

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

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## In Speech at UN Rights Body, Armenian FM Skirts Azeri Trials of Ex-Karabakh Leaders

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan mentioned the continuing imprisonment of 19 Armenians, including former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh, in Azerbaijan but stopped short of explicitly condemning it when he addressed the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Monday, February 23.

Mirzoyan instead touted “peace” which he said was established between Armenia and Azerbaijan during an August summit in Washington hosted by US President Donald Trump.

“Although the painful humanitarian consequences of the conflict are still to be resolved and the wounds of the distant and recent past linger on, we have chosen the difficult path of reconciliation,” he said in a speech. “This is indeed a difficult endeavor with 19 Armenian detainees still being held in Baku, and need for clarification of the fates of missing persons and cases of enforced disappearances, and amid dissemination of distorted historical narratives.”

“Nevertheless, Armenia remains firmly committed to pursuing this path to its future-oriented conclusion with the understanding that further institutionalization of peace will foster a more conducive environment for addressing the consequences of the conflict,” added Mirzoyan.

Official Yerevan thus continued its effective silence on lengthy prison sentences given this month to eight former Karabakh Armenian leaders captured by Azerbaijan in 2023. Five of them were sentenced to life imprisonment while the three others received 20-year prison sentences at the end of what Armenian lawyers and human rights activists see as sham trials. Amnesty International likewise described last week the jail sentences against them and eight other Karabakh Armenians as a “travesty.”

The Armenian government has still not officially commented on the sentences, stoking opposition allegations about its complicity in the continuing captivity of these and three other Armenians held in Azerbaijan. The government had waited for weeks before criticizing the mock trials” last year.

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## Pashinyan and Aliyev Attend Inaugural Trump’s Board of Peace Meeting

By Yousef Bardouka

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev have participated in the inaugural session of the Peace Board in Washington.

The two leaders attended the session on Thursday, February 19.

Both countries accepted US President Donald Trump’s invitation to the Board of Peace as founding members in January. The board was initially intended to oversee the administrative transition in Gaza from Hamas rule, but has since expanded its mission to “the development and dissemination of best practices capable of being applied by all nations and communities seeking peace.”

During the meeting, Trump, who regularly boasts about how he resolved the decadeslong conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, again spoke about how he mediated the initialing of the peace agreement between the two countries.

“I think they’re friends now,” he said.

Pashinyan and Aliyev also spoke one-on-one on the sidelines of the board’s meeting, but no details about their conversations were published by either side.

Trump announced during the meeting that members of the board have pledged more than \$7 billion for reconstruction efforts in Gaza, and that the US would contribute \$10 billion to the organization.

He named Azerbaijan among the countries that have contributed to the relief package. Azerbaijan was again mentioned as being among those countries by an announcer, who urged the leaders and representatives of countries that have joined the fundraising efforts to join Trump on stage as he signed the pledge. Aliyev is



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev shaking hands during the meeting (official photo)

then seen standing behind Trump as he is signing the document.

However, shortly after, Aliyev’s aide Hikmat Hajiyev clarified on X that Azerbaijan “doesn’t envisage to participate in

the \$7 billion financial initiative,” but that it “may consider participating in investment projects in Gaza through the Board of Peace.”

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## Bodyguards for Azerbaijani President, in Town for Trump’s Board of Peace, Attack Protesters in DC

By Joseph Gedeon

WASHINGTON (*Guardian*) — Bodyguards traveling with the Azerbaijani president, who was visiting Washington for the inaugural meeting of Donald Trump’s Board of Peace, punched, kicked and chased protesters outside a Washington hotel on Thursday, February 19, video footage shows.

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## Bishops Condemn Armenian Government’s ‘Repressions’



Armenian bishops pose for a photograph after an emergency meeting in Sankt Polten, February 19, 2026

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Twenty-five bishops of the Armenian Apostolic Church have voiced support for Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and condemned Armenia’s authorities for their “unfounded prosecution” of the church’s supreme head and a dozen other senior clergymen.

Following a three-day meeting in Austria which Karekin was not allowed by the authorities to attend, they also demanded the immediate release of three archbishops and one bishop arrested last year amid Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s controversial efforts to depose the Catholicos.

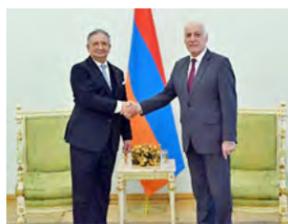
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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Armenian, Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Ministers Meet in Geneva

GENEVA (Armenpress) — On February 24, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Robert Abisoghomyan and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Elnur Mammadov met in Geneva on the sidelines of the 61st session of the Human Rights Council, the Armenian foreign ministry said in a press release.

The meeting took place in continuation of contacts held at the higher political level.

### New Direct Flights to Yerevan to Boost Tourism

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Various airlines are planning to launch new direct flights to Yerevan from several countries, Armenian Tourism Committee Chairperson Lusine Gevorgyan said on February 23.

Speaking at a press conference, she said that direct flights contribute to an increase in tourism.

“A few days ago, I had the opportunity to discuss with the Ambassador of Latvia in Armenia the entry of AirBaltic into the Armenian market. In May, a direct flight between Yerevan and Riga will be launched. The countries of the Baltic region are opening up for us. Riga is a tourist aviation hub with extensive capabilities. However, very few tourists come to Armenia from that region, and with this direct flight, it is expected that more visitors will come to our country,” said Gevorgyan.

From June, a direct flight between Yerevan and London will also be launched, which, according to Gevorgyan, is unprecedented. The Yerevan–London flight will be operated by Wizz Air.

Currently, there is a direct flight from Ürümqi, China to Armenia, but Gevorgyan said talks are taking place for flights from another Chinese city.

### Analyst Decries Arrest Over Facebook Message Critical of Pashinyan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — A 55-year-old woman from the village of Akhuryan has been placed in pretrial detention for one month over a Facebook message allegedly containing a call for violence.

Authorities brought charges against the woman over a message criticizing Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. A court ordered her detention based on a screenshot of what investigators say was a private message exchange. The woman, who holds opposition views, disputes the authenticity of the evidence and maintains that the account in question is fake.

Political analyst Suren Surenyants described the case as part of a broader and troubling shift in Armenia’s political climate. In his view, the issue goes beyond legal technicalities and raises serious concerns about prosecuting individuals for their opinions rather than for concrete actions.

# Pro-Pashinyan Archbishop Appears To Turn on Prime Minister

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, who previously called for Catholicos Karekin II to step down and backed Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s church reform agenda aimed at ousting the Catholicos, has appeared to turn on Pashinyan by signing a statement urging Armenian authorities to “stop the persecution of the Church.”

The statement was issued on the evening of February 19 as one of the outcomes of the bishops’ gathering held in Austria on February 16–19. Initially convened as a bishops’ synod, the meeting lowered its status in the face of the absence of Karekin II.

Ahead of the meeting, Armenian authorities barred the Catholicos from leaving the country as part of a criminal case opened in January, with Karekin II facing investigations since February 14.

The announcement of the investigation came a day after Pashinyan accused the Church of seeking to remove the Catholicos from Armenia by holding the bishops’ synod in Austria.

“I will not allow that. If additional measures are required, they will be taken,” Pashinyan said at the time.

Following their gathering, the bishops expressed “deep concern” over the ongoing confrontation between the Church and the Armenian government, describing it as an “undesirable” and a “perilous situation.”

They urged Armenian authorities to “stop the persecution of the Church and respect its centuries-enshrined sovereignty and autonomy” and to “put an end to the repression of clergy” and Karekin II, which was “based on fabricated charges and slander.”

The statement also urged the release

of detained clergy and those “who have spoken out in defense of the Church,” an apparent reference to Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan, who is currently under house arrest.

Members of the gathering further called on authorities to act in accordance with the Armenian constitution and legislations and to resolve existing issues “in a spirit of dialogue, without preconditions, refraining from futile ultimatum-driven rhetoric.”



Archbishop Hovnan Derderian of the Western Diocese

The statement appears to be an allusion to Pashinyan’s efforts to challenge Karekin II’s leadership.

The attendees of the gathering also addressed the “eight misguided” high-ranking clergies, urging them to “act with awareness of their vow of loyalty” to the Mother See and the Catholicos.

Ten senior priests had previously called on Karekin II to resign in November 2025 and, alongside Pashinyan, signed his church reform agenda in January.

Among those 10 priests were Bishop Gevorg Saroyan, whom the Church de-

frocked in January, and Archbishop Derderian.

Derderian is the primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of North America, one of the largest dioceses in the diaspora.

By signing the adopted statement along with 24 other high-ranking clergy members, Derderian “reaffirm[ed] his loyalty to the Mother See and the Catholicos.”

The statement deemed any reform

movement outside of the Church to be “unacceptable.” Derderian was previously declared as a member of the Coordinating Council, created as part of Pashinyan’s church reform agenda launched in January, tasked with overseeing the organizational aspects of the reform process.

He had previously been among the senior priests to issue a statement calling for Karekin II to “voluntarily go on leave” amid the rift between the state and the Church.

(This article originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on February 20.)

## Bishops Condemn Armenian Government’s ‘Repressions’

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“We, the bishops of the Armenian Church, reaffirm our fidelity to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and to the Catholicos of All Armenians as the visible symbol and guarantor of the unity, reconciliation and concord of the Church,” read a joint statement released by them on the night of Thursday, February 19.

The emergency meeting of the church’s worldwide top clergy was originally scheduled to take place in Echmiadzin from December 10–12. Karekin postponed and then moved it to the Austrian town of Sankt Polten due to the government crackdown.

An Armenian law-enforcement agency indicted the Catholicos and six other bishops and banned them from leaving the country ahead of the rescheduled meeting. Pashinyan implicitly pledged to obstruct it on February 13.

The meeting went ahead, even though its status was downgraded by the church’s Echmiadzin-based Mother See due to Karekin’s absence. Karekin addressed his participants via video link, while the Catholicos of the See of Cilicia Aram I, the number-two figure in the church hierarchy, as well as the Armenian patriarchs of Jerusalem and Istanbul, sent written messages of support.

The resulting statement signed by the participants condemned the “fabricated” charges leveled against Karekin and indict-

ed bishops and archbishops. It said the authorities in Yerevan must free four of those clerics held in prison or under house arrest and end other “repressions against clergy and the nationally elected Catholicos of All Armenians.”

The statement also urged the authorities to “act exclusively in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, its legislation and international law, and remain faithful to proclaimed democratic principles, guaranteeing freedom of conscience, religion and belief in the country.”

Armenian law guarantees the autonomy of the ancient church and its separation from the state. Pashinyan has been accused by the church and other critics of violating these legal provisions throughout his campaign against the Catholicos. He formally pledged last month to keep trying to oust Karekin in his capacity as prime minister after meeting again with a dozen other bishops and archbishops who broke ranks last November to join his campaign.

The rebel clerics denounced the decision to hold the episcopal meeting outside Armenia. However, one of them, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, not only attended the Sankt Polten meeting but also signed the joint statement by its participants. The statement also appealed to the “erring” pro-Pashinyan bishops, saying that they should “refrain from anti-canonical actions, weakening steps and separatist mani-

festations which threaten to cause schism.”

Pashinyan’s campaign is causing growing criticism not only in Armenia but also in its worldwide Diaspora. On February 11, eight prominent members of the Armenian communities in the United States and Europe issued a statement saying that his “attacks” on the church pose “direct threats to all Armenians around the world.” Pashinyan responded by accusing them of plotting to remove the seat of the Catholicos from Armenia and seizing church treasures kept in Echmiadzin. He offered no proof of the allegation laughed off by the Mother See.

