsized influence on the entire U.S. health care system. By making baseless, incendiary claims about all Armenian Americans, the Administrator has pitted the community against the U.S. health care system, an outcome that could chill providers’ willingness to engage with the community.

As a former federal prosecutor in Los Angeles who investigated and prosecuted fraud against the federal government, I take allegations of fraud very seriously. Anyone engaged in fraud should be investigated and prosecuted. But to single out one community and label it as a culprit is no way to identify fraud; it is indiscriminate slander instead. If Administrator Oz has concerns, I stand ready to work with him, as I have worked with stakeholders in the state of California to achieve our oversight responsibilities. However, we should not tolerate the reckless and

abhorrent targeting of the Armenian American community.

In light of the severity of the allegations made against the Armenian American community, I urge you to open an investigation into Administrator’s Oz’s actions described above. I request responses to the following questions by February 20, 2026:

Did Administrator Oz use taxpayer dollars to fund his visit to Van Nuys? And did Administrator Oz or his staff perform any work outside of the visit itself?

Has CMS conducted an official investigation into hospice fraud in the Van Nuys neighborhood of Los Angeles, California? If so, were those results shared with the Department of Justice prior to Administrator Oz’s visit?

Is it standard practice for the CMS Administrator to visit sites under investigation or suspected of participating in fraud?

What evidence does CMS have that widespread hospice and home care fraud is being committed in Van Nuys? How did CMS and its staff identify the 42 hospice centers in the video as potentially engaging in fraud?

Did Administrator Oz violate any HHS policies which prohibit employees from engaging in discriminatory behavior toward individuals or groups based on their ancestry or ethnic background?

On what basis, apart from ethnic stereotyping, did Administrator Oz link Armenian script with the “Russian, Armenian mafia?” What information was provided to the Administrator to back up those serious allegations, and how was it vetted?

I urge OIG to investigate the Administrator’s actions and help in ending these attacks against the Armenian American community. The Armenian American community in Los Angeles has contributed so much to Southern California with their culture and determination to forge new lives for themselves and their families after unspeakable horrors. I welcome any serious effort to combat waste, fraud and abuse, but the rule of law requires that it be based on evidence, not language, culture, or ethnicity.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

# 4th Annual Khash Breakfast Brings Community Together

HAVERHILL, Mass. — On Saturday, January 24, Holy Archangels Armenian Church of St. Michael and St. Gabriel in Haverhill, hosted its 4th Annual Traditional Khash Breakfast, welcoming more than 120 attendees for a morning of fellowship, tradition, and community.

The event, once again organized and hosted by the members of the church’s Men’s Club, brought together parishioners and guests from across the MetroWest and Merrimack Valley regions. Also welcomed by Fr. Vard Gyozyan and Holy Archangels were clergy from around



Clergymen, from left, Fr. Sevak Gabrielyan, Fr. Tadeos Barseghyan, Fr. Vard Gyozyan, Fr. Stephan Baljian



Organizer Ervant Kibarian enjoying a dance with his wife Anahit



Picture station

Boston and Rhode Island, seminarians from St. Nersess Armenian Seminary in New York, and many members of the Armenian community who serve as ambassadors for numerous organizations both locally and beyond.

Since its inaugural year, when approximately 50 guests attended, the Khash Breakfast has continued to grow steadily in size and popularity. Each year reflects the community’s increasing enthusiasm for this cherished tradition.

When asked about the event’s continued success, organizing committee member Ervant Kibarian pointed to a simple but powerful reason: everyone’s shared focus on being a gracious host. This sentiment resonates deeply within Armenian culture, where honoring guests through generosity and a bountiful table is both tradition and pride. Most importantly, it has allowed the group to help its newly consecrated sanctuary as well as to help in our homeland both through the efforts of established networks as well as directly supporting deserving families.

Guests were treated to an abundant and varied spread of food, highlighted by an impressive dessert table that left little room for the imagination — or even for the tablecloth to be seen. Simply put, the table was overflowing, a visual and culinary testament to Armenian hospitality.

Adding to the festive atmosphere was the return of Sevan Band, whose members once again volunteered their talents. Their music helped elevate the celebration, making the past two years’ breakfasts especially memorable.

Traditionally held during the colder months and often attended primarily by men, the Khash Breakfast has evolved into a gathering that welcomes everyone. Its growing inclusivity and joyful spirit continue to make it a highlight of the church’s annual calendar.



Seminarians and young Armenians singing

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25

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13

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OBITUARY

# Robert Serabian

## Environmental Engineer with Deep Love of Church

HAVERHILL — Robert “Bob” Serabian, 73, a lifelong resident of Haverhill, passed away unexpectedly on February 1 at his residence.

He was born in Haverhill on November 29, 1952, son of the late Charles and Beatrice (Mantarian) Serabian. Robert was a graduate of Haverhill High School and UMASS with an engineering degree. He was an environmental engineer of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for many years.

He was a dedicated and lifelong member of the Holy Archangels Armenian Church, St. Michael & St. Gabriel in Haverhill. From his earliest days, the Church was not simply a place he attended, but it was the center of his life. Born to parents who were pillars of St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church in Haverhill, Robert was raised with a strong love for the Church and its traditions. Alongside his brothers Richard and Paul, he faithfully attended Sunday School and Armenian School, learning not only the language and faith of his ancestors, but also the responsibility of stewardship and service. As he grew older, that foundation blossomed into lifelong involvement through ACYOA (youth group), Parish Council, Men’s Club, and the Building Committee.

Robert’s joy for parish life was most

visible during the Holy Archangels Food Festivals. These events were not just fundraisers for him; they were celebrations of community. He never missed a planning meeting, proudly handled public relations, and made sure everything was done with care and excellence. He always planned his schedule so he could be present, because for Robert, the Church came first.

When St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church of Haverhill and Holy Cross Armenian Church of Lawrence began the difficult but hopeful journey of combining their resources, Robert was among the first to step forward. He believed deeply in the vision, worked tirelessly through the challenges, and was instrumental in seeing the process through to completion. His commitment helped lay the groundwork for Hye Pointe that would eventually become Holy Archangels Armenian Church, St. Michael and St. Gabriel.

In 2024, Robert was named one of 16 Godfathers of the Sanctuary, a moment of profound pride and joy for him. To witness the Consecration of the Sanctuary was the



fulfillment of years of prayer, sacrifice, and hands-on dedication. He stood in that sacred space knowing he had given his heart, time, and strength to build a spiritual home for generations to come.

Robert’s care for the Church extended far beyond meetings and events. Several times a week, he would stop by to check the kitchen, the generator, the parking lot, the winter stakes, and the small cracks that needed sealing. Nothing was too minor. To Robert, caring for the Church meant caring for every detail, because this was God’s house. He will be missed by his Parish Council members, his fellow committee members, and by the entire Church Family. For Robert, the Church was not just a community; it was his family. These were the people he served, stood beside, and loved as his own, and they, in turn, loved him dearly.

As the son of Armenian Genocide survivors, Robert carried a deep sense of responsibility to remember, educate, and advocate. He was a passionate voice for Armenian Genocide awareness, attending State House commemorations in Boston, participating in mayoral proclamations in Haverhill, and contributing through church programs and commentaries. For many years, he represented Holy Archangels on the Boston Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee, ensuring that memory was preserved and truth was spoken.

Robert loved to take walks on the beach, attend several Armenian food festivals, and also other ethnic events and festivals.

Reading and writing were his passions. He wrote articles for the church about the events and always took pride in them. He used to say, “I am not a writer, and I am just an engineer.”

Robert’s life was one of quiet faithfulness, unwavering presence, and sacrificial love. He did not seek recognition; he simply showed up, again and again, because he believed in the Church, in community, and in honoring the legacy entrusted to him.

He was the brother of the late Richard Serabian, who passed away in 2012, and Paul Serabian, who passed away in 2019.

He is survived by his companion Armine Assadourian, Montreal, Canada; cousin Edward Z. Mazmanian and his wife Evelyn of Chelmsford, MA; June (Mazmanian) Pham, Melrose, MA; and many other family and friends.

Relatives and friends are respectfully invited to attend the calling hours on Wednesday, February 11, from 4-6 p.m. at the, MA 01835. His funeral service was held on Thursday, February 12 at Holy Archangels Armenian Church, 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill. Interment followed in the Linwood Cemetery, Haverhill. Arrangements are by the H.L. Farmer & Sons Funeral Homes, Bradford-Haverhill.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Holy Archangels Armenian Church at <https://www.hypointearmenianchurch.org/>, or a check can be mailed to the church at 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill, MA, 10835. Please make checks payable to Holy Archangels.

# George H. Boole, Jr.

## Active Member of Armenian Memorial Church

WELLESLEY, Mass. — George H. Boole, Jr. of Wellesley, formerly of Wattertown, Waltham and Brookline, passed away peacefully on February 1, at age 97.