Pashinyan said until December that Karekin and other top clerics at odds with him must go because they had secret affairs in breach of their vows of celibacy. He then began accusing them of spying for a foreign country, presumably Russia. His latest allegations directed at Diaspora figures in the West raised even more questions about his real motives.

Pashinyan began his campaign last May right after Karekin accused Azerbaijan of committing ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh and illegally occupying Armenian border areas during an international conference in Switzerland. His detractors say he wants to please Azerbaijan or neutralize a key source of opposition to his unilateral concessions to Armenia’s arch-foe.



## ARMENIA

## ACT College Team Earns Second Place at 'Yerevan Sustainable Energy Days'

YEREVAN — The “Yerevan Sustainable Energy Days” event began on February 11 at the AYGI Business Center with the theme “Youth for Armenia’s Science-Driven Future.” The event brought together young innovators to develop technology-based solutions for urban sustainability.

The two-day initiative was organized by the Yerevan Municipality and the Yerevan Construction Investment Project Implementation Unit in cooperation with the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Foundation and the Covenant of Mayors East Program.

Youth teams participated in a hackathon focused on practical solutions to urban challenges such as air quality, energy efficiency, waste management, and sustainable mobility.

ACT College participated as an official partner through the Gyumri Information Technologies Center. Competing against university-level teams and older students, the ACT College team, composed of 15- and 16-year-old students, earned second place.

The ACT team presented an artificial intelligence-powered waste-sorting management concept designed to improve recycling accuracy and reduce contamination in municipal waste systems.

The proposed system features a camera-based recognition platform powered by machine learning that identifies waste types in real time, including plastic, paper, metal, and glass. The device would include an easy-to-use interface and visual indicators to encourage correct sorting. It would also collect data to help municipalities optimize waste collection logistics.

By combining image recognition technology with behavioral feedback, the students’ concept aims to improve waste separation at the source, reduce landfill



Amalya Yeghoyan, executive director of ACT College, Edgar Chilingaryan, head of strategy of ACT College with winning students

volumes, and generate actionable environmental data for local authorities. Judges praised the project for its practicality, scalability, and measurable environmental impact.

During the official awards ceremony, ACT College students received laptops in recognition of their achievement. Their

accomplishment was notable given the age difference between the ACT team and their university-level competition. Organizers highlighted the students’ analytical thinking, engineering skills, and confident public presentation as key factors in their success.

“We are so proud of our ACT team, who

demonstrated that age is not a limitation when education is rooted in critical thinking, technology, and purpose-driven innovation,” said Amalya Yeghoyan, executive director of ACT College. “Their success sets a standard for future ACT students and is a great step toward a bright future for the program.”

## MP Says Displaced Artsakh Armenians Face Hurdles in Citizenship Process

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — A lawmaker from Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) accused the Armenian authorities of deliberately creating obstacles for forcibly displaced Karabakh Armenians seeking Armenian citizenship, alleging the measures are politically motivated ahead of upcoming parliamentary elections.

Metakse Hakobyan, a member of the Justice faction in the Artsakh National Assembly, told [Panorama.am](#) on Tuesday, February 24, that displaced Artsakh Armenians have encountered “multiple and varied obstacles” in applying for citizenship.

“Obstacle is a mild word to describe the situation,” Hakobyan said, adding that she and her colleagues have met displaced families across Armenia who described difficulties in navigating the process.

“Obviously, these obstacles are being created intentionally,” she said.

Hakobyan cited cases of applicants who submitted citizenship requests in September or October and incurred significant costs to restore missing or damaged documents, but have yet to receive responses. Some have only recently received initial notifications, while others have heard nothing.

She also criticized a decision to move the process fully online starting on January 1, saying it had created additional barriers, particularly for elderly applicants and those living in remote rural areas.

“People in distant villages — elderly people and even some younger ones — do not know how to register online and lack the necessary technical means,” she said. “There are even modern devices with which it is not possible to complete the reg-

istration.”

Hakobyan said intermediaries have started offering assistance with online registration for a fee of 10,000 drams per family member. “There are families who, out of desperation, have taken that step,” she said.

She alleged the underlying motive was political.

“The subtext is clearly political,” Hakobyan said. “The authorities are confident that if Artsakh Armenians participate in elections, they will decisively reject the Civil Contract party. Naturally, they are creating obstacles so that the Artsakh people do not have that opportunity.”

She also pointed to social concerns related to the displaced population.

Armenia’s Interior Ministry rejected the allegations, saying steps have been taken to simplify the citizenship application process.

Its spokesperson Narek Sargsyan said that from January 1, the electronic citizenship case management system had been fully launched. Since its rollout, the Migration and Citizenship Service (MCS) has received numerous inquiries via its communication channels.

He said the agency regularly publishes clarifications in a frequently asked questions format on its official website, Facebook page and Telegram channel to address technical or procedural issues. In cases of complex problems related to online registration or document uploads, staff contact applicants directly by phone and, if necessary, provide in-person consultations.

Sargsyan said the main issues recorded in applications from displaced persons relate

to missing or damaged identity documents or documents proving eligibility for citizenship, which require restoration.

He added that staff at public service offices are undergoing retraining to provide appropriate guidance to displaced applicants.

As of December 30, 2025, 25,901 dis-

placed persons from Nagorno-Karabakh had applied for Armenian citizenship, Sargsyan said. By presidential decree, 19,319 had been granted citizenship.

Between January 2 and February 23, 2026, a further 4,392 displaced persons submitted citizenship applications via the MCS electronic platform, he added.

### FASF Continues Mission to Fallen Soldiers’ Families

YEREVAN — Friends of the Armenian Soldier and Family (FASF) continues to uphold its mission of supporting institutions that provide direct assistance to the families of fallen Armenian soldiers. Focused on improving the lives of young widowed women and their children, FASF directs its efforts toward long-term, meaningful solutions.

Through partnerships with organizations on the ground in Armenia, FASF addresses the social and economic challenges these families face. Its programs enhance stability, improve living conditions, and create opportunities for families to rebuild their lives with dignity.

Over the years, many families who have suffered profound loss have benefited from FASF-supported initiatives. While the challenges are significant, the organization has helped resolve numerous pressing needs, thanks to the dedication of individuals who believe in its mission and contribute to its work.

FASF’s latest fundraising campaign

concluded on February 15. The funds, totaling \$20,000, have already been donated to HAYORDI, a charitable organization supporting the families of soldiers killed in war. Through this partnership, FASF helps ensure that homes purchased with government assistance for these families are fully furnished, providing a dignified environment for those who have lost their most precious loved ones.

By fostering a culture of responsibility and collective support within the Armenian diaspora, FASF ensures that every contribution makes a meaningful impact. Each act of giving strengthens the network of care surrounding the families of those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

FASF continues its work with a deep sense of responsibility, honoring the memory of fallen soldiers through ongoing, tangible support for their families.

For more information or to support FASF’s mission, visit [www.fasf.org](http://www.fasf.org)

## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL

**'Zangezur Corridor,'  
Already Agreed Upon,  
Turkey MP Says**

YEREVAN (News.am) — Chairman of the Turkish parliament's foreign relations committee spoke in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, about regional developments.

Fuat Oktay, answering reporters' questions about the region, said that the "Zangezur Corridor," described as the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), has been agreed upon between Azerbaijan and Armenia, TRT reports.

He noted that this has begun the process of normalizing relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

**Aurora Humanitarian  
Foundation Deplores  
Vardanyan Conviction**

NEW YORK — This week the Aurora Humanitarian Foundation and its CEO released a statement deploring the conviction of co-founder Ruben Vardanyan.

"We strongly condemn the unjust conviction and 20-year prison sentence imposed on Aurora Humanitarian Initiative Co-Founder Ruben Vardanyan. We call for Ruben's immediate release and urge the international community to stand firm in defending the principles of justice, human right and due process," the statement noted.

"The charges against Ruben, tied to his humanitarian work in Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), represent a troubling disregard for fundamental human rights. For decades, Ruben has been a tireless advocate for education, humanitarian aid, and social progress, dedicating his life to strengthening communities and advancing human dignity. His co-founding of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative in 2015 was a testament to his unwavering commitment to honoring those who risk their lives to protect others. This verdict, delivered by a military court in Azerbaijan, is not only a profound injustice but also a painful moment for his family, who have endured immense hardship throughout this ordeal," the statement continued.

**Manouchian Anniversary  
Commemorated at  
Panthéon**

PARIS (Public Radio of Armenia) — On February 21, Armenia's Ambassador to France, Arman Khachatryan, took part in a ceremony at the Panthéon marking the second anniversary of the pantheonization of French Resistance heroes Missak Manouchian and his wife, Mélinée. The event was organized by the National Association of Armenian Veterans and Resistance Fighters (ANACRA).

Speeches were delivered by Khachatryan, ANACRA President Léon Hovnanyan, and Jean-Pierre Sakoun, President of the Committee for the Pantheonization of Missak Manouchian. A prayer was offered by Bishop Grigor Khachatryan. The ceremony concluded with a wreath-laying tribute and the performance of the French anthem.



Iranian Defense Minister Aziz Nasirzadeh greets his Armenian counterpart Suren Papikyan at a ceremony in Tehran, February 24, 2026

**Armenian Defense Minister Visits Iran**

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Iranian Defense Minister Aziz Nasirzadeh warned against foreign power interference in regional affairs as he met on Tuesday, February 24, with his Armenian counterpart Suren Papikyan visiting Tehran amid the growing risk of US military action against the Islamic Republic.

"The security of the region must be ensured through interaction and cooperation among the regional countries, and Tehran is sensitive to the interference of extra-regional countries," Nasirzadeh told Papikyan, according to the official IRNA news agency.

"Some interventions are driven by malicious intent and could threaten the region's stability," he said in an apparent reference to the United States.

Iranian officials have repeatedly issued such warnings in recent years as Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has sought to reorient Armenia towards the West amid heightened tensions with Russia, its traditional ally. They have expressed serious concern at the Armenian government's plans to open a US-administered transit corridor for Azerbaijan that would run along the Armenian-Iranian border.

Tehran fears that the so-called Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) could endanger the border and lead to US security presence there. A top aide to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei described it in December as a serious security threat to Iran. Yerevan has

clearly failed to dispel the Iranian concerns with its repeated assurances that the TRIPP will not compromise Armenian sovereignty over the area.

"Armenia will never be the source or origin of any threat to its historical neighbor and it believes that Iran's stability guarantees the stability of the region," IRNA quoted Papikyan as saying during the talks with Nasirzadeh.

The Armenian Defense Ministry gave no details of the talks and Papikyan's separate meeting with the Iranian army chief of staff, Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi. It said only that they discussed Arme-

nian-Iranian military cooperation and "regional and international security."

Papikyan traveled to Tehran as the US continued to deploy military assets to the Middle East in preparation for possible strikes against Iran. Official Yerevan has still not publicly commented on the possibility of US military action. The Iranian news report suggested that the issue was also on the agenda of Papikyan's talks.

"Iran does not seek war, but if war is imposed on the country, it will defend itself with full force and will teach the enemies a lesson they will not forget," said Nasirzadeh.

**Police Fear Elderly Armenian Man  
Kidnapped in Australia Is Dead**

By Arthur Hagopian

SYDNEY — Chris Baghsarian, the 85-year-old Armenian widower, who was kidnapped from his home in suburban Sydney on February 12, has been found dead, unconfirmed reports on February 24 showed.

Police found the remains of what could be the body of the innocent man who was taken in a botched kidnapping, near a golf course, about 50 kilometers away.