George is survived by his three children, Philip Boole (Kathryn) of Medfield; Donna Boole Yerganian (Richard) of Medfield; and Dana Boole (Lauren) of Raleigh, NC. George was the adored Papa to seven grandchildren: Sarah Boole Murphy (Stephen) of Boston; Matthew Boole (Lee) of New Canaan, CT; Eric Boole (Allie) of New York, NY; Nicole Yerganian Woeste (Matthew) of Darien, CT; Scott Yerganian (Christine) of Newton; Kelsey Boole Owen

(Brewer) of Raleigh, NC; and Taylor Boole of New York, NY. Finally, he is survived by nine great-grandchildren; his sister-in-law Astrid Bozkurtian of Belmont, as well as his nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his wife of 68 years, Betty (Papazian), brothers Leon and Philip, and sister Elaine.

George was born and raised in Mission Hill (Boston) to George and Victoria Boole. He graduated from what is now called the John D. O’Bryant School of Math and Science. After high school, he enlisted in the Army and was stationed in Japan during the occupation period.

He graduated from Clark University, where he met Betty and made many lifelong friends.

He was proud of his Armenian heritage and an active member of the Armenian Memorial Church, and other Armenian organizations.

George led human resources at Star Market for many years. He was a great judge of character and provided employment opportunities at all levels within the company. He was a Dale Carnegie instructor and enjoyed developing students’ communication skills.

During retirement, George enjoyed outdoor activities at his home in Grantham, NH, especially golf and cross-country skiing, and covertly chopping down trees to improve his view of the 8th hole! Most of

all, the couple loved hosting family and friends.

A funeral service took place on Wednesday, February 11, at Armenian Memorial Church. Burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to the Armenian Memorial Church ([armenianmemorialchurch.org/simplechurch](http://armenianmemorialchurch.org/simplechurch)), Clark University ([clarku.edu/give](http://clarku.edu/give)) or Special Olympics MA ([specialolympicsma.org/](http://specialolympicsma.org/))

# Ed Iskenderian, the ‘Camfather’

## Hot Rod Engineer

LOS ANGELES — Ed “Isky” Iskenderian, one of the most influential figures in American hot-rodding and automotive performance history, died on February 4 in Los Angeles. He was 104 years old.

Born July 10, 1921, in Tulare County, Calif., to Armenian immigrant parents, Iskenderian grew up fascinated by mechanical devices and speed. His family moved to Los Angeles after early setbacks in their Central California vineyards.

Iskenderian attended Los Angeles Polytechnic High School, and while he was still in school, he built and raced a customized Model T Ford roadster, foreshadowing a lifetime devoted to automotive innovation. He was one of the hot rod pioneers who raced in the dry lakebeds of California’s Mojave Desert.

At the outset of World War II, Iskenderian enlisted in the United States Army Air Forces, serving with the Air Transport Command in the Pacific Theatre. His wartime service broadened his technical skills and deepened his interest in high-performance machinery.

After the war, he returned to California and founded what would become Isky Racing Cams. His innovative company got its start with a single converted cam-grinding machine as existing companies couldn’t provide the camshaft he needed to increase his car’s speed. His camshaft designs soon



revolutionized performance engineering. Iskenderian’s innovations included high-performance camshaft profiles and early use of computer-aided design. He was also the first to offer complete valve-train component sets.

Nicknamed the “Camfather,” Iskenderian made products that powered everything from land speed record cars and Indy racers to Top Fuel dragsters. Legends such as Don Garlits, Richard Petty, and Don Prudhomme counted among those who used his components, and he helped pioneer marketing strategies that made performance parts a cultural staple.

In 1963, Iskenderian was a founding member and first president of the organization now known as the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA), helping unify and professionalize the automotive aftermarket industry.

His career brought numerous honors, including induction into the SEMA Hall of Fame and the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America. In 1985 he was named one of Chevrolet’s “Legends of Performance.”

Iskenderian was predeceased by his wife, Alice, in 2024. Survivors include his children, Richard, Timothy, and Amy; eight grandchildren; his brother, Ben; and a wide extended family of friends, racers, and colleagues.

James “Jack” Giragosian, CPC

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# Arts & Culture

## New Western Armenian Poetry Program Launches Quarter Tone Poets

A new literary initiative dedicated to innovative Western Armenian poetry is under way for the 2025–2026 academic year. Quarter Tone Poets // Քվարտոնի Չայն Բանաստեղծներ (QTP) is a multidisciplinary poetry program that promotes and celebrates contemporary literary expression in Western Armenian by exploring the musicality of language and the creative possibilities that emerge through music.

QTP seeks to cultivate a community that is inclusive, accessible, innovative, and enjoyable. The program strives to maintain an open mind to the many ways that linguistic expression can manifest itself, and is committed to promoting authentic self-expression as an essential path toward cultural progress and evolution.

QTP offers a range of artistic and professional opportunities, including a series of seven poetry workshops, a print and digital poetry anthology, a poetry contest with cash prizes, and a music video project integrating poetry with oud and other Armenian folk instruments. Together, these components are designed to support both emerging and established writers while expanding the expressive possibilities of Western Armenian literature. Workshops have thus far taken place with Armenian writing classes at UCLA and UC Berkeley. A spring workshop is planned to take place in New York City, with other gatherings



The UC Berkeley program in November

in development for Beirut, Buenos Aires, Oakland, and beyond. To explore a workshop with your community, please connect via the contact form at <https://www.quartertonepoets.org/faq-contact>.

Submissions from writers of all levels are now open for the Quarter Tone Poets Anthology, a print and digital publication that will showcase the discoveries, voices, and complexities of the program’s creative community. All poems submitted for the anthology will also be considered for the accompanying poetry contest, which will award three cash prizes: first place: \$1,000 USD; second place \$700 USD; third place \$300 USD.

The Quarter Tone Poets program is supported by a Western Armenian culture grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and is led by Glendale’s inaugural Poet Laureate and UCLA faculty member Raffi Joe Wartanian.

Submission deadline: June 1, 2026, by 11:59 pm PST



Khachatur Badalyan as Prince in Rusalka.

## Khachatur Badalyan

### The Armenian Voice of Russian Opera

YEREVAN/MOSCOW — Khachatur Badalyan (born 1982, Ordzhonikidze, currently - Vladikavkaz) is a Russian operatic tenor and a soloist of the Novaya Opera Theatre in Moscow (since 2007, with a break) and the Mariinsky Theatre (since 2012). Born into a family of academics, he moved to Rostov-on-Don in 1996, initially studying economics before turning to music and enrolling at the Rostov State Conservatory. He also attended master classes with leading international opera singers.

From 2004 to 2006, Badalyan was a soloist of the Rostov Regional Philharmonic. He has performed at major Russian stages, including the Bolshoi Theatre, where he sang Rodolfo (La Bohème) and Vaudémont (Iolanta).

Badalyan is a laureate of the Luciano Pavarotti International Tenor Competition in Saint Petersburg (2008) and the winner of the Galina Vishnevskaya International Opera Competition in Moscow (2010). His international appearances include the Puccini Festival in Torre del Lago (2017), where he performed Alfredo in La Traviata. His repertoire features leading tenor roles such as Rodolfo, Alfredo, Don José (Carmen), Faust, Foresto (Attila), Charles VII (The Maid of Orleans), and Vladimir Igorevich (Prince Igor).

**Dear Khachatur, in 2013, a critic wrote about you that you were more of a chamber singer than an opera singer. Perhaps he was strongly influenced by your performance at the Luciano Pavarotti Tenor Competition, where you received a special prize for the best performance of Neapolitan songs. However, you have successfully established yourself in opera. How do you respond to such an opinion?**

Criticism is always very subjective. My opera debut was in the role of Lohengrin in Wagner’s opera of the same name, at the age of 25. I have performed many other opera roles on the world’s largest opera stages. A singer’s voice is always developing. With age, the voice becomes bigger and stronger. I would even say that I regret having so few chamber works in my repertoire, because I am more often invited to perform large-scale works.

**What role does knowledge of languages play for a classical singer?**

Knowledge of languages is very important for opera singers. I speak English and Italian fluently, and French a little less well. For opera, Italian is the most suitable language. It has bright, clear, and close vowels, which are important for singing in order not to strain the voice. These vowels give the singer the most vivid and beautiful timbre. Consonants in Italian are soft, and the correct combination of vowels and consonants creates the Italian legato — this is exactly the smooth, connected sound of the voice. Next, I would place French. It has nasal vowels that you need to learn to sing. German is more difficult for singing; German legato is different from the classical Italian school. In German, consonants play a very important role. I would say this is a higher level of vocal mastery: when you already know how to sing vowels, you can maintain legato even through hard consonants. Russian vowels are deeper. But since I have spoken Russian since childhood, of course, it comes naturally to me.

**Apart from the classical repertoire, you have also performed in contemporary opera productions. How close do you feel to contemporary opera — is it a matter of artistic interest or more of a professional necessity?**

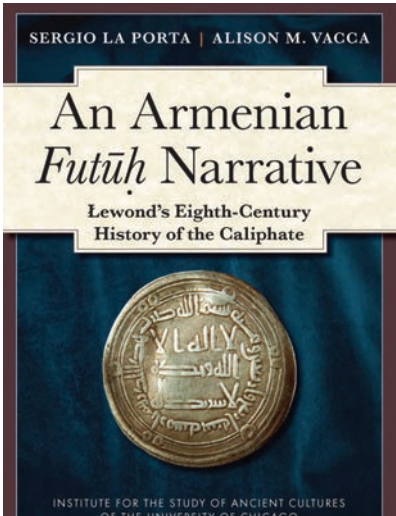
Yes, I have participated in many contemporary productions, and probably even more than classical ones nowadays. I think this is because audiences are accustomed to cinema, the internet is full of interesting content, and AI is everywhere. A traditional classical production can only attract audiences in very wealthy theaters that can afford elaborate, colorful stagings with embroidered costumes, huge expensive sets, and world-class singers. Less wealthy theaters often appeal to audiences by creating contemporary, unusual productions that bring something new.

see OPERA, page ?

## NAASR Announces Winners of Dr. Sona Aronian Armenian Studies Book Prizes

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) is pleased to announce the 2025 Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prizes for Excellence in Armenian Studies, awarded to Dr. Boris Adjemian for *The Brass Band of the King: Armenians in Ethiopia* (I.B. Tauris) and Drs. Sergio La Porta and Alison M. Vacca for *An Armenian Futuh Narrative: Lewond’s Eighth-Century History of the Caliphate* (Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, University of Chicago). The 2025 awards are for books with a 2024 publication date.

Boris Adjemian is the director of the AGBU Nubar Library, France. He holds a PhD in history from École des Hautes Études en Sciences Socia-



les (EHESS), France, and Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale,” Italy. He is the co-editor of the academic journal *Études arméniennes contemporaines* and his other publications include *Les Petites Arménies De La Vallée Du Rhône: Histoire et mémoire des immigrations arméniennes en France*.

*The Brass Band of the King*, which is part of the Armenians in the Modern and Early Modern World series edited by Dr. Bedross Der Matossian, makes a significant contribution to advancing knowledge about a less-well-known diasporan community with a rich and fascinating history. Drawing on a wide range of sources, Adjemian explores the Armenian community of Ethiopia and the astonishing role of the Armenians in their host country, bringing to light the political and cultural importance of a community that has long been ignored and has almost vanished.

Adjemian wrote, “I am deeply honored to have my work acknowledged and awarded the Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prize for Excellence in Armenian Studies. The support of NAASR was crucial in enabling me to translate my book into English, and I am grateful for this further recognition. Thanks to this support, the Ethio-Armenian epic, which was essentially transmitted orally and teeming with extraordinary events and characters, has now been made accessible to a wider readership and audience. Seeing this unique Armenian diaspora community’s history recognized for its originality is a tremendous reward for me.”

see AWARDS, page ?



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Dreams Gather Here Opens at ReflectSpace

GLENDAL — ReflectSpace at Glendale Central Library is presenting “Dreams Gather Here,” a solo exhibition by Rachel Hakimian Emenaker, on view from February 17 through April 26. The exhibition explores how the cultural memory of diasporic communities is preserved in the history of material objects. Moving across geographies that include Armenia, Lebanon, Russia, South America, and the United States, Emenaker’s work reflects on how people, objects, and gestures carry memory through time, forming the foundations of new futures and new cities.

Emenaker is a Los Angeles-based artist



Rachel Hakimian Emenaker, *Traces*, Batik on canvas, 67 x 118 inches, 2025

working across installation, craft, sculp-



Rachel Hakimian Emenake

ture, painting, sound and textiles blending Eastern and Western art and craft traditions. She earned her MFA from UCLA. Her work has been presented in solo exhibitions at Grand Central Arts Center, Luce Gallery in Turin, UCLA Broad Art Center, Guest House in Inglewood, the American University of Armenia, and Earl and Virginia Green Gallery, as well as multiple group exhibitions in Southern California. She received the 2024 Dedalus MFA Fellowship and the 2023 UCLA Elaine Krown Klein Fine Arts Scholarship.

With an American father and a Syrian-Armenian mother, Emenaker’s childhood was spent in Suriname (South America) and Russia. She grew up multilingual and multicultural, immersed in Dutch, Russian, Armenian, American, and Surinamese cultures. She moved to the United States as an adult to start her university education in art.

Employing batik (wax and dye), sculp-

ture, tile, and other media, Emenaker’s work is a meditation on diasporic architecture. Fragments, inherited gestures, and long-traveled materials converge in sculptural and installation-based works that speak directly to communities like Los Angeles, Moscow, Kessab, and Van — cities that witness, absorb, and hold countless migratory stories and dreams.

“For communities shaped by migration, grief, and rupture, dreaming can be a way of re-remembering and reimagining,” says Emenaker. “Dreams often become portable homes, a place to rest when permanence is impossible.”

An opening reception with the artist will be held on Saturday, February 28, from 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. at ReflectSpace, located inside Central Library 222 East Harvard Street, and an artist’s talk will be held in the same place on Tuesday, April 21, at 6:30 p.m. For more information, visit [ReflectSpace.org](https://ReflectSpace.org).

## Khachatur Badalyan: The Armenian Voice of Russian Opera

OPERA, from page 13

For me personally, the most important thing is that everything is suitable for singing, that nothing is vulgar or obscene, and that the production does not contradict the opera’s story or the composer’s intention.

**Many years ago, when I sang tenor in a chamber choir myself, I often heard jokes about tenors. How do you feel about them? And if positively, could you share one?**

There’s a stereotype that for tenors nothing is more important than their own voice, and that tenors are often not very bright. I think this comes from the fact that singing as a tenor is harder than other voice types. Tenors always have very challenging parts, usually the lead roles. There are many high notes and a lot of responsibility. From my experience, the most technically skilled singers are usually tenors, because if you succeed as a tenor, you’ve mastered the subtleties of vocal technique.

Here’s a joke I remember: In an Italian village, a boy was born who, instead of crying, immediately began to draw out a single word—“una... uuuuna.” His parents took him to the local doctor, asking him to remove part of his brain, as such an “intellectual” was not needed in a simple village family. After the operation, the boy woke up and again began to draw out “una... uuuuna.” The doctor removed a little more brain tissue, leaving only a small piece. The whole village gathered to see what

would happen. The boy woke up, looked around, started “Una... uuuuna” again—and suddenly sang “Una furtiva lagrima” (we laugh). By the way, orchestra players have just as many jokes about violists!

**Khachatur, you always seem to be in excellent physical shape, even though tenors are often stereotyped as chubby. How important is physical fitness for a classical singer?**

Physical fitness is very important for opera singers. Singing on stage involves a lot of movement. Sometimes you have to sing right after running, or even carry your partner in your arms while maintaining proper breathing. I practiced Taekwondo and Aikido for many years, then bodybuilding, and now I enjoy boxing. The main thing for vocalists is not to overstrain the abdominal muscles, but in general, sport is always beneficial.

**Was it difficult for a young singer with a non-Russian name and surname to establish himself in the Russian capital?**

I did not face such problems. In Russia, Armenians are loved and respected. There is a very large Armenian community in Russia. Armenians have always been known as a talented and hardworking people. Since the late 18th century, Empress Catherine II encouraged the resettlement of Armenians to the south of the Russian Empire to develop crafts. Armenians founded the city of Nor Nakhichevan (now part of Rostov-on-Don) and several other villages.

As for musicians, one can recall the talented Lisitsian family, as well as my dear colleagues of international fame such as Kristina Mkhitarian, Anna Aglatova, and others.

**Do you include Armenian songs in your chamber repertoire?**

When I lived and studied in Rostov-on-Don, I sang small cycles of Komitas’ works. I love his music very much and try to include some pieces in my solo concerts.

**In North Ossetia there has long been a significant Armenian community. How long has your family lived there, and do you preserve Armenian traditions?**

My grandfather Khachatur Badalyan was originally from the village of Gemur in the Shahbuz district of the Azerbaijan SSR. After the end of the Great Patriotic War (World War II), he studied in Moscow at the Frunze Academy and rose to the rank of colonel. Later, after serving in Germany, he moved with his family to the city of Ordzhonikidze (now Vladikavkaz), where my parents met. My mother’s family had already been living there for many years. Even today, many relatives still live there. Armenian traditions are always preserved. I was baptized in the Armenian Church in Vladikavkaz. All Armenian holidays and celebrations are always observed.

**Do you feel (or do others notice) Armenian temperament in your singing?**

Of course. My temperament helps me in roles like José in Carmen or Turiddu in Ca-

valleria Rusticana, among others. But it’s also important to control yourself and not get carried away, in order to keep a clear mind and protect your voice.

**If I’m not mistaken, you performed in Yerevan last year.**

Yes, I have been fortunate to perform in Yerevan almost every year. It began with the anniversary of the great Armenian tenor Gegham Grigoryan, where I was invited to sing. Since then, I have performed many operas there, including La Traviata, several productions of Carmen, and Turandot. I am always happy to visit my historical homeland, and I especially love sunny Yerevan.

In conclusion, I would add that music is the best diplomat. Despite political conflicts, musicians have always been and will always be a connecting link for the world. Unfortunately, in recent years, Russian singers—including those of Armenian descent—have found it harder to perform abroad due to sanctions. I sincerely hope this will improve soon. I know this interview will also be published in the United States, where I had the pleasure of performing the role of the Prince in Rusalka by Dvořák in Minnesota. Wherever I perform in the world, it is always a great joy when Armenians in the audience come to congratulate me after the performance.