Even before the discovery, fears and doubts about his safety began surfacing, as police ramped up their investigation.

Sources believed his chances were doomed right after the kidnappers realized they had the wrong man, a fact police kept hammering over the airways and through other sources that would reach the perpetrators...

Detective Chief Inspector Andrew Marks minced no words expressing his concern and urging the speedy return of the victim.

Voicing his fears, he said it was not "a great feeling we have in relation to his health and his survival, so every day for us is of important."

He noted the elderly man's family were "devastated."

"This is not the world they live in, it's taken them by shock," he said.

But despite their gross blunder, the kidnappers had no intention of playing ball.

They set up temporary camp in an abandoned homestead a distance away after burning the getaway car. They used another, burnt that also, and decamped to a rural village.

When the police finally reached the site, they stumbled upon the remains of what might be Chris Baghsarian.

Chris was born in Jaffa but spent most of his childhood and youth in the Old Armenian Quarter of the City of Jerusalem.

They were halcyon days, when he felt at home among the score of relatives and friends, the close-knit community of Armenians, survivors of the Genocide or descendants of survivors.

He had six uncles, of whom two died young, four aunts and a dozen cousins, all linked together in an unbreakable bond molded in faith, love and devotion.

He attended the Armenian parish school and unlike some of his elder cousins who were given to pranks, he was quiet and modest.

His one great vice as a youth was smoking Lucky Strike or some other American cigarette which he obtained at a discount from a staffer at a UN center.

When he left school, he was apprenticed at a photographer's, honing the skills he would find useful when he joined a movie distribution company in Sydney.

He arrived in Australia in the 1960s.

In Sydney, he married and bought a house in North Ryde (the one broken into).

His wife passed away a few years ago.

He kept in touch by mail with his family and community in the Old City, and went back to Jerusalem for a reunion with his ailing parents, relatives and friends.

In their convivial company he enjoyed a rare idyll, denied in the hectic run of life back in Australia.

**In Speech at UN Rights  
Body, Armenian FM  
Skirts Azeri Trials of Ex-  
Karabakh Leaders**

SPEECH, from page 1

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan claimed in January 2025 that an explicit condemnation would only harm the defendants. His critics countered that he is simply afraid of angering Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev as part of his appeasement policy which they say will not lead to a lasting peace.

Earlier this month, Aliyev rejected calls for the release of the former Karabakh leaders, comparing them to Nazi Germany's leaders. He said that their trials were "absolutely transparent."



## INTERNATIONAL

# Armenian President Khachaturyan Meets with First Palestinian Envoy to the Country

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — The first ever Palestinian Ambassador to Armenia, Isa Kassisi, presented his credentials to Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan on February 24.

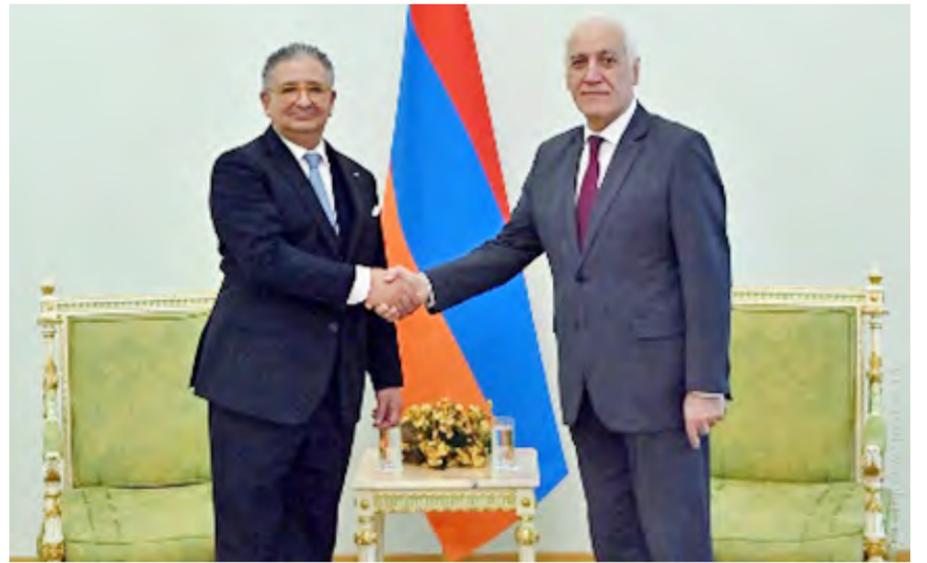
The Armenian president congratulated his counterpart on assuming this position and wished him success in his diplomatic service.

“You are the first [Palestinian] ambassador [to Armenia], and this is another historic event. I am confident that in this status, our relations will have new development trends, and together we will seek ways and opportunities that will enable us to contribute to a way out of the current situation. This concerns both the establishment of peace in Palestine and, of course, the establishment of lasting peace in Armenia and our region,” he said.

Kassisi expressed gratitude for the

reception and well wishes. “I will make every effort to strengthen bilateral relations between Armenia and Palestine in all fields, especially in the fields of culture, education and healthcare. I hope that everything will be very good for Armenia and Palestine in the near future,” he added.

During the subsequent meeting, the avenues for developing and promoting cooperation between Armenia and Palestine were discussed, emphasizing the intensification of political dialogue and the expansion of cooperation in various fields. In particular, the opportunities for exchanging experience in the humanitarian sphere were touched upon. In this context, the president stressed Armenia’s readiness to provide the necessary assistance to Palestine, taking into account Armenia’s accumulated experience and developed capabilities in humanitarian issues.



President Vahagn Khachaturyan with the first-ever Palestinian Ambassador to Armenia Isa Kassisi

# Jailed since 2017, Kavala Says Turkish Government Made an Example of Him to Intimidate Activists

ISTANBUL (Turkish Minute) — Turkish philanthropist and human rights defender Osman Kavala said his eight-year imprisonment on charges he calls fabricated serves as a deliberate warning to civil society that critical voices will no longer be tolerated, in written responses to questions published by T24 news website on February 23.

“I think my punishment is meant to send the message that civil society organizations no longer have the freedom they once had, that taking a critical stance creates danger,” Kavala, 68, wrote from his one-person cell at Marmara Prison on the outskirts of Istanbul.

Kavala was arrested in October 2017 at age 60 and has spent what he described as “almost all of the time I could have been actively engaged in civil society” in prison on charges stemming from the 2013 Gezi Park protests.

He is serving an aggravated life sentence for “attempting to overthrow the government” despite two European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) rulings that found his detention violated his rights, ordering Turkey to release him immediately.

Kavala also said the government needed his imprisonment to make credible a conspiracy theory it adopted after a failed coup in July 2016, that the Gezi protests, which began as an environmental demonstration in Istanbul in 2013 and grew into nationwide anti-government protests, were actually a foreign-orchestrated plot to topple then-prime minister and current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

“After the July 15 coup attempt, in an atmosphere of distrust, the narrative that the Gezi protests were a foreign-backed uprising was embraced and became the government’s official view, and public opinion was directed accordingly,” Kavala wrote. US billionaire George Soros, who funded civil society groups in Turkey through his Open Society Foundations, was designated the main foreign actor.

“To give credibility to the narrative that Gezi was planned and organized by Soros, there was a need to accuse and imprison me because of my relationship with the Open Society Foundation.”

Kavala said that once someone is im-

prisoned, “it becomes easier to spread the perception that they are guilty.” He added that the government’s extensive use of the foreign conspiracy narrative to discredit the opposition, particularly during the period when Turkey’s relationship with former US President Joe Biden’s administration was strained, meant that “accepting my innocence would mean changing this reality that has been constructed over eight years, with the active support of a section of the media. Taking that step is probably not very easy for them.”

The philanthropist, who founded cultural NGO Anadolu Kültür and worked for decades on projects promoting minority rights, arts and dialogue between Turkey’s diverse communities, said Turkish prosecutors and judges have abandoned the fundamental legal principle that people cannot be imprisoned without concrete evidence.

“Prosecutors bring grave accusations without concrete evidence, judges can issue conviction rulings without concrete evidence, on the grounds that their conscientious belief is in that direction, and they believe such behavior is legitimate,” he wrote. This reflects not just a refusal to recognize the authority of the Constitutional Court and the ECtHR, “but also a manifestation of the fact that the fundamental legal principle, that people’s freedom cannot be restricted without concrete evidence that they committed a crime according to law, has not been internalized.”

He pointed to the absurdity of a prosecutor accusing celebrity manager Ayşe Barım of “attempting to overthrow the government” and a court sentencing her to 12 years in prison, despite no evidence connecting her to any such attempt.

“This shows that this strange perception of reality is effective in the judiciary,” he said.

## ECHR to Hear Kavala Case on March 25

The ECtHR will hold a Grand Chamber hearing on Kavala’s case on March 25, examining Turkey’s continued detention of Kavala after the court’s 2019 ruling that ordered his immediate release. The hearing will focus on whether Turkey’s refusal to comply with that ruling and its subsequent sentencing of Kavala to life imprisonment

in April 2022 constitute continued violations of his rights.

The 2019 ECtHR ruling found that Kavala’s detention was arbitrary and pursued “the ulterior purpose” of silencing him as a human rights defender. In July 2022 the ECtHR’s Grand Chamber issued a second landmark ruling finding that Turkey had failed to fulfill its legal obligation under the European Convention on Human Rights to comply with the 2019 judgment, only the second time in the court’s history that it has taken such action against a member state.

Kavala is a businessman and philanthropist who worked for decades funding civil society initiatives in Turkey. Through his Anadolu Kültür foundation, he supported projects promoting Kurdish-Turkish dialogue, the restoration of Armenian churches, environmental protection and arts programs. He was a board member of the Open Society Foundation’s Turkey office until it closed in 2018.

He was arrested in October 2017 on charges of financing and organizing the 2013 Gezi Park protests. Police crackdown on the protests left 11 dead and thousands injured.

Prosecutors later added espionage charges and expanded the case to include allegations related to the July 2016 coup attempt, a claim Kavala called “terrifying” because of how such accusations have historically been used against dissidents. He was acquitted of the Gezi charges in February 2020, only to be rearrested hours later. In April 2022 an Istanbul court sentenced him to aggravated life without parole for “attempting to overthrow the government.”

Seven other defendants in the Gezi case, including architect Mücella Yapıcı and filmmaker Çiğdem Mater, received 18-year sentences. All deny the charges. Turkey’s Supreme Court of Appeals upheld Kavala’s sentence in September 2023.

Before his arrest, Kavala maintained relationships with government ministries on cultural projects while also signing statements critical of government policies, including opposition to legal changes that would have allowed Turkey to support the US invasion of Iraq.

“In the period before, people active in civil society could cooperate with state in-

stitutions in the realization of their projects, while at the same time criticizing some of the government’s practices and participating in campaigns initiated to change them,” he wrote. “After the Gezi protests, with the impact of the July 15 coup attempt, a serious change occurred. The government began to see civil movements with critical messages as political opponents.”

Kavala’s case has become a flashpoint in Turkey’s relations with Europe and a symbol of the erosion of judicial independence under Erdoğan’s government. His continued imprisonment despite binding ECtHR rulings has prompted calls from European officials for his release and warnings that Turkey’s refusal to comply undermines the entire European human rights system.

He remains in Marmara Prison with other high-profile prisoners including jailed Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu.

## Pashinyan and Aliyev Attend Inaugural Trump’s Board of Peace Meeting

BOARD OF PEACE, from page 1

Since its founding in January, the Board of Peace has received 22 members, all by invitation. Those include Israel, Hungary and Uzbekistan, among others. The board does not have any Palestinian representation.