**Thank you for your answers, Khachatur, and we hope to see you again on the Yerevan stage!**





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



## Claudia Roden's Armenian Kofta with Mashed Potato, Pine Nuts, and Raisins

Born in 1936 to a Syrian-Jewish family in Cairo, Claudia Roden studied in London to become a painter before becoming engrossed by the stories and recipes of Britain's expatriate Egyptian community. She began teaching Middle Eastern cooking from her home, hosting the BBC series "Claudia Roden's Mediterranean Cookery" and becoming a prolific food journalist and cookbook author. She is best known for two publications: *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*, a cookbook first published in 1968 that remains an important influence on top chefs around the world, and *The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey from Samarkand to New York*, an opus on Jewish cooking that provides a detailed history of Jewish holidays and recipes from the diaspora. *The Book of Jewish Food* won the James Beard Foundation Cookbook of the Year Award and the National Jewish Book Award. Roden is the President of the Oxford Food Symposium and, in 2022, was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for her services to food culture.

Roden has updated and expanded her popular 1968 cookbook for a more savvy and knowledgeable audience. While still filled with old favorites, the third edition acknowledges food processors and other handy kitchen tools, as well as this generation's preference for lower-fat recipes. Not that every recipe is changed; many are not, but Roden does attempt not to rely too much on butter and oils. Begin your meal with mezze, derived from the Arabic t'mazza, meaning "to savor in little bites." Try Cevisli Biber (Roasted Pepper and Walnut Paste) spread on warm pita bread. Serve with Salata Horiatiiki (Greek Country Salad) and then move on to a

main dish of Roast Fish with Lemon and Honeyed Onions or Lamb Tagine with Artichokes and Fava Beans. The cookbook wouldn't be complete without sections on rice, couscous, and bulgur -- try Addis Polow (Rice with Lentils and Dates) or Kesksou Bidaoui bel Khodra (Beber Couscous with Seven Vegetables). Finish with a traditional dessert like Orass bi Loz (Almond Balls).

Originally published in 1972 and hailed by James Beard as "a landmark in the field of cookery," this new version represents the accumulation of the author's years of extensive travel throughout the ever-changing landscape of the Middle East, gathering recipes and stories. Now featuring over 800 recipes, including the aromatic variations that accent a dish and define the country of origin: fried garlic and cumin and coriander from Egypt, cinnamon and allspice from Turkey, sumac and tamarind from Syria and Lebanon, pomegranate syrup from Iran, preserved lemon and harissa from North Africa. Roden has worked out simpler approaches to traditional dishes, using healthier ingredients and time-saving methods without ever sacrificing any of the extraordinary flavor, freshness, and texture that distinguish the cooking of this part of the world. Throughout these pages Roden draws on all four of the region's major cooking styles:

- The refined haute cuisine of Iran, based on rice exquisitely prepared and embellished with a range of meats, vegetables, fruits, and nuts
- Arab cooking from Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan—at its finest today, and a good source for vegetable and bulgur wheat dishes
- The legendary Turkish cuisine, with its kebabs, wheat and rice dishes, yogurt salads, savory pies, and syrupy pastries
- North African cooking, particularly the splendid fare of Morocco, with its heady mix of hot and sweet, orchestrated to perfection in its couscous dishes and tagines

From the tantalizing mezze—succulent bites of filled fillo crescents and cigars, chopped salads, and stuffed morsels, as well as tahina, chickpeas, and eggplant in their many guises—to the skewered meats and savory stews and hearty grain and vegetable dishes, here is a rich array of Middle Eastern cooking.

### INGREDIENTS:

Serves 4  
1 russet potato, weighing about 12 ounces  
Salt and pepper  
1/4 cup pine nuts  
Vegetable oil for frying  
1 pound ground lean lamb or veal  
1 small egg, lightly beaten  
1/4 cup black or golden raisins  
Flour

### PREPARATION:

Peel and boil the potato in salted water until tender, then drain. Put it back in the pan, mash it, and dry it out thoroughly over medium heat.

Fry the pine nuts in a drop of oil, shaking the pan to brown them lightly all over. Mix the ground meat with the mashed potato and add the egg, salt, and pepper. Knead vigorously by hand until well mixed and smooth. Work the pine nuts and raisins into the meat-and-potato mixture. Shape into walnut-sized balls and flatten them slightly. Dip them in flour to coat them lightly all over, and deep-fry in medium-hot oil, turning them over once, until crisp and brown.

See this recipe published in Epicurious on December 9, 2011 at: <https://www.epicurious.com/recipes/food/views/armenian-kofta-with-mashed-potato-pine-nuts-and-raisins-373420>

Mixed in with the recipes are Roden's personal experiences as a cook and recipe archivist, and Middle Eastern tales that illustrate the history of a particular recipe or food group. "It was once believed olive oil could cure any illness except the one by which a person was fated to die," Roden writes. "People still believe in its beneficial qualities and sometimes drink it neat when they feel anemic or tired." She also includes a detailed introduction to the terrain, history, politics, and society of the Middle East so her readers can more fully understand why the cuisine has evolved the way it has. "Cooking in the Middle East is deeply traditional and non-intellectual," she says, "an inherited art." It's our good fortune to inherit such a rich tradition. -- Dana Van Nest

"Full-bore cooking covers the bulk of The New Book of Middle Eastern Food, across 16 chapters. Grape leaves, served warm, stuffed with ground meat and rice and seasoned with tomato and cinnamon, include both a Lebanese and Greek variation."

To order, go to: <https://www.amazon.com/New-Book-Middle-Eastern-Food/dp/0375405062>

## NAASR Announces Winners of Dr. Sona Aronian Armenian Studies Book Prizes

AWARDS, from page 13

Sergio La Porta is interim dean, Kremen School of Education and Human Development, and Senior Advisor for Strategic Planning and Initiatives at California State University, Fresno, as well as the former Haig and Isabel Berberian Professor of Armenian Studies at the university. In addition to publishing studies on the Armenian commentaries on the works of Dionysius the Areopagite, he has written articles on medieval Armenian intellectual history and cultural interactions with the Islamicate, Byzantine, and Latinate worlds. Alison M. Vacca holds the Gevork M. Avedissian

Chair in Armenian History and Civilization at Columbia University. She is a historian of early Islam focusing on the caliphal provinces of Armenia and Caucasian Albania in the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods.

*An Armenian Futuh* [i.e., early Arab-Muslim conquests of Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, etc] Narrative is both an invaluable new translation of an important source for the history of early Islamic rule and the only contemporary chronicle of second/eighth-century caliphal rule in Armenia, and formidable work of scholarship, presenting in-depth commentary and

annotations.

By email, La Porta and Vacca wrote that "We are honored to receive the Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prize for Excellence in Armenian Studies for our translation and commentary of Lewond's History. We are grateful to NAASR for this recognition and for the generous support that helped make this work possible. This award is especially meaningful given NAASR's critical role in advancing research in Armenian Studies and promoting its scholarly significance to a wider public."

The publication of both *The Brass Band of the King* and *An Armenian Futuh Nar-*

*rative* were supported by grants from NAASR and the Knights of Vartan Fund for Armenian Studies.

NAASR's Aronian Book Prizes were established in 2014 by the late Dr. Aronian and Dr. Geoffrey Gibbs, to be awarded annually to outstanding scholarly works in the English language in the field of Armenian Studies and translations from Armenian into English.

Authors or publishers wishing to submit books for consideration for future Aronian Prizes may contact NAASR Director of Academic Affairs Marc A. Mamigonian at [marc@naasr.org](mailto:marc@naasr.org).



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# The World of Zabel Yesayan Comes to Boston

YESAYAN PLAY, from page 1

Her books have been translated into English in the past two decades through the efforts of the Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA). Among her books available at Armenian bookstores are the autobiographical novel *The Gardens of Silihdar*, *My Soul in Exile: And Other Writings* and *In the Ruins: The 1909 Massacres of Armenians in Adana, Turkey*.

Judith Saryan and her husband Victor Zarougian are the producers of the BPT production. They had commissioned the play in 2018. In a recent interview, Saryan explained why she wanted a play produced based on Yesayan's works.

"She is a pivotal figure in history," she explained, as "one of the most important reasons really comes back to *In the Ruins*, which she wrote after she visited the aftermath of the Adana massacres. It was one of the first times anyone in history had documented the testimonies of people who had been massacred."

She stressed that Yesayan was directing the book at the ruling Young Turks, asking that they recognize the tyranny happening



Robert Najarian, Sarah Corey, Grace Experience



Sarah Corey, Nailah Randall-Bellinger, Danny Bryck

in the country. "In fact, she was predicting what would happen in Turkey," she added. "That makes it very important from a literary point of view."

Saryan added that she has seen the rehearsals of the play, exclaiming, "I think it's amazing."

Playwright Sandberg's daughter, Megan Sandberg-Zakian, the artistic director of the BPT, is directing the play. She has been involved with the Boston theater scene for a while. It was through her that Saryan found the playwright.

"Victor and I commissioned this play in 2018. That's when I met with Megan Sandberg-Zakian," she said. "We decided on her father, Bob Sandberg. It's a father-daughter partnership which kind of fit in with Zabel Yesayan because she was very close to her father. He [Zabel's father] was a very important mentor to her. He was the one who really encouraged her open-mindedness, her focus on human rights and dignity."

The playwright Sandberg was delighted with the cast, and of course, with working with his daughter.

"Judy had seen some of Megan's work. She had seen her last name and asked if Megan would be interested in exploring a project about Zabel Yesayan. Megan said yes. Judy wanted to commission a play and she reached out to three or four playwrights and got proposals. Megan stayed out of that process and Judy decided to go with the way I was envisioning that play," he said.

Sandberg is familiar with Armenian history, as his wife, Virginia Zakian, is Armenian. In addition, he said, the character of

Zabel seems familiar to him.

"I could understand Zabel very easily because of my wife," who is "a tough cookie, a fighter, being someone who isn't going to take anything at all and is going to stand up for herself and not be worried about the consequences," he noted.

Zakian is the Harry C. Wiess Professor in the Life Sciences, Emeritus, at Princeton staff and had her own lab there.

"I knew the history and had read numbers of things before this came around," he said. "I had a lot of close contact with my wife's family and her extended family."

He continued, "Yesayan had such a variety of different life experiences and wrote in a variety of different ways and the challenge was how do you capture all of that. My take on it was that a way to do that was to do a memory play. You had to find a dramatic situation that was going to justify bringing varied material into the play. My idea was that you see Zabel in her Soviet prison cell, being condemned to death and she is coming to terms with what her life has meant, with death facing her. That allows you to bring in lots of memories from *Gardens of Silihdar*, and things from all the other writings. In some ways her life is more dramatic than her writing."

"We see her in her cell in different times, with the guard who is in charge of her," with different memories coming back to her.

"She remembers different things and also there are times when people from her past come unsummoned to her," he said, "engaging her or even confronting her."

Asked who the target audience is, he said, "Anybody who is interested in families, anyone who is interested in how we conduct our lives, cope with challenges that come from bad things going on in the world, how difficult it is to see our way through that, how do we manage it in some ways. The play, has, I hope, some humor in it. It's not totally dark but there are many challenging things."

"People who want to be moved and grapple with the important things in our lives," should see the work.

Asked if he thought the play would open eyes, Sandberg was humble and replied, "I feel like it would be presumptuous of me to say 'open eyes,' but for people who know things about the history of that part of the world, there will be things that they know but other things that will enrich, deepen their perspectives. For people that don't know, they will be fascinated and shocked."

He was delighted with the cast and the production. "Great. It's a wonderful cast. I obviously think very highly of the director. The Boston Playwrights' Theater is an excellent place to be working. I was at the rehearsals last week and they went great. It is a really smart, talented, funny cast of actors. It's going to be a really good show."

This is his first production with BPT.

Her message resonates with our times. Sandberg said: "The play, because it is a difficult moment...is a really important play for people to see. And I hope people will feel the various resonances in the play with the world we are living in now. You want to be true to her story and the time of the play. At the same time, there need to be things in it that are naturally there, that are going to keep the audience feeling like they are seeing somethings that are going on in our world today."

Sandberg has a long history with the theater. He taught at the Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle and wrote plays and teaching students who wanted to be actors "text analysis," which is how an actor looks at the text and then acts. He also taught directing as well as directed. At Princeton he taught English and theater, "an incredibly wide variety of courses," including dramatic literature, playwright, Shakespeare and musical theater, among others.

The veteran playwright, asked to name some of his favorite playwright, noted Tennessee Williams, Caryl Churchill, Tony Kushner, Wole Soyinka (Nigerian Nobel Prize winner for literature).

For thousands of years, humans have been entranced by theater. For Sandberg, its appeal, even now, in the age of shortened attention spans and online addiction, makes sense.

"The media most of us is dealing with so much of the time is on screens. I think at some level, when we get into that live



Director Megan Sandberg-Zakian

experience it can touch us even more when we are in a smaller space. That liveness is the basis of theater, that it is happening in front of us live, and we are living with it," said Sandberg. "As amazing as the films and TV shows may be in terms of creating realities, it only goes so far."

As for what is next for him, he said he is not sure, though he hopes that the play gets a positive response and can be staged in different cities.

"This particular group working on this show, there are highly emotional things in the play, but this is a very joyful group of people working on it. They bring so much laughter and so much positive energy."

"Zabel" really is a family affair for Sandberg. In addition to his daughter, he is

*continued on next page*





ARTS & CULTURE

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

**DECEMBER 12-APRIL 26** —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.

**NOW THROUGH FEBRUARY 28** — "The Art of Disruption: The Art & Impact of Serj Tankian," Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown. Hours: Thursday-Sunday 12-6pm. World renowned musician Serj Tankian is known globally as the lead singer and songwriter for the band, System Of A Down. He is also a visionary poet, visual artist, and outspoken advocate for human rights. Inspired by his memoir, Down with the System, the exhibition immerses visitors in the dynamic intersections of music, painting, and protest that define Tankian's work. This exhibition is curated by Ryann Casey. Sponsored by Carolyn Mugar and the Alan K. & Isabelle DerKazarian Foundation. <https://www.armenianmuseum.org/serj-tankian> **FEBRUARY 23 - MARCH 22** — On exhibit at Boston City Hall, "Geometry as Public Part: Telling a Story," Curriculum Inspired by Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway.

**MARCH 1** — **UNDER THE SNOW MOON.** Sunday at 4pm, virtual. Virtual program of Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway. Registration: [ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar](http://ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar)

**MARCH 2** — Monday St. James Monthly dinner & Fellowship 6.15pm mezza, 7 pm dinner Losh & Kheyima, \$25;00 per person, Guest Speaker Brett Dean, President and CEO of Watertown Savings Bank. 465 Mt. Auburn Street , Watertown.

**MARCH 9** — "Memories Flow Beneath It, From Valley to Quabbin," A film by Roger Hagopian in collaboration with author and historian, J.R.Greene. Local filmmaker Roger Hagopian presents his documentary film, tracing the displacement of people and the loss of a way of life in the Swift River Valley of western Massachusetts, when the Quabbin Reservoir flooded four towns in order to create water infrastructure for 52 Boston metropolitan communities. 6:15—8:00 PM Marcy Room, Stoneham Library 431 Main Street, Stoneham, MA

**MARCH 14** — "Memories Flow Beneath It, From Valley to Quabbin," A film by Roger Hagopian in collaboration with author and historian, J.R.Greene. Local filmmaker Roger Hagopian presents his documentary film, tracing the displacement of people and the loss of a way of life in the Swift River Valley of western Massachusetts, when the Quabbin Reservoir flooded four towns in order to create water infrastructure for 52 Boston metropolitan communities. 2-4 PM Bedford Public Library 7 Mudge Way Bedford MA

**MARCH 21** — "Memories Flow Beneath It, From Valley to Quabbin," A film by Roger Hagopian in collaboration with author and historian, J.R.Greene. Local filmmaker Roger Hagopian presents his documentary film, tracing the displacement of people and the loss of a way of life in the Swift River Valley of western Massachusetts, when the Quabbin Reservoir flooded four towns in order to create water infrastructure for 52 Boston metropolitan communities 1:00—3:00 PM Tarbell Room Lincoln Public Library 3 Bedford Rd, Lincoln.

**MARCH 28** — "Memories Flow Beneath It, From Valley to Quabbin," A film by Roger Hagopian in collaboration with author and historian, J.R.Greene. Local filmmaker Roger Hagopian presents his documentary film, tracing the displacement of people and the loss of a way of life in the Swift River Valley of western Massachusetts, when the Quabbin Reservoir flooded four towns in order to create water infrastructure for 52 Boston metropolitan communities 2-4 PM Marlborough Public Library 35 W Main St. Marlborough, MA

**APRIL 9** — **LET'S GET TOGETHER!** Thursday, 7-9pm **JOIA BOSTON AT THE HARBORSIDE INN, BOSTON**

Young Leaders' Friends Benefit for Armenian Heritage Park Donation: \$30/ person. Advance Reservations. [ArmeniaHeritagePark.org/Support](http://ArmeniaHeritagePark.org/Support)

**APRIL 24** — Armenian Genocide Commemoration at the Massachusetts State House, 24 Beacon St., Boston, starts 10:30 a.m., with reception to follow. Program details to be announced. Organized by the Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee of MA. Buses from Watertown will be available courtesy of the Knights of Vartan Ararat Lodge No. 1. The event is free and open to all. For more information, email [bostonagcc@gmail.com](mailto:bostonagcc@gmail.com).

**APRIL 26** — Armenian Genocide Commemoration at Armenian Heritage Park, at the Rose Kennedy Greenway, Boston, starts 2:30 pm. Program details to be announced. Organized by the Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee of MA. Buses from Watertown will be available courtesy of the Knights of Vartan Ararat Lodge No. 1. The event is free and open to all. For more information, email [bostonagcc@gmail.com](mailto:bostonagcc@gmail.com).

**MAY 2** — **CELEBRATE PUBLIC ART! ABSTRACT SCULPTURE PERMANENT & ALIVE & WORLD LABYRINTH DAY: WALK AS ONE.** Saturday at 12:30 pm. **ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK ON THE GREENWAY, BOSTON** Join people in cities & towns in 35 countries world-wide: Armenia (Gyumri), Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, South Africa, Spain, many more. Reception following.