Despite accepting the offer to join the board, Belarus has claimed that its delegation was denied a US visa to attend the meeting, despite informing the US that its Foreign Minister Maksim Ryshenkov would attend.

“If even basic formalities aren’t respected, what ‘peace’ are we talking about?,” the Belarusian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Thursday.

As Aliyev was in Washington to attend the meeting, several Azerbaijani migrants attempted to gather to confront him in front of his hotel. Aliyev’s security detail assaulted and chased off the protesters, beating them in plain view of US police officers.

(This story originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on February 20.)

# Community News

## Pastor, Wife Forced Adopted Kids to Eat Trash, Killed Pets in Front of Them: Police

GREENVILLE, S.C. (WKRC) — A pastor was accused on February 16 of forcing his adopted children to eat out of dumpsters, killing their pets while they watched, and sexually abusing them while his wife did nothing.

Police began investigating 73-year-old Myron Chorbajian and 71-year-old Kathleen Chorbajian in April 2025 after one of their children came forward to report “extensive abuse” that began in the 1980s, according to local outlet WHNS.

The outlet obtained arrest warrants that claimed Myron sexually abused multiple female children after adopting them, and he forced a child to “search dumpsters and eat rotten and discarded food” and another to eat dirt. The warrant said that Myron once paddled one of the victims 50 times while they were naked, and another time he beat a child with a belt until they lost consciousness.

Myron was accused of running over a kitten belonging to one of his children, then shooting the kitten in the head in front of her. Similarly, he allegedly once shot a pet dog in the kitchen in front of a child and forced the victim to bury its body.

Authorities said Kathleen knew about the sexual and physical abuse but did not report it.



Myron Chorbajian

The pair was reportedly arrested while visiting the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee, and was subsequently extradited to their home in Greenville County.

Myron was charged with three counts of criminal sexual conduct with a minor between the ages of 11 and 14, three counts of incest, second-degree criminal sexual conduct, 14 counts of unlawful placing a child at risk, and two counts of second-degree assault and battery. Kathleen was charged with 14 counts of unlawful placing a child at risk and two counts of felony accessory after the fact.

Both Kathleen and Myron initially had their bond denied, but a judge granted bond for Kathleen in February 2026 after determining she was not a flight risk. Her defense attempted to prove that she was not a danger to the community, but the judge said they needed time to evaluate if that was true.



The participants at the meeting

## Armenian-American Advocates Press U.S. Religious Freedom Commission On Azerbaijan’s Erasure of Armenian Christian Heritage and Hostages

LOS ANGELES — The Armenian National Committee of America-Western Region (ANCA-WR) and a delegation of Armenian legal experts, clergy, elected officials and human rights advocates on February 20 presented documented evidence of Azerbaijan’s systematic destruction of Armenian Christian heritage sites before members of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), calling for the release of Armenian hostages held in Baku and raising alarms on the Armenian government’s attacks on the Armenian Apostolic Church and on escalating threats to Jerusalem’s Armenian Quarter.

The delegation included Aida Dimejian, ANCA National Board Member, Rev. Fr. Hrant Yeretsian Armenian Apostolic Church, Western Prelacy, Rev. Fr. Serop Azarian, Hon. Ardy Kassakhian, Councilmember of the City of Glendale; Steve Dadaian, Esq., Vice Chair of the Armenian Bar Association and Founding Member of the Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights; Harut Sassounian, Publisher of the *California Courier* and former UN human rights delegate; Garen Jinbachian, ANCA-WR Community Coordinator; Ani Nazaryan, attorney and board member of the Armenian Legal Defense Front; Harutiun Kassakhian, former district attorney; and US Army veteran Alex Manoukian, longtime ANCA staff member and civic educator.

Steve Dadaian directly addressed claims made by Azerbaijani officials regarding cultural destruction, stating: “The efforts to destroy our faith have been going on for over 100 years now. And it has continued from the Ottoman Empire, to the Russian Tsar, to the Turkish Republic, then to the Soviet Union with Stalin’s purges and the murder of the Catholicos as well as the boarding up of our churches and the execution of Armenian clerics by the Russians.” Dadaian continued, “And now, in the period of Independent Armenia, with the destruction of Armenian churches in Artsakh and the erasure of Armenian identity by Azerbaijan and the repression now being dictated by Baku on to the a compliant Armenian government in persecuting the hierarchy of the Armenian Church in Armenia.”

Dadaian also raised the sham trials in Baku of Armenian civilian authorities being tried in military courts with no due process or transparency. In fact they are prevented from having Armenian clergy visits as well as family. Dadaian expressed outrage that this charade continued under the nose of a visiting US Vice President only last week. Finally he called for international protections to ensure the safe and dignified return of Artsakh’s Armenian Christian population.

Rev. Azarian, who personally served Divine Liturgy in Shushi prior to Azerbaijan’s takeover, described the contrast between preservation and destruction: “If you go to Shushi today, there is only one church which is half destroyed... The other one has been completely destroyed. Basically, it’s erased from existence.” Then, referring to the documented cemetery destruction, he added “There are videos of Azerbaijani soldiers kicking the Armenian cemeteries, destroying the standing stones, spitting on crosses, shooting at them, destroying the *khachkars*.”

Sassounian underscored the broader human rights dimension of the crisis, noting his decade of experience at the United Nations and stated “Azerbaijan’s claims are often fantastical – we recently heard an Azeri parliamentarian claim that there are 790 million Muslim graves in Armenia. These exaggerations are not accidental.” Sassounian then addressed the Azerbaijani expansionist agenda by saying, “At the same time, President Aliyev speaks of a ‘non-Republic of Armenia’ and refers to Armenia as ‘Western Azerbaijan.’ That rhetoric is dangerous. It signals a refusal to recognize Armenia’s sovereignty and lays the groundwork for further aggression.”

Sassounian added, “Furthermore, the Armenian Government’s interference on internal church matters of the Armenian Apostolic Church is not only a violation of Armenia’s Constitution, but also the European Convention on Human Rights.”

Kassakhian raised concerns about religious parity and accountability, posing a direct challenge: “Ask our US Ambassador in Baku to try and attend an

see HERITAGE, page 7

## Third Annual Kerr Family Lecture To Take Place on March 12 at UCLA

LOS ANGELES — The UCLA Promise Armenian Institute (PAI) announced recently that the third annual Kerr Family Endowed Lecture, titled “Rev. Dikran Antreasian: A Leader of the Musa Dagh Resistance to the Armenian Genocide” will be delivered by Prof. Vahram L. Shemmassian, director of the Armenian Studies Program at California State University, Northridge, with introductory remarks and context provided by Dr. Rouben Adalian, director of the Armenian National Institute (ANI) in Washington, DC. This event will take place on Thursday, March 12, at 7 p.m. (Pacific Time) at the Founders’ Room of the UCLA James West Alumni Center.



Prof. Vahram L. Shemmassian

This lecture will explore the life and work of Rev. Dikran Antreasian, an Evangelical pastor and one of the leaders of the Musa Dagh resistance to the Armenian Genocide, whose contributions to the survival of thousands of people from Musa Dagh/Musa Ler in 1915 has been under-appreciated. Dr. Shemmassian will deliver a presentation on Antreasian’s meritorious life, including his role as the Chairman of the General Administrative Body during the Musa Dagh resistance, his efforts in seeking help from Allied governments and generating aid and funds for refugees, his role as a pastor in caring for his community in the refugee camp near Port Said, Egypt, and the publication of his participant observer account of the resistance, which is considered the most objective and balanced rendition of what transpired in Musa Dagh in 1915.

This event is co-sponsored by the Ararat-Eskijian Museum (AEM), the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), Haigazian University, and the UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies.

Pre-registration is required for this event. To register for in-person attendance, visit the event webpage at [bit.ly/kerrfamilylecture2026](http://bit.ly/kerrfamilylecture2026).

The Kerr Family Lectureship was created by the UCLA Promise Armenian Institute and the Kerr Family with the aim of amplifying the stories of heroes and heroines who dedicated themselves to providing humanitarian support for victims and survivors of violence and mass atrocities in times of crisis.



COMMUNITY NEWS

# Armenian-American Advocates Press U.S. Religious Freedom Commission on Azerbaijan’s Erasure of Armenian Christian Heritage and Hostages

HERITAGE, from page 6  
 Armenian Holy Mass in any of the [Armenian] churches in Baku... What happened to all the Armenians there? What were these churches before the ethnic cleansing, and what are they being used for now?” Kassakhian continued to address the imprisonment of Armenian detainees, “I’m here to advocate for the release of the Armenian civilian leaders of [Artsakh] Nagorno-Karabakh who have been unjustly held and have been unjustly prosecuted.”

The discussion also examined recent actions by the Armenian government against clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Dadaian explained the constitutional dimension: “In Armenia, in the Armenian Constitution, the church and state are divided... For the political branch to be involved in meddling in the church is a violation of the Constitution.”

Father Serop warned of unprecedented interference: “Pashinyan is getting involved in liturgy... saying you should remove the word Catholicos from the liturgy. This is unacceptable. This liturgy does not belong to the state.”

Rev. Fr. Yeretsian spoke about the separation of Church and State, by mentioning: “The Armenian Church does not belong to the State. It belongs to the faithful and to God. When political authority attempts to control spiritual authority, it endangers not only religious freedom but the very foundation of our nation.”

Ani Nazaryan expanded on the religious freedom conversation beyond the South Caucasus, describing the escalating threats

to Jerusalem’s Armenian Quarter: “The Armenian community in Jerusalem is under systemic threat... nearly half of all hate crimes in Jerusalem have targeted Armenians.” She detailed armed intimidation and land seizure attempts that threatened one of Christianity’s oldest continuous communities.

Aida Dimejian emphasized the importance of sustained U.S. engagement and accountability, submitting documentation on the destruction of Armenian holy sites and the need for continued monitoring. “My grandmother was born in Adana. She spoke Turkish like everyone around her, but she always prayed in Armenian,” she said. “Our faith has preserved our identity when everything else was stripped away. When religion

is targeted, when churches are erased, it is not just an attack on buildings — it is an attempt to erase a people. And that is something we must call out clearly.”

Alex Manoukian highlighted the intergenerational impact of these developments, stressing the role of faith and heritage in preserving Armenian identity in the diaspora.

The delegation urged USCIRF to designate Azerbaijan a “Country of Particular Concern” for their severe violations of religious freedom, as well as, to closely monitor conditions affecting religious freedoms of Armenians, advocate for the release of Armenian prisoners, publicly address documented destruction of Christian heritage, and to engage directly with church leaders

and impacted communities.

The ANCA is actively urging Member of Congress to sponsor the following legislations:

H.R.6840 - the ARMENIA Security Protection Act, to restrict U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan until Armenian POWs and hostages are unconditionally released, Armenian cultural heritage is protected, and Azerbaijani forces withdrawn from Armenian sovereign territory.

H.R.5369 - the Azerbaijan Sanction Review Act, requiring a review of Global Magnitsky sanctions against Azerbaijani officials responsible for grave human rights abuses, including torture of detainees and destruction of Armenian religious heritage.





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## Bodyguards for Azerbaijani President, in Town for Trump’s Board of Peace, Attack Protesters in DC

BODYGUARDS, from page 1

Demonstrators calling for the release of political prisoners were driven from the street near the motorcade of Ilham Aliyev, the Azerbaijani leader.

The clashes broke out outside the Waldorf Astoria on Pennsylvania Avenue, blocks from the White House, where Aliyev was staying during an official visit.

Aliyev has spent more than two decades crushing political opposition and dissent in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan’s embassy defended its security personnel in a statement, alleging protesters had “violently attempted to enter the protected area and took offensive actions against the Presidential vehicle” as Aliyev’s motorcade approached the hotel.

“The Presidential Security Service had no choice but to immediately intervene,” the statement said, arguing that any attempt to obstruct a protected vehicle carrying a head of state “constitutes a serious security concern”.

The embassy also said its personnel “always operate in strict coordination with the host country.”

Protesters told a sharply different story. Rahim Yagublu, 27, an Uber driver whose father is a politician imprisoned in Azerbaijan, told the Washington Post he was struck in the jaw and kicked in the stomach. Adil Amrakhly, 35, said he injured his leg fleeing from the guards and that at least four others were hurt.

“We intended to hold a peaceful protest to demand freedom for political prisoners in Azerbaijan,” Amrakhly, who lives in Alexandria, Virginia, told the outlet.

Asked for comment, DC Metropolitan police and the US Secret Service referred

questions to the state department, which referred questions back to the US Secret Service and the DC Metropolitan police.

Earlier on Thursday, the US Secret Service told the *Washington Post* the hotel was “part of the event security perimeter” because that was where the Azerbaijani delegation was staying, with its role limited to establishing security infrastructure for visiting heads of state.

The incident drew immediate comparisons to a 2017 confrontation in Washington in which bodyguards for Turkey’s president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, attacked protesters outside the Turkish ambassador’s residence, injuring 11 people including a police officer. A similar altercation involving Erdoğan’s security detail had occurred the previous year outside the Brookings Institution.

Aliyev was in Washington for the first meeting of Trump’s Board of Peace, a new body the US president announced at Davos last month. Trump has described it as having “unlimited potential” to become “the most consequential international body in history”.

The gathering, focused primarily on the fragile Gaza ceasefire and colonial-envisioned reconstruction efforts for the devastated coastal strip, drew more than two dozen world leaders – though some US allies including France, Germany and Italy chose only to attend as observers.

Azerbaijan was among the countries Trump named as having contributed to a \$7bn relief package tied to the initiative. On Wednesday, Aliyev posted on social media that he met with the chief executive of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac), Elliot Brandt.



## COMMUNITY NEWS

## AGBU Scholarship Program Announces Larger Awards And New Criteria

NEW YORK — In addition to opening applications for its 2026–2027 scholarship awards, AGBU is announcing significant updates to eligibility requirements, award amounts, and priority fields of study. These changes are designed to attract applicants whose academic pursuits align with social impact, Armenian advancement, and AGBU's mission.

For the upcoming academic year, AGBU scholarship awards will range up to \$10,000 per student, with a limited number of highly selective grants of up to \$20,000 available to exceptional candidates. The expanded awards reflect the rising cost of higher education and AGBU's commitment to providing support that is meaningful and impactful, particularly for students pursuing demanding graduate and professional programs at top universities.

The updated scholarship framework introduces a more focused approach, prioritizing fields of study that contribute to long-term educational, humanitarian, and socio-economic development in Armenia and the global Armenian community. These fields include Armenian Studies, Education, International Relations, Diplomacy and Political Science, Journalism and Communications, Medicine and Public Health, Performing Arts, Religious Studies, Social Impact and Economics, and STEM disciplines.

In addition to field specialization, AGBU has raised minimum GPA requirements for all applicants, including a 3.7 GPA for U.S. based graduate study and a 3.5 GPA for all other categories. Applicants are also evaluated based on the competitiveness of their academic institution.

"Beyond scholarly achievement, applicants are expected to demonstrate a strong connection to Armenianness, reflected through community service, leadership, and active involvement in Armenian life. This emphasis reinforces AGBU's mission to support students who are committed not only to personal success, but also to giving back to their communities," stated AGBU Central Board member Lena Sarkissian.

All AGBU scholarships are available to students of Armenian descent who demonstrate academic excellence and financial need. An exception applies to the Helen C. Evans Scholarship for Armenian Art and Culture, which is open to applicants regardless of Armenian descent. All applicants must be enrolled in a full-time degree program, demonstrate that a significant portion of tuition is secured through secondary funding sources, and may receive funding for a maximum of three years toward college or university education expenses.

In addition to financial support, AGBU continues to invest in strengthening relationships with scholarship recipients through networking events, virtual career workshops, and mentorship opportunities, fostering long-term engagement within the global Armenian community.

Applicants are encouraged to begin by completing AGBU's eligibility quiz [Scholarship Eligibility | AGBU](https://agbu.org/scholarships), which directs applicants to the appropriate scholarship. Full details on all scholarship criteria, and application deadlines are available at <https://agbu.org/scholarships>.

## Councilwoman and Former Mayor Asatryan Announces Re-Election Campaign for Glendale City Council

GLENDALÉ — Councilmember and Former Mayor Elen Asatryan recently announced her campaign for re-election to the Glendale City Council, highlighting her record delivering results for Glendale residents, small businesses, and the Armenian-American community. Asatryan cited unfinished work on affordability, government efficiency, public safety, and equitable access to city services as her top priorities. Elections are June 2, 2026.

Born in Armenia, Asatryan moved to Glendale with her family at age 10 and grew up in the same immigrant and working-class reality shared by so many Glendale families. She understands firsthand what it means to navigate language barriers, rising costs, and government systems while trying to build a stable life. That lived experience continues to guide her work in public office and fuels her commitment to making City Hall work for everyday residents and small businesses.

Since taking office, Asatryan has focused on closing the gap between what residents and small businesses need and how City Hall delivers services. Her campaign will build on efforts to expand housing, strengthen public safety and safe streets, increase access to parks, arts, and affordability programs, empower women and girls, support small businesses, cut bureaucratic red tape, and improve access to services across Glendale's diverse communities.

Before her election to the City Council, Asatryan served as Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of America–Western Region (ANCA-WR) and ANCA Glendale, where she led the expansion of the organization's grassroots network and advanced Armenian Genocide and Artsakh recognition efforts at local, state, and ultimately federal level. During her tenure, Asatryan launched the successful Hye Votes voter registration and get-out-the-vote program, increasing Armenian voter registration by over 50,000 in LA County alone, significantly amplifying the voices of the local Armenian-American community.

She has previously earned the endorsements of prominent Armenian advocacy organizations, including ANCA-WR, ANCA local chapters (Glendale, Burbank, La Crescenta, and San Fernando Valley–East), and the Southern California Armenian Democrats, reflecting long-standing, broad support from Armenian-American civic leadership.

During the unprovoked attacks on Artsakh and during the blockade, Asatryan helped mobilize Armenian communities nationwide and authored successful California Democratic Party resolutions condemning the attacks on Artsakh and Armenia and calling for the release of Armenian prisoners of war. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Asatryan noticed a lack of community knowledge about COVID-19 assistance programs offered by the city and state and at the federal level, catalyzing her initial run for City Council, with the goal of improving



Councilwoman Elen Asatryan

multilingual communication and outreach to Glendale residents, particularly the Armenian community.

"My goal is to create a system that works for working-class families, those that have language barriers, and those that don't know how to navigate our system. If we can do that, then we've actually created a system that works for everyone," Asatryan said.

As an elected official, Asatryan also helped advance the historic inclusion of an Armenian checkbox as a distinct category on all California state forms.

"This was a long-sought equity measure that will bring critical access to funding, resources, and fair representation for the Armenian community as well as cities and organizations that represent Armenians across the state. That visibility touches nearly every part of our city and state and how Armenian communities get served, from language access, healthcare, and small business support to housing, emergency response, and fair districting," Asatryan said.

On the City Council, Asatryan led the effort to turn Glendale's Sister City relationships from paper agreements into active

partnerships by establishing real programming and consistent engagement.

She became the first city official in years to visit and reestablish ties with Gyumri, reconnect with Kapan after more than a decade without contact, and build direct relationships with the Kentron Administrative District in Yerevan, as well as Martuni in Artsakh. She then brought the work back to the Council, which voted unanimously to create a Sister City committee and subcommittees for each partner city to ensure sustained collaboration.

Under her leadership, Glendale also welcomed a delegation of students from Kapan, giving them firsthand exposure to civic engagement and local government.

Asatryan's commitment to public service began at 15, when she volunteered on Rafi Manoukian's 1999 campaign for City Council and discovered her passion for representing underheard Armenian voices. By 19, she was managing a local Glendale campaign. These early experiences opened her eyes to the difference one can make through canvassing and connecting with the community. Youth mentorship and civic engagement remain priorities for the Councilwoman, and she plans to continue strengthening Glendale's investments in global connections through youth, education, trade, and culture.

In her role as Mayor of Glendale, Asatryan was also invited by the U.S. Department of State to participate in the inaugural U.S.-Armenia Local Democracy Forum, where she joined a national delegation working to expand bilateral relations, explore economic opportunities, and promote cultural and educational exchanges between Armenia, Glendale, and the United States.

Asatryan said her re-election campaign will focus on affordability, access to city services, support for small businesses, and continued investment in Glendale's Armenian and immigrant communities.

"Glendale is home to one of the largest Armenian diasporas in the nation," she said. "That means our community's voice should never be sidelined or treated as symbolic. It should be reflected in who sits at the dais, how decisions are made, and how services are delivered. I will always fight to ensure Armenian families in Glendale feel seen, heard, protected, and proud, and that our city remains a strong, respected bridge between our local community and Armenia."

## FASF Continues Mission to Fallen Soldiers' Families

YEREVAN — Friends of the Armenian Soldier and Family (FASF) continues to uphold its mission of supporting institutions that provide direct assistance to the families of fallen Armenian soldiers. Focused on improving the lives of young widowed women and their children, FASF directs its efforts toward long-term, meaningful solutions.

Through partnerships with organizations on the ground in Armenia, FASF addresses the social and economic challenges these families face. Its programs enhance stability, improve living conditions, and create opportunities for families to rebuild their lives with dignity.

Over the years, many families who have suffered profound loss have benefited from FASF-supported initiatives. While the challenges are significant, the organization has helped resolve numerous pressing needs, thanks to the dedication of individuals who

believe in its mission and contribute to its work.

FASF's latest fundraising campaign concluded on February 15. The funds, totaling \$20,000, have already been donated to HAYORDI, a charitable organization supporting the families of soldiers killed in war. Through this partnership, FASF helps ensure that homes purchased with government assistance for these families are fully furnished, providing a dignified environment for those who have lost their most precious loved ones.

By fostering a culture of responsibility and collective support within the Armenian diaspora, FASF ensures that every contribution makes a meaningful impact. Each act of giving strengthens the network of care surrounding the families of those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

FASF continues its work with a deep sense of responsibility, honoring the mem-



FASF's donation to Hayordi allowed the homes of 10 fallen soldiers to be furnished.

ory of fallen soldiers through ongoing, tangible support for their families.

For more information or to support FASF's mission, visit [www.fasf.org](http://www.fasf.org)



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Dr. Anna Aleksanyan to Deliver Lecture on Armenian Women's Daily Life in Transit and Concentration Camps (1915-1918)

FRESNO — Dr. Anna Aleksanyan will present her second public lecture of the spring semester on “Armenian Women's Daily Life in Transit and Concentration Camps” on Friday, March 6, at 7 p.m., in the University Business Center (5245 N. Backer Ave.), Alice Peters Auditorium, on the Fresno State campus. The lecture is co-sponsored by the Armenian Relief Society, Fresno Mayr Chapter and is free and open to the public.