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

To send Calendar items to the *Mirror-Spectator* email [alin@mirrorspectator.com](mailto:alin@mirrorspectator.com) or [alin.gregorian@gmail.com](mailto:alin.gregorian@gmail.com). You can also visit our website, [www.mirror-spectator.com](http://www.mirror-spectator.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.

from previous page

assisted by his 13-year-old granddaughter, who is working as part of an independent study.

She contributed a number of insights and ideas.

The cast features June Baboian, Danny Bryck, Sarah Corey, Grace Experience, Anelga Hajjar, and Robert Najarian. Another full-circle moment for Sandberg is that Corey, who portrays Zabel, was a former student of his at Princeton.

Saryan said she found out about Yesayan when she attended the showing of a documentary about her at NAASR many years ago. After that, she spoke to Barbara Merguerian, the former president of the Armenian International Women's Association, and the two agreed that there was a need to translate Yesayan's works into English for a new generation. The two, plus Danila Jebejian Terpanjian, and Joy Renjilian-Burg edited the versions translated by G. M. Goshgarian.

"We worked together to find translators and publish the books," she said, giving credit to designer and illustrator Taline Boghosian who did the covers and Mark McKertich who did the typesetting.

She and her husband also helped fund much of the publication of *In the Ruins*. All the translations sold well.

"Her work, her writing, was not available to English readers and wasn't at all well-known in the US or Armenia. The Middle East knows her work, including Beirut and definitely in Cyprus and Istanbul in the Armenian schools," she said. "It's still a work in progress getting her known."

She added, "People are excited to learn about her because she is such an important figure. We talk about the male writers, and there were many female writers who got lost. It often happens. Many people have been trying to resurrect her. She is a great role model because of her writing, her great achievements as a writer and her activism, it's very inspiring."

She also singled out her courage for writing the book and publishing it, "very much known by the Young Turk government. She had an awareness of her own ability to speak to a much greater global audience."

Added Saryan, "It's an important time for this play because it's important to recognize we have heroes among us. I've said this before. Zabel Yesayan is my hero. In particular I am moved by her courage in the face of unbelievable danger. Her willingness to speak her mind, which put her at risk, but made her immortal," Saryan said. "We're counting on the Armenian community to be excited about the play, but we



Judith Saryan and Victor Zarougian

want to reach a non-Armenian audience."

Sandberg-Zakian expressed her delight working with her father.

"It's amazing. My dad was my first teacher and taught me most of what I know about making theater, so it's a true honor and privilege to be responsible for stewarding his work on stage," she said.

She was also unfamiliar with the life and legacy of Yesayan before starting work on

the play. "I was not familiar with her work until I met Judy. I'm beyond grateful to her for bringing Zabel into my life (as she has done for so many others!). I could say many things about what her legacy means to me, but on my mind at this moment is that she reminds me that artists have a critical role to play in times of political oppression, by bearing witness, and offering alternative visions of a more empathetic future."

Sandberg-Zakian said she had collaborated with BPT several times before becoming its artistic director. She noted that she collaborated with the theater several times, "most notably on a production of a play by the founder of BPT, Derek Walcott, whose "TI Jean and His Brothers" I directed in a co-production with Central Square Theater circa 2011. This was also the production where Judy Saryan and I first met, when she attended a post-show conversation I was moderating, so it all comes full circle!"

Asked what she wanted the audience to take away from the play, she said, "We have been here before. Bear witness. Don't stop caring. Don't give up."

The BPT is located at 949 Commonwealth Ave., Boston.

For additional information and to purchase tickets, visit [www.BostonPlaywrights.org](http://www.BostonPlaywrights.org).





COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**  
— SINCE 1932 —



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# Indian Chief of Defense Staff in Armenia: A Display of Strategic Synergy

By Arunansh B. Gaswami

India and Armenia share a rich history of military collaboration, which is deeply rooted in their past and is now being elevated to new levels in contemporary times. It was a privilege for this author to participate in the unveiling of the portrait of Indo-Armenian commander Hakob Petrosyan (Jacob Petrus) at the Indian Army cantonment in Gwalior, attended by the Armenian ambassador and Indian military officials a few years ago. Jacob Petrus, an Indo-Armenian and the son of a merchant, chose to pursue a career in the military and, through his exceptional abilities, ascended to the rank of senior commander in the service of King Scindia of Gwalior. He served this monarch with unwavering loyalty and dedication for an impressive span of seventy years, passing away on June

In 2019, the Indian Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the establishment of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) position, which holds the rank of a four-star General and receives a salary and benefits comparable to those of a Service Chief. The Chief of Defence Staff oversees the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) within the Ministry of Defence and serves as its Secretary. In addition to leading the DMA, he also holds the position of Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. He acts as the Principal Military Adviser to the Defence Minister on all matters concerning the tri-Services. Currently, the Indian Chief of Defence Staff is Anil Chauhan, who has a distinguished career. He previously served as the Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) of the Army during the Balakot air strikes in 2019, when Indian aircraft targeted a Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist training facility deep within Pakistan in retaliation for the Pulwama terror attack.

General Chauhan effectively commanded the Indian armed forces during the recent Operation Sindoor against Pakistan, which is an ally of Azerbaijan. In this operation, India successfully eliminated nine significant terror launchpads located in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK), specifically targeting facilities associated with Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Hizbul Mujahideen. More than 100 terrorists were neutralized in the operation. Additionally, India destroyed several air defense radar installations throughout Pakistan, including one situated at the Pasrur airfield in Punjab, as confirmed by satellite imagery. Three additional sites were targeted at the Arifwala airbase, Chunian radar, and Sukkur airfield. General Chauhan stated, “India was capable of striking deep into enemy territory utilizing long-range precision weapons, guided by satellite imagery, electronic surveillance, and signal intelligence, often without direct visual contact with the adversary. These operations were non-contact and multi-domain in nature, where success was not gauged by the territory

seized, but rather by the level of dominance and sophistication exhibited across all levels of escalation.”

Each year, India observes Vijay Diwas on December 16 to honor the soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice during the 1971 war against Pakistan, a conflict that led to the establishment of Bangladesh. In this confrontation, the Indian army witnessed the largest enemy surrender since the Second World War, with 93,000 Pakistani soldiers capitulating to the Indian Army. On this year’s Vijay Diwas, the Indian Army showcased a Turkish YIHA kamikaze drone, which had been employed by Pakistan to assault Indian cities during Operation Sindoor, prior to being shot down by Indian forces. The Indian defense forces demonstrated their effectiveness by neutralizing the Turkish drones utilized by Pakistan.

As part of a series of ongoing defense collaborations between India and Armenia, which includes the Joint Working Group Meeting on Defense Cooperation that took place in Hyderabad, Telangana, on October 23, 2025, Indian Chief of Defense Staff General Anil Chauhan arrived in Armenia on February 2nd. The high-ranking Indian delegation was welcomed by India’s Ambassador to Armenia, Nilakshi Saha Sinha, and the Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia, Temur Shahnazaryan, in Yerevan.

During this visit the CDS was shown by Armenian military personnel enthusiastically platforms obtained from India. Among the prominent displays were the MArG (Mobile Artillery Rocket Gun or wheeled howitzer variants), the impressive ATAGS (Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System), the reliable Akash air defense system, and the significant Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher. These were not simply static exhibits; they demonstrated the authentic operational capabilities that Armenia has integrated into its forces, and the hosts clearly took great pride in showcasing them to the CDS and his team. Additionally, the CDS inaugurated the IT Lab and Distance Learning Centre at the Vazgen Sargsyan Military Academy of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia in Yerevan.

Making a strong statement to those who refute the Armenian genocide, including Erdoğan, who stated in 2015 that any resolution from the European Parliament acknowledging the 1915 killings as genocide would go ‘in one ear and out the other,’ General Chauhan paid tribute to the victims by placing a wreath at the Armenian Genocide Memorial and Museum, which commemorates the 1.5 million Armenians who lost their lives in the genocide. The author is of the opinion that the Chief of Defense Staff’s visit to Armenia will further enhance the already amicable relations between the two states.

(Arunansh B. Goswami, is a historian and lawyer. He is a Fellow at the Orbeli Center in Yerevan.)

## ‘Armenia Breaks Free from Russian-Turkish Grip’: Reaction to JD Vance’s Visit

“After 2020, Armenia found itself in a hopeless position, squeezed between Russia and Turkey. We managed to break out of these pincers because the existence of the so-called ‘corridor’ in Syunik did not serve the interests of the United States and Europe,” political analyst Lilit Dallakyan said, commenting on developments in Armenian-US relations and JD Vance’s visit.

By the “corridor” in Syunik, the analyst refers to a road that would connect Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhichevan. Armenia’s authorities initially agreed to unblock transport links. But Baku demanded a full “corridor,” which Yerevan found unacceptable because the term implied losing control over its own territory. The dispute over the issue lasted for years. The sides only reached an agreement in Washington during a peace summit attended by Donald Trump.

Under the Washington agreements, the road will remain under Armenia’s sovereign control, and the United States will join the unblocking process as a business partner. For this reason, the project received the name “Trump route for international peace and prosperity” — after the mediator. The

English name is Trump route for international peace and prosperity (TRIPP).