The lecture is part two of a three-part series of public lectures that Aleksanyan will deliver in the Spring semester with the theme of “Women and the Armenian Genocide.”

Aleksanyan is the newly appointed Henry S. Khanzadian Kazan Visiting Professor in Armenian Studies for the Spring 2026 semester. The Kazan Visiting Professorship was established in 2000 and Dr. Aleksanyan is the 22nd Kazan Visiting Professor.

After being deported from their homes

and arriving at transit camps, Armenian women had varying experiences depending on their location within the empire's Arab-speaking provinces. After crossing the Taurus Mountains, the deportees were forced to follow one of two routes: one to the east and the other to the north of Syria. For those on the eastern deportation route, the resettlement areas extended as far south as Ma'an, passing through Hauran, Dera, Amman, and Kerek. Although famine and disease led to a significant loss of life in these areas, there were no massive massacres reported. Nevertheless, survival came at a great cost, marked by daily struggles and uncertainty. In contrast, the other deportation route traveled through the northern reaches of Arab Mesopotamia, where exiled Armenians were confined in concentration camps known as tent cities. Many were subsequently deported deeper into the desert, where they faced mass killings in 1916. This lecture will discuss the experiences of three groups of exiled women



Dr. Anna Aleksanyan

based on their circumstances in these settlements: those who settled in the eastern regions, those who were confined in the northern tent cities and subsequently massacred in 1916, and those who were distributed throughout Turkish villages as slaves before reaching Syria. The last group consisted of women who survived the massa-

cles of their caravans in 1915, managed to hide or were abducted along the way, and were eventually collected or arrested by gendarmes.

Aleksanyan earned her Ph.D. from the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University. Her research focuses on the gendered aspects of the Armenian Genocide, particularly the experiences of female victims from 1914 to 1918. Before her doctoral studies, she spent seven years as a senior research fellow and head of the Source Studies Department at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute. Aleksanyan holds a B.A. and M.A. in History from Yerevan State University. From July 2023 to January 2026, she served as a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Armenian Genocide Research Program at the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA.

The presentation will also be recorded for streaming on YouTube at: <https://bit.ly/armenianstudiesyoutube>.

## OBITUARY

### Rose Yessayan Bazarbashian Nurse, Philadelphia Tekeyan Leader

WAYNE, Penn. — Rose Yessayan Bazarbashian passed away on February 19, surrounded by her sons and daughter-in-law.

Born on March 10, 1938, in Aleppo, Syria, to Levon and Hayganoush Yessayan, Rose grew up surrounded by the love of her sister, Liza, and her brothers, Garo and Nazareth, in a close-knit and devoted family.

She pursued higher education in nursing at the American University of Beirut before emigrating to the United States in 1960. Committed to furthering her clinical excel-



lence, she continued her studies at Boston College, earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 1963, and obtained her Master of Science in Nursing from Boston University. In later years, while managing family and a busy career, she achieved the designation of nurse practitioner through a second Master of Science in Advanced Practice Nursing from Eastern University.

Rose began her distinguished nursing career in labor and delivery nursing, then later as nursing instructor at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, Mass., where she served for more than a decade. Her dedication to patient care and women's health laid the foundation for a lifelong commitment to the nursing profession. She served as a nursing instructor at the Lankenau Hospital School of Nursing until 1992, and later at the Schools of Nursing at both Frankford Hospital and Chester County Hospital,

shaping the next generation of nurses with both knowledge and compassion. In the latter years of her career, Rose served as night supervisor for several retirement communities including Devon Manor and Dunwoody Village, where her steady presence and gentle care brought comfort to many residents. A tireless and devoted provider, Rose even worked two jobs for several consecutive years to provide for her family's well-being. Remarkably, several nurses who later cared for her during her time at Bryn Mawr Rehab Hospital and Wayne Center had once been among her students.

In 1977, Rose married her beloved husband of 31 years, the late Antoine Bazarbashian, and together they built their life in the Philadelphia area. They made their home in Paoli, Penn., where they raised their two sons, Armen and Vicken, in a household grounded in faith, love and opportunity. Rose was a devoted wife and mother whose love for her family was boundless. She found great joy in cooking and baking, generously sharing her culinary talents with family and friends. Her home was always filled with warmth, hospitality, and the comforting aroma of a lovingly prepared meal. She was especially famous for her baklava and has graciously permitted the family to disclose her secret ingredient: a splash of rosewater.

Rose was deeply committed to her Armenian heritage and actively supported numerous Armenian causes. Rose was instrumental in helping lead the Philadelphia chapter of the Tekeyan Cultural Association. Her organizational skills and steady leadership supported countless cultural events and initiatives over the decades, leaving a lasting imprint on the multi-national Tekeyan organization. Rose was a dedicated parishioner of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, where she faithfully volunteered for many years, most notably running the Attic Treasures table at the parish's Annual Christmas Festival and as a Parish Nurse.

Rose was the sister of Nazareth (Alice) Yessayan, who survives, the late Dr. Gar-

abed Yessayan and the late Dr. Liza Dulgarian. Rose is survived by her sons, Armen (Bridget) and Vicken Bazarbashian, along with her nieces Laurel and Melissa, and her nephews Greg, Jeff and Alex, and grandnieces and grandnephews.

The family would like to give special acknowledgement and gratitude to the incredible team at the Wayne Center, especially the nursing aides, nurses, recreational team, therapy team, dietary staff, facilities staff, social workers and front desk team members for their support, kindness and care over the past 9 years, and to her devoted Nurse Practitioner, Gigi, and her won-

derful Hospice RN Troy, for their clinical excellence and compassionate care.

Friends and family are welcome to attend her viewing from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m., Saturday, February 28, at St. Sahag & St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church, 630 Clothier Rd, Wynnewood. Her funeral service will follow at 11 a.m. in the church. Her interment will be private.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Wayne Center Resident Association, 30 West Avenue, Wayne, PA 19087 and St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church, 630 Clothier Road, Wynnewood, PA 19096.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

## Armenian Assembly Hosts Winter Weekend Gathering in Florida

WASHINGTON — Last month, the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) hosted a Winter Weekend in Delray Beach, Fla. on January 16 and 17, which included a special donor event and dynamic briefing along with an evening reception and dinner featuring the John Berberian Ensemble.

At the special donor event, Archbishop Vicken Aykazian provided the invocation and benediction. Co-Chairs Talin Yacoubian and Oscar Tatosian thanked the Committee Members and weekend sponsors. They updated guests and members about the Assembly's Capital Campaign that is nearing its \$3 million goal for the Assembly's new headquarters. They also extended special thanks to the evening's hosts, Ed and Susan Atamian, for the gift from the Asbed and Margaret Zakarian Foundation, that made possible the Armenian Diocese's Legate Office in Washington, DC housed within the Armenian Assembly's offices.

The Assembly briefing provided an op-

portunity to discuss issues and ways in which the community can come together to advance shared goals. During the briefing, a congressional overview was provided, including legislation that was recently introduced by a Florida Member of Congress that would repeal Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which restricts assistance to Azerbaijan. The Armenian Assembly strongly opposes repeal of Section 907 and urges its Members and activists to take action.

Genocide Commemoration on Capitol Hill featuring remarks by Members of Congress. The Assembly also held its Board meeting wherein it ratified the Board slate with the following Board Members re-elected to serve a four-year term: Valina Agbabian, Aram Gavoor, Bianka Kadian-Dodov, Alex Karapetian, Peter Mirijanian, Carolyn Mugar, Lu Ann Ohanian, David Onanian, Herman Purutyan, Oscar Tatosian and Annie Simonian Totah.

In addition to the returning Board Members, the Assembly welcomes Souren Israelyan as the newest member of the Board. Israelyan has been practicing law since 2003 and founded the Law Office of Souren A. Israelyan in 2008.

Massachusetts State Representative David Muradian (R-MA) served as Master of Ceremonies for the dinner with the invocation led by Rev. Father Garabed Kochakian and remarks from Board Member Lu Ann Ohanian, Co-Chairs Talin Yacoubian



Assembly Board Members, Sponsors, and Supporters



and Oscar Tatosian, along with President Emerita Carolyn Mugar. Ohanian extended her appreciation to her committee members and sponsors. Yacoubian emphasized the importance of community and engagement noting that we should all be proud of how the next generation is stepping up and stepping forward. Tatosian echoed Yacoubian's remarks and highlighted the critically important work of the Assembly and recognized and extended the Assembly's deep gratitude to Pontish Yeramyian for her commitment to become a Life Trustee of the Armenian Assembly. Mugar also extended her appreciation to everyone gathered and highlighted work of the Armenian Tree Project and the upcoming Global Biodiversity Summit (COP17) taking place in Armenia in October of this year. The evening concluded with music and dancing with the John Berberian Ensemble.

During the briefing, Assembly Members Sam and Lucine Kaprielian shared their experience this past summer and how they took a group of non-Armenians to Armenia to help raise awareness and gain a better understanding of the issues facing the first Christian nation. The Assembly also announced its 2026 Spring Advocacy Summit, which will take place the week of April 13th, and will include an Armenian

Genocide Commemoration on Capitol Hill featuring remarks by Members of Congress.

Genocide Commemoration on Capitol Hill featuring remarks by Members of Congress.



## Watertown High School Graduate Wins Award, Scholarship

WATERTOWN — Natalie Tenekedzhyan, a graduate of Watertown High School, was selected by the Watertown Guidance Department as the recipient of The Tough Choices in History Book Award and Tough Choices in History Rev. Vartan Hartunian Scholarship for her exemplary high school academic record, successful completion of her first college semester and her award-winning essay based on the memoir *Neither to Laugh Nor to Weep*, written by Rev. Abraham Hartunian and translated by his son, Rev Vartan Hartunian. The account chronicles the survival of a people and family from the 1915-1922 Armenian Genocide beginning in Marash concluding with the burning of Smyrna.

Natalie graduated with honors from Watertown High School in June 2025 and currently is freshman majoring in Premedical Health Studies at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences.

Natalie is the daughter of Vardan Tenekedzhyan and Siranush Melkonyan Tenekedzhyan formerly of Gymri; granddaughter of Oganess and Vardui Tenekedzhyan, Gyulnarochka and the late Avik Melkonyan; and sister to Vardui Izabell Tenekedzhyan.

The Tough Choices in History Award and the Tough Choices in History Rev. Vartan Hartunian Scholarship application is available through the Watertown High School Guidance Department. The merit-based award and scholarship is open to all Watertown High School seniors without regard to race, color, creed, religion, or national origin. Required reading for competition of the essay component of the application, the biography is available for sale at National Association of Armenian Studies and Research, Belmont and Armenian Museum, Watertown and is accessible free throughout Massachusetts public libraries.

 Institute for the Study  
of Eastern Christianity  
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

GRACE AND PAUL SHAHINIAN ARMENIAN CHRISTIAN ART AND CULTURE LECTURE SERIES

## ARMENIAN ART AND THE WORLD

**HELEN C. EVANS, Ph.D.**

Mary and Michael Jaharis Curator for Byzantine Art Emerita  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

**Date: March 26, 2026**

**Time: 5 p.m.**

**Location: Heritage Hall\***

The Catholic University of America  
Father O'Connell Hall  
620 Michigan Ave., N.E.  
Washington, DC 20064

\* Heritage Hall is located on the main floor of Father O'Connell Hall.



### ABSTRACT

Domed churches, intricate sculpted images, elaborately illuminated manuscripts, gilded reliquaries, richly decorated textiles — Armenian art is the multifaceted visual voice of the Armenian people. It defines how Armenians view themselves, as well as the important role they have played over the centuries, and still play, in the larger world. This talk shows that Armenian art — once studied primarily as a national tradition — is also evidence of Armenia's importance to the world and its art.