The analyst described the US vice-president’s visit to Yerevan as an important event. In her view, Armenia needs new, real allies. She considers an alliance with a “hegemonic state like the United States” especially valuable.

She called the agreements Armenia reached with the United States, including those related to TRIPP, a “lifeline”.

Dallakyan recalled that Turkey and Azerbaijan had demanded the “Zangezur corridor” from Armenia, while President Ilham Aliyev said there was no place for the West in the region. Against this backdrop, the US and EU ambassadors accredited in Armenia travelled to the Syunik region. They said roads should reopen in line with the principle of territorial integrity.

She stressed that without an agreement with Washington:

Armenia would have lost control over the “corridor,” meaning a road running through its sovereign territory;

it would have faced the threat of losing its border with Iran;

the country would have entered conflicts

over every centimeter during the delimitation and demarcation process, fueled by Azerbaijan and Russia;

shelling and escalations along the border would have continued, leading to new casualties.

The analyst described the US presence in the region and the establishment of relative calm as a major achievement.

“We must do everything possible to ensure the United States stays in the region and continues to deepen relations with Armenia,” she said.

Key points from the interview with political analyst Lilit Dallakyan.

On February 9, US Vice-President JD Vance and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan signed a joint statement announcing the conclusion of negotiations on a “123” agreement on the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Vance said the deal could lead to the construction of American small modular reactors in Armenia. These reactors could replace the current power unit at the Metsamor nuclear power plant. The vice-president also said the United States had

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## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Why Has Pashinyan Become the Darling of Azerbaijan and Turkey?

With each passing day, Turkey and Azerbaijan are tightening the noose around Armenia's neck with the blessing of Pres. Donald Trump. His self-proclaimed TRIPP (Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity) is the best indication of that. Trump cares neither for Armenia nor its interests. He only cares for his own selfish gains, desperately seeking an undeserved Nobel Peace Prize. TRIPP is another name for the Turan Road, linking Turkey and Azerbaijan to the Central Asian Turkic republics -- a long-held pan-Turkic dream that poses a serious threat to Armenia's existence.

No matter how many times Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan claims that he has brought peace to Armenia — just as he claims to have brought democracy — the fact remains that not only there is no peace; there is not even a signed worthless “Peace Treaty.”

It is alarming that Armenia's leader has become the darling of Azerbaijan and Turkey. Both of these countries, along with Europe and the United States, are doing everything they can to ensure that after this June's Parliamentary elections, Pashinyan remains in power. The last thing they want is an Armenian nationalist replacing him, wiping out all of their gains in the last eight years. That is why we constantly hear from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his cronies that they have no problems with Pashinyan, but are very concerned about the “radical” Diaspora.

The latest evidence of this sad state of affairs is an 8.5-minute long YouTube video in Turkish titled: “They are teaching Turkish in [Armenia's] schools.” The video, prepared by Turkish blogger Erenca Alun, has been viewed 85,000 times in the last 10 days and has over 600 comments.

Alun, who has close to 200,000 followers, stated: “Why is Armenia becoming friendly with Turkey? Turkish is being taught in schools! Could Armenia be gradually shedding its animosity towards Turkey? Let's look at this issue through Pashinyan's statements. Last summer, he said: ‘Our only option is to reconcile with Turkey. To go to war with a country like Turkey? They don't know what they're talking about.’ Furthermore, ‘Turkey and Armenia do not pose a threat to each other. Our proposed Peace Crossroads project is not an obstacle to the Turan path. If there is a waterway, we can all drink this water together,’ he stated. Shortly after these statements, Trump intervened, renaming the famous Zangezur Corridor the Trump Corridor and granting the US a 100-year lease in the region.... How effective Pashinyan's peace-themed words are in society and how Armenia is advancing this process?”

Indeed, Armenia's Minister of Education has announced that 400 high

schools in Armenia have expressed an interest in learning the Azeri and Turkish languages. However, the minister admitted, there is a shortage of qualified teachers in these languages. The next step would be bringing hundreds of Azeri and Turkish teachers to Armenia, creating a fertile ground for future spies. I would have been less concerned if these languages were taught in universities, not in high schools.

Alun continued: “Armenia's political axis has begun to shift, and it has chosen a path of cooperation with the Turks.... In Armenia, ‘Turk,’ ‘Turkey’ and ‘Turkish’ are still emotionally charged words. The existence of Turkish as an elective course in Armenia does not fully mean that the two societies are getting closer. However, it is a sign that the two countries have stopped ignoring each other, and Pashinyan's statements support this.”

Commenting on TRIPP — referred to by Azeris and Turks as a corridor — Alun said: “Zangezur is not only a transportation route between Azerbaijan and Armenia. It is also a strategic line connecting Turkey and Central Asia. When the Zangezur corridor opens, the seemingly disconnected Turkic states will be connected for the first time by an uninterrupted land route. This is not just a symbolic unification. Natural gas and oil pipelines can be laid along this route. Fiber optic internet cables will be installed. Direct rail transport will be established. Imagine, someone leaving Istanbul by bus and traveling through Igdir, Nakhichevan, Zangezur, Karabakh, Ganja, and Baku, all the way to the Caspian coast. From there, they could take a ship to Kazakhstan, then a bus to Bishkek, or perhaps Urumqi [China].... It's more than just a route. It's something like a reunification of civilizations. This vision is also called the Turan route, but because that term bothers some [Armenian] circles, the term ‘middle corridor’ is used diplomatically. So, what role will Armenia play in this process? The truth is Armenia can benefit from this corridor. If it acts wisely, its economy will be revitalized through this route because every truck passing through here will actually pass through Armenian borders. New revenue streams will open up, such as logistics revenue, service sector income, and customs revenue, and even attract new foreign investments.”

However, Alun acknowledged: “The burden of the past is so heavy that they [Armenians] can't overcome certain emotions. Today, political rhetoric in Armenia still revolves around genocide, the loss of Karabakh, and Turkey being our enemy. Naturally, it doesn't seem easy for a society that has grown up with this rhetoric to support the path of unity. Let's see what time will show us. Let's wait and see.”

In conclusion, Alun emphasized that the Trump Road “will benefit our country [Turkey] and Azerbaijan. In my opinion, it will provide not only transportation but also geopolitical expansion. This gains strategic significance both economically and militarily. And let's not forget that Azerbaijan is a place where the Turkish Armed Forces are actively present. If this corridor opens, the influence of the Turkish Armed Forces in the east will increase even more. Therefore, Turkey plays a key role in this scenario. We just need to know how to play our cards right.”

## Vance Should Bypass Azerbaijan After Its ‘Kangaroo Court’ Sentencings Of Armenians

By Michael Rubin

*At Stake Is Trump's Desire to Cement Peace in the South Caucasus, and the Commitment They Made to Protect Christian Communities*

On September 19, 2023, Azerbaijani dictator Ilham Aliyev ordered his forces to ethnically cleanse the remaining indigenous Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh despite promises just days earlier not to do so. More than 200 Armenians died as Azeri troops drove 120,000 ethnic Armenians off their land, razed graves, and vandalized or destroyed churches and monasteries.

Aliyev was upset not only about the dispute over sovereignty — Nagorno-Karabakh had declared its independence in September 1991 in accordance with the Soviet-era constitution, a decision confirmed overwhelmingly in a referendum two months later — but also because the Republic of Artsakh's democracy put it to shame. While Freedom House [ranks](#) Azerbaijan as among the world's most consolidated dictatorships, on par with the military junta in Myanmar and less free than Cuba, China, or Russia, it ranked Artsakh prior to the conquest as “partly free,” roughly on par with Ukraine or Tanzania.

Artsakh was the first of three autonomous entities

or unrecognized states — the Kurdish autonomous administration in North and East Syria (“Rojava”) and Somaliland being the other two — characterized by democracy, tolerance, and general fiscal transparency under assault by autocratic, extremist, and corrupt entities that claimed sovereignty over them. For all that European leaders and many in the State Department talk about democracy, the failure of the United States to support Artsakh, Rojava, and Somaliland shows such rhetoric to be empty.

Aliyev's tenure over Azerbaijan has been an abject failure. While Azerbaijan, on paper, should be almost as wealthy as Gulf oil sheikhdoms, [Aliyev's corruption](#) has left the country impoverished, with a [per capita income](#) below hydrocarbon-poor Armenia and Georgia. There is hardly an advocate for Aliyev and Azerbaijan in the think tank or media communities, meanwhile, who does not somehow suckle on the teat of Azerbaijan's [caviar diplomacy](#), its dog-and-pony show junkets, inflated honoraria, and sidebar commercial dealings.

Azerbaijan is sensitive enough about democracy in Armenia, but to have democracy on territory it calls its own was too great a threat to Aliyev. Hence, after his troops stormed Artsakh, Aliyev arrested its elected leaders on various [charges](#), including crimes against peace and humanity, war crimes, preparation and conduct of an aggressive war, genocide, violations of the laws and customs of war, terrorism, and the violent seizure of power.

The charges were preposterous and the trials even more so. Translators purposely mistranslated responses. Azerbaijan banned international observers and imposed Azerbaijani lawyers on the accused. That those in the docket were all elected community leaders and intellectuals paralleled the initial phase of the Armenian genocide. On February 5, 2026, the Baku Military Court sentenced the defendants to life in prison. Billionaire philanthropist [Ruben Vardanyan](#), who had left his life of comfort to serve as a state minister in Artsakh and once [served](#) on a board with former US-

AID administrator Samantha Power, likely will be sentenced in coming days.

Nothing in Azerbaijan happens by chance; nor is the judiciary in any way independent of Aliyev. Therefore, the White House and the broader international community must consider the reasons for the court's action now.

While President Donald Trump takes pride in an Azerbaijan-Armenia peace process, the [dynamics](#) of that process always raised questions about Aliyev's sincerity. Throughout the negotiations (which began during the Biden administration), Aliyev would make humiliating and extreme demands that appeared designed to force Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to walk away. Pashinyan, however, called his bluff and acquiesced to every demand, frustrating Aliyev, who simply believes that Armenia has no right to exist. By sentencing Artsakh's Armenian leaders to such lengthy and unjust prison terms, Aliyev is doubling down, signaling he seeks surrender and not peace.

Aliyev also seeks to thumb his nose at the United States. His action comes as Vice President JD Vance prepares to [visit](#) both Armenia and Azerbaijan. To now visit Baku, so soon after such a travesty of justice and provocation, would be to imply U.S. endorsement. What is at stake is not only Trump's desire to cement peace in the South Caucasus, but also a commitment by Trump and Vance to protect Christian communities under siege.

Vance should continue to Yerevan, while his National Security Advisor Andy Baker, whose commitment to Armenian Christians is sincere and predates the Vance vice presidency, makes clear to Aliyev and his inner circle that the only way senior US officials will visit Azerbaijan, now or in the future, is to bring home all the Armenian hostages, up to and including Ruben Vardanyan.

(This article first appeared on the American Enterprise Institute website on February 8, 2026.)





# 2025–2026 Young Aurora Finalists Announced

WASHINGTON — The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, in partnership with United World Colleges International (UWC), Teach For All, and the African Leadership Academy, has announced the three finalists for the 2025–2026 Young Aurora competition: UWC East Africa and UWC SEA East Campus and Dover Campus.

Since its launch in 2017, Young Aurora has invited student teams from participating schools to develop innovative project proposals addressing pressing humanitarian challenges in their local communities. Proposals are evaluated based on creativity, sustainability, quality of research and potential for long-term impact. Each year, one winning team is awarded a \$10,000 grant to further develop and implement its project.

As part of the competition, student teams design solutions to locally identified humanitarian issues and compete for funding to bring their ideas to life. The three finalist teams will present their projects to a panel of distinguished humanitarians, entrepreneurs and global leaders who will offer tailored feedback and mentorship to help refine and strengthen the initiatives.

The 2025–2026 finalists were selected from 15 submissions across UWC schools worldwide. Their proposals reflect the creativity, empathy, and leadership of young people committed to humanitarian action. As the teams approach the competition's finale next month, they are diligently refining their presentations, with the aim of securing funds from Aurora that will allow them to bring their impactful initiatives to life.

Young Aurora has already demonstrated significant impact by supporting student-led projects that drive meaningful and sustainable change worldwide. Previous winning initiatives include the Chulha Project (2024–2025) by UWC Mahindra College, which addressed the health risks of traditional mud cookstoves in rural western India by introducing locally produced rocket stoves, reducing emissions by 86 percent, cutting firewood use by half, and significantly lowering



UWC Atlantic students

toxic fumes. Other past winners include Enlightenment (2023–2024) from UWC Changshu China, focused on empowering rural youth through needs-based education, and Combili (2022–2023) from UWC Dilijan, which tackled bio-waste disposal while promoting urban gardening.

Full details of the finalist projects are provided below.

## Majiliko Project — UWC East Africa

Majiliko aims to address the global issue of lack of clean and sanitary water and drought through the distribution of biosand water filters: an efficient, sustainable, and cost-effective solution that can transform households.

Ana from the Majiliko Project notes: “I grew up in Chile, an unequal country with people from very diverse backgrounds. It became clear to me that access to water is entirely dependent on social class; while some people do not have access to drinking water, others have huge swimming pools in their homes. I believe in this project because I think that it is important to find solutions that can truly impact people's lives, and that's what we are aiming to do.”

## The LINK Project — UWC SEA East Campus

The Link Project focuses on empowering migrant workers in Singapore with practical English literacy skills through in-person workshops and a personalized digital learning platform. The LINK Project aims to promote social sustainability by enhancing the communication, cultural integration, and English literacy of migrant workers in Singapore.

Videep, a LINK Project team member, explains: “Improving English literacy amongst migrant communities isn't just about accurate grammar rules or using complex vocabulary; it's about creating moments where, regardless of one's background or ethnicity, everyone feels seen, heard, and confident. Watching the workers share their thoughts, stories, and navigate daily tasks with greater ease has made us realize the potential this project has in bringing about lasting change to the migrant community through English literacy.”

## Nira Project — UWC SEA Dover Campus

Project Nira is an initiative seeking to

support and empower women and girls of all ages by normalizing casual, compassionate, and open conversations about menstrual health in Singapore's society. Through Nira's game-based and community fostering, the team intends to normalize discussions on menstrual health and ensure that accurate information, compassion, and empathy begin where they matter most: at home.

Aditi, a member of the Nira Project, states: “I see this project as a stepping-stone towards normalizing menstrual education and supporting families in understanding that menstruating is a healthy and normal process. This project furthered my love and passion for the cause of women's empowerment.”

## About Young Aurora

Launched in 2017 by the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative in partnership with UWC International, Teach for All, and the African Leadership Academy, Young Aurora is a program designed to encourage young changemakers to address pressing humanitarian concerns within their local school communities.

For information visit [www.uwc.org](http://www.uwc.org).

## ‘Armenia Breaks Free from Russian-Turkish Grip’: Reaction to JD Vance’s Visit

REACTION, from page 18  
approved the sale of V-BAT reconnaissance drones to Armenia.

Armenia and the United States also confirmed the agreements reached on 8 August 2025 on cooperation in:



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AI and semiconductors, civilian nuclear energy, advancing the project to unblock regional transport links.

Dallakyan believes the US vice-president's visit has a regional dimension. In her latest interview, she said she expects Vance to raise a sensitive issue in Baku. She referred to the question of Armenian prisoners. She believes the main message to Azerbaijan will be that “the peace established by Trump in the Caucasus is irreversible”.

In her assessment, Washington views the South Caucasus as a single region. Because of this, she expects certain steps from the United States towards Georgia as well:

“Several days ago, Vance and Rubio met the president of Georgia in Italy. Prime Minister Kobakhidze also said he was ready to cooperate with Trump. If pressure increases, he will quickly shift his orientation from Russia to the West.”

Dallakyan argues that the United States needs stability in the region, as key transport routes will pass through it:

“Russian spheres of influence must be neutralised, because Russia provokes conflicts. Will this be possible? Will Trump remain consistent to the end? What countermeasures can Putin take? This is a very complex chess game.”

As for the agreements reached between Yerevan and Washington, Dallakyan said she hopes the plans for small modular reactors will move forward and expects “ac-

tive steps”. She recalled that in 2022 Armenia signed a declaration on cooperation in peaceful nuclear energy with Russia's Rosatom. But those agreements never went beyond paper.

She said the purchase of American reconnaissance drones would strengthen Armenia's defense capabilities. At the same time, she stressed the need to deepen cooperation in this area. She spoke about rearming the army, acquiring new military equipment, and moving towards NATO standards.

Lilit Dallakyan also proposed leaving the joint air defense system with Russia:

“When you do not control your own airspace, buying weapons is only half the job. Armenia does not want war under any circumstances. It has never been an aggressor state. But we must be ready for any scenario.”

Dallakyan said the situation on the Armenia–Azerbaijan border can now be described as relatively stable, but not as a lasting peace:

“This is also reflected in the letter that representatives of Azerbaijani civil society sent to the US vice-president about the return of the so-called ‘Western Azerbaijan’ to Armenia. In it, they try to convince Vance they have no demands on Armenia and simply want to return.”

She believes Azerbaijan's president raises such issues through various local groups and officials in order to undermine US

peace efforts at a critical moment.

“At the same time, Aliyev cannot openly tell Trump that he opposes [peace] today. He even received an award for establishing peace, which seems to put psychological pressure on him. The Azerbaijani president's actions do not inspire trust,” the analyst said.

In her view, stability will likely last at least until November 2026, when the United States holds midterm congressional elections. She noted that no one knows what will happen then, as the domestic political situation remains tense:

“If the Republican Party keeps its majority in Congress, stability will continue. In Russia, they are betting that the US may deviate from its course to some extent. By that time, a ceasefire could take hold on the Russian-Ukrainian front, and Moscow might again attempt some kind of adventure in our region.”

Dallakyan believes that if Trump prevails in the midterm elections, Armenia will be able to capitalize on its gains over the next three years, particularly regarding the TRIPP project:

“For Armenia, this is a period of both great opportunities and serious challenges. We will see what happens in the second half of the year. The most active developments are expected precisely during that period.”

(This analysis originally appeared on JAMNews, [www.jamnews.net](http://www.jamnews.net) on February 10.)