This lecture is free and open to the public. For information and to register, visit our [website](#).  
To request accommodations for individuals with disabilities, please call 202-319-5683.



COMMUNITY NEWS

# Co-Creating the Matenadaran Garden: Presentation By Curator Nairi Khatchadourian of Yerevan

WATERTOWN — Curator Nairi Khatchadourian, visiting from Yerevan, will speak on the Matenadaran garden project on Friday, March 6 at the Baikar Building. Her English-language presentation is sponsored by the Armenian Tree Project and the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Boston.

Perched on one of the last remaining hills of Yerevan’s natural amphitheater, the slope of the Matenadaran will soon blossom into a garden. Yerevan’s residents and visitors alike will be able to stroll along the Matenadaran’s terraced green promenades. On November 22, 2025, a co-creation workshop led by the curatorial practice AHA collective brought together 40 artists, architects, urban planners, botanists, Matenadaran researchers, scholars and local residents to collectively imagine the future of the Matenadaran garden. Organized in collaboration with the Armenia Tree Project and the Matenadaran, the workshop marked a new, inclusive, and interdisciplinary approach to public space design in Armenia.

Khatchadourian’s talk in Watertown will trace the site-specific methodology behind the co-creation, share insights from the workshop outcomes, and introduce the three garden visions that emerged from the process. The exhibition currently on view at the Matenadaran titled “The Sun is Rising: The Matenadaran Garden Vision” presents these visions and offers a window into the participatory design process.

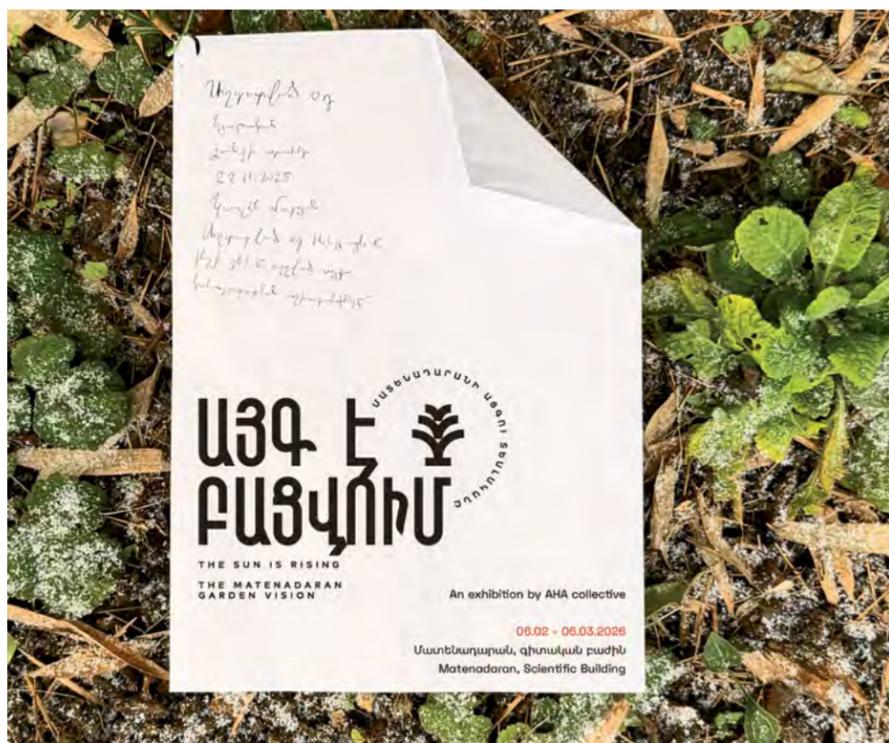
Khatchadourian will explain the curatorial framework of the exhibition and

explore its key themes: Which conceptual and spatial visions will define the future garden? How will the garden complement the museum experience and enter into dialogue with the Matenadaran’s manuscript legacy? How will it connect to Yerevan’s wider green landscape and public spaces?

Against the backdrop of Yerevan’s rapid urban transformation, this lecture reflects on co-creation as a critical tool for inclusive, culturally responsible, and context-sensitive design.

This special talk takes place during Nairi Khatchadourian’s visit to the United States, offering a rare opportunity to engage directly with her curatorial work and the vision for the Matenadaran garden, a visionary project redefining contemporary Armenian garden and landscape design thinking.

Khatchadourian is a Paris-born curator, art historian, and founding director of AHA collective, an independent curatorial practice based in Yerevan since 2019. Khatchadourian works at the intersection of contemporary art, publishing, critical museology, and placemaking. Her work brings together artists, architects, designers, scholars in museums, public spaces, gardens, abandoned factories, villages, and heritage sites to renew the place of art within territories. She has curated more than 30 exhibitions and edited a dozen catalogs on Armenian contemporary art, design and cultural heritage. Her curatorial projects take the shape of long-term processes rather than singular events, creating space for



Advertising for the exhibition at the Matenadaran

alternative temporalities, intergenerational dialogue, and knowledge transmission. Khatchadourian was the curator of the exhibition “In Relief: Design in Armenian” at the 2025 International Design Biennale in St. Etienne, France.

Since 2024, marking the 5th anniversary of its creation, AHA collective opened a gallery in the heart of Yerevan. The gallery presents an annual calendar punctuated by

exhibitions and public programs, presenting works of artists from diverse backgrounds across the modern and contemporary eras, with a strong focus on emerging voices and overlooked figures from Armenia and its diaspora.

The event will begin at 7:30 p.m. at the Baikar Building, located at 755 Mt. Auburn Street. For more information, email [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com).

Tekeyan Cultural Association and Armenia Tree Project are co-sponsoring a presentation by **Nairi Khatchadourian** curator of ATP's Matenadaran Garden project. Ms. Khatchadourian will be visiting from Yerevan to discuss the process behind bringing a multisensory green space to the grounds of Armenia's iconic manuscript research library and one of our most important cultural institutions.

**March 6th at 7:30pm**  
**Historic Baikar Building**  
 (755 Mt Auburn Street)  
**in Watertown, MA.**



# Arts & Culture

## Andrea Savorani Neri

### *A Visual Investigation On His Ancestors*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/PARIS — Andrea Savorani Neri (born in 1976) is a Paris-based Italian photographer. He graduated in modern literature from the University of Bologna and studied photography at IUAV University of Venice. From the beginning of his career, he has explored the relationship between language and image. After research periods in Spain, France, and Russia, he settled in Paris and later taught at the University of Paris III, Sorbonne Nouvelle, and at Université Paris Cité.

He has collaborated with international TV networks, news agencies, and print media, including NUR Photo, IMAGO, Euronews, BBC, Sky TG24, RAI, and L'Espresso, among others. His work has appeared in major newspapers and magazines worldwide, such as *Le Monde*, *Paris Match*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*, *Le Point*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *L'Espresso*, *La Repubblica*, *El País*, *Der Spiegel* Al Jazeera, and many others.

For more about him see <https://www.andrea-savorani-neri.com/>



Dear Andrea, while looking through your photographs, I was especially struck by your human portraits in what I would call a “dry” documentary style. Many of your subjects seem slightly disoriented in the world around them; they rarely smile — even when they are young people or children, even within the fashion context. Is this a conscious choice?

Both the absence of an overly obvious smile in my photographs and the vague feeling of disorientation with respect to the surrounding world are the result of deliberate choice. What exactly am I doing when I take a photograph of a person? What kind of relationship am I establishing with that person and, above all, what kind of representation do I want to give of that person to those who may observe their image? If we add the complexity and substantial unknowability of the individual to the fact that photography is always and in any case a fiction, not see NERI, page 16



Pegasus Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Karén Hakobyan

## Pegasus: The Orchestra Makes Debut at St. Vartan Cathedral

NEW YORK — Pegasus: The Orchestra will make its debut at St. Vartan Cathedral on Friday, March 20, at 7 p.m., in a program titled “Armenian Voices, American Rhapsody.”

The concert is presented by the Cultural Committee of St. Vartan Cathedral, under the auspices of Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate.

Under the direction of Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Karén Hakobyan, the evening reflects a deeply personal artistic journey. Born in Armenia and now based in New York, Hakobyan has shaped Pegasus around flexibility, clarity, and carefully curated programming. For this debut, every work on the program is heard in a new version crafted by Hakobyan for Pegasus’s eighteen-member ensemble, curated specifically for this concert.

The program opens with selections from Komitas’s Armenian Dances, performed by guest pianist Kiron Atom Tellian, alongside orchestral arrangements of Komitas by Hakobyan that illuminate Armenia’s most revered musical voice through a contemporary and intimate orchestral lens.

Cellist Sergey Antonov, Pegasus Artist in Residence, joins the orchestra for Saint-Saëns’s *Cello Concerto No. 1* and Arutunian’s *Impromptu*, followed by Rachmaninoff’s *Vocalise*.

“It is always a pleasure to collaborate with Pegasus as Artist in Residence,” Antonov said. “I am especially thrilled to bring Saint-Saëns’s *Cello Concerto* to life in Karén Hakobyan’s new arrangement, which reveals fresh color and clarity in this beloved gem. Working with an ensemble so responsive and artistically committed makes the experience all the more meaningful,” said Antonov.

The concert concludes with Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, performed and conducted by Hakobyan. Rather than presenting the work as a stylistic contrast, Hakobyan views it as an extension of his dual cultural identity. “*Rhapsody in Blue* represents the American chapter of my journey,” he said. “This program is about identity — about carrying Armenian musical consciousness into every space I inhabit.”

St. Vartan Cathedral is located at 300 East 34th Street, New York. Tickets: \$40, with ages 12 and under free. For more information or tickets, visit <https://givebuter.com/pegasus-concert>



Pegasus: The Orchestra performing at Merkin Hall

## Armenian American Museum to Host Concert by Dr. Laura Farré Rozada

GLENDALE — The Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center of California presents, in collaboration with Instituto Cervantes Los Angeles, award-winning pianist and mathematician Dr. Laura Farré Rozada in concert on Wednesday, March 25, at the Glendale Presbyterian Church. The concert is free to attend and open to the public. Advance registration is required.

Dr. Farré Rozada’s newest album “Araspel” (2025), a tribute to Armenia’s musical heritage, earned multiple international awards across the United States, United Kingdom, Armenia, and Europe. Throughout her career she has performed across five continents in renowned venues including Carnegie Hall in New York, the Southbank Centre in London, and the Cafesjian Center for the Arts in Yerevan, with broadcasts featured on BBC Radio 3, France Musique, and international public radio networks.

Recognized by BBC Music Magazine as a “Rising Star,” Farré Rozada is internationally celebrated for performances that unite scientific curiosity with emotional depth. The press has described her as one of the most original and reflective artists of her generation, an artist who moves



Dr. Laura Farré Rozada

comfortably between equations and sonatas, between research and resonance. She is the recipient of the American Classical Young Musician Award in Washington, D.C., a “New Talent” honoree by the BIME Equity Awards, and an artist and lecturer in residence at leading cultural institutions across Spain.

Beyond the concert hall, Farré Rozada is also a researcher specializing in music and mathematics and currently serves as associate professor at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia and the Catalonia College of Music. Her work explores musical memory, performance psychology, and the ways patterns shape human expression.

The program will celebrate classical repertoire alongside works connected to Armenian musical tradition, reflecting the museum’s mission to share culture through meaningful artistic experiences while its landmark cultural campus continues to be developed.

Armenian American Museum long-standing supporters Donnell and Rima Cameron have underwritten the venue and production of the concert. Post-concert reception is sponsored by Azniv Ghazanian.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Sirapian's Novel *Palu-Paris* Presented at Yerevan's Tekeyan Center

YEREVAN — On February 17, at Yerevan's Tekeyan Center, the book launch of the Armenian translation of public figure and publicist Jean-Varoujan Sirapian's *Palu-Paris: An Armenian's Journey* took place. The event evolved from a literary occasion into an intellectually substantial forum, where national memory and historical self-consciousness stood at the center of discussion.

The book presents the life journey of Vartan, who becomes a voluntary exile, tracing his path from the remote town of Palu (Kharpert) in Western Armenia to Paris. The author has crafted a destiny shaped by unexpected yet internally coherent turns, trials, and stages of self-discovery. However, the work does not confine itself to an individual narrative; it transforms into an artistic testimony of collective memory, addressing the fundamental issues of dispossession, exile, the preservation of identity, the transmission of cultural heritage, and the spiritual bond between generations.

In the opening remarks, it was emphasized that the book constitutes a significant contribution to contemporary interpretations of diasporan Armenian themes, harmoniously combining historical fact with artistic narrative.

Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, and President of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Armenia Ruben Mirzakhanyan noted that he read the book from cover to cover in one sitting, highlighting its harmonious integration of artistic conception with historical layers.

Corresponding Member of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Doctor of Philology and Prof. Aelita Dolukhanyan stated that she read the book with great enthusiasm and expressed her gratitude to the author for writing such a work.

According to Associate Prof. Knarik Abrahamyan, the novel is noteworthy both for its thematic choice and its structure; it offers a comprehensive artistic portrayal of Constantinopolitan Armenian life, while synthesizing the historical and the fictional. Addressing the journey that begins in Palu and extends to France and Armenia, the author reveals the complex process of searching for national identity, demonstrating how the protagonist ultimately rediscovers himself on Armenian soil. The novel is intellectually dense, rich in historical and political layers, and aligns with the traditions of Constantinopolitan Armenian literature, while opening possibilities for a new, more candid discourse. As Abrahamyan observed, "Armenia is fertile ground for

improbable encounters and the discovery of new horizons." This idea pertains not only to the hero, but also to the reader's experience. Encountering the book itself becomes a unique and unexpected revelation, with its most significant achievement being the restoration of a sense of belonging and identity.

Speaking on behalf of the younger generation was Nina Chughuryan, a first-year graduate student in the Faculty of Philology at the Armenian State Pedagogical University, who presented her personal reading of the work.

Translator Nelly Stepanyan addressed the stylistic and linguistic features of the text, emphasizing the depth of its emotional layers and the balance of its historical flow.

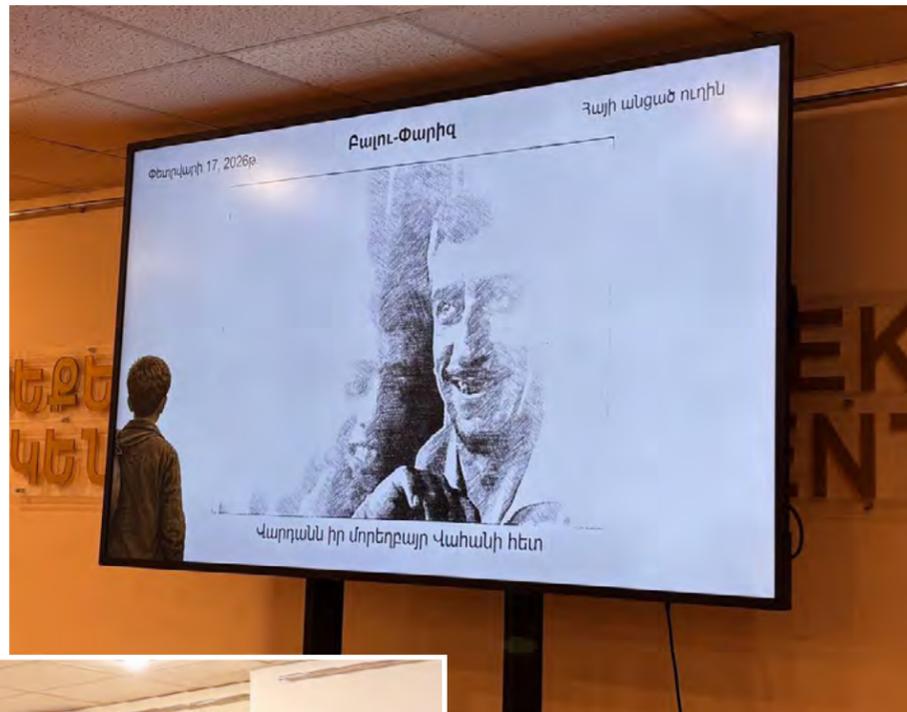
At the conclusion of the event, the au-



Ruben Mirzakhanyan with Jean-Varoujan Sirapian, holding a copy of the Atlas of the Historical Cartography of Armenia gifted to him

thor, Varoujan Sirapian, delivered closing remarks, thanking the attendees and underscoring that the book was born not only from research and personal experience, but also from an inner imperative to preserve historical justice and memory.

A symbolic finale to the meeting came when Ruben Mirzakhanyan presented the author with the *Atlas of the Historical Car-*



An illustration from the book of the novel's protagonist Vartan with his uncle Vahan



Translator Nelly Stepanyan speaking



Associate Professor Knarik Abrahamyan, center, speaking at the event

and answers, reaffirming that *Palu-Paris: An Armenian's Journey* is not merely a new literary publication, but a significant intellectual event aimed at reinterpreting national identity, historical memory, and the diasporan experience.

*tography of Armenia* as a token of scientific heritage and the preservation of historical spatial memory. The gift served as a bridge between the geographical routes depicted in the book and their scientific cartographic representation, underscoring the complementary nature of history and literature.

The book launch proceeded in an atmosphere of active discussion and questions



Corresponding Member of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Doctor of Philology and Professor Aelita Dolukhanyan praising the book



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



Lahmacun served at Mer Taghe in Yerevan, Photo Benjamin Kemper

## Avocado and Lentil Fritters with Lemon Avocado Yogurt Sauce

“With strong evidence supporting the Mediterranean-style Diet’s health benefits, this eating pattern is now recommended in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and by the American Heart Association. It’s easy to understand why. The scientific support for eating more fruits, vegetables, legumes, seafood, olives and nuts is robust and the heart-healthy avocado, which contributes naturally good fats, fits perfectly into the Mediterranean style of eating,” says Wendy Jo Peterson, a culinary trained nutritionist with the California Avocado Commission.

As a dietitian for nearly 20 years, Wendy Jo has been trained to challenge the norm, search the science, and move forward with an evidence-based approach. As a culinary trained nutritionist, she embraces the slow food movement and relishes the old world ways of cooking, from sourdough to homemade pasta. She is an award-winning author of *Born To Eat*, *Bread Making For Dummies*, *Mediterranean Diet Cookbook For Dummies*, *Adrenal Fatigue For Dummies*, *Air Fryer Cookbook For Dummies*, and *Instant Pot® Cookbook For Dummies*. You can find her sharing tips and tricks as a regular contributor with *Taste of Home Magazine*.

“California Avocados are a heart-healthy superfood. The Mediterranean Diet is one that is proportionately high in healthy fats, such as monounsaturated fats, making avocados a perfect fit. There’s more to fresh California Avocados than great taste. Learning about avocado nutrition facts can inspire you to find more ways to incorporate this healthy super fruit into your healthy diet. California Avocados are a nutritional powerhouse. Add to smoothies, soups, salads, bowls, burgers and more for a creamy, buttery taste you crave and the nutrition your body needs. Nutrient-dense foods are those that provide substantial amounts of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients with relatively few calories.”

“One-third of a medium avocado (50 g) has 80 calories and contributes nearly 20 vitamins and minerals, making it a great nutrient-dense food choice. California Avocados are naturally sodium-, sugar- and cholesterol-free. Avocados can act as a ‘nutrient booster’ by helping increase the absorption of fat-soluble nutrients such as vitamins A, D, K and E.”

“The Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the American Heart Association recommend eating less nutrient-poor foods and limiting the amount of saturated fat, trans fat, added sugars and sodium consumed. The majority of fats in one’s diet should be heart-healthy monounsaturated or polyunsaturated; more than 75% of the fat in avocados is unsaturated, good fat. Why naturally good fats? Because the body needs some dietary fat in moderation to help with absorption of nutrients. Good fats, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, do not raise LDL (‘bad’) cholesterol levels.”

“Wendy Jo’s plant-forward recipe is perfect for a Meatless dinner, a light lunch, or anyone looking to embrace the Mediterranean Diet. The recipe is packed with 57% daily value dietary fiber from favorites like lentils and avocados. Make these tasty fritters into a sandwich, stuff them into your favorite pita or crusty roll, or serve as an appetizer at your next party.”

### INGREDIENTS:

#### Sauce:

- 1 cup whole fat Greek yogurt
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 ripe Fresh California Avocado, peeled and seeded
- 1/4 cup parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt, to taste

### Fritters:

- 1 1/2 cups cooked brown lentils
- 1 large ripe Fresh California Avocado, peeled and seeded
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
- 1/4 cup chopped onions
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1/4 cup parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon za’atar, or ground coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt, to taste
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups bread crumbs
- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil, for frying

### Salad:

- 4 cups arugula, or shredded Tuscan kale or fresh spinach
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste
- 1/4 ripe Fresh California Avocado, peeled, seeded and chopped
- 1 teaspoon sesame seeds, optional

### PREPARATION:

Add yogurt, lemon juice, avocado, parsley and sea salt to food processor. Blend for 30 seconds, scraping down the sides as needed. Test for flavor and add salt as needed.

Rinse food processor to make the fritters. Add lentils, avocado, lemon juice, chopped onions, garlic and parsley to the food processor. Blend ingredients for 1 minute, frequently scraping down sides. Add za’atar, sea salt, flour and bread crumbs; pulse for 30 seconds to incorporate the bread crumbs.

Using a cookie scoop or tablespoon, form 2 tablespoon patties. Patties will be about 2 1/2 inch circles and 1/2 inch in thickness.

In a heavy cast iron skillet or heavy skillet, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Pan fry the fritters for 2 minutes on one side and 1 to 2 minutes on the other or until lightly golden brown in color. Transfer cooked fritters to plate and cover with paper towels. Cook fritters in 3 to 4 batches. In a separate mixing bowl, toss greens with lemon juice and massage in olive oil and sea salt.

To plate, place 1 cup greens on each plate. Place 4 fritters around the bed of greens and drizzle or dollop with the lemon and avocado yogurt sauce. Add chopped avocado, and for optional garnish sprinkle with sesame seeds.

\*Large avocados are recommended for this recipe. A large avocado averages about 8 ounces. If using smaller or larger size avocados adjust the quantity accordingly.

Serves: 4

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 12 minutes

Total time: 27 minutes

Serving Suggestion: If you can’t find za’atar, you can use cumin or coriander instead. If you don’t have sesame seeds on hand try chopped walnuts or other nuts.

Beverage Pairing: Cucumber and lemon infused sparkling water would make for a refreshing beverage, but if you’re craving a crisp glass of wine opt for a Sauvignon Blanc that highlights citrus notes.

Wendy Jo Peterson, MS, RD, CSSD., speaker, culinary nutritionist, dietitian and cookbook author

For this recipe, go to: <https://californiaavocado.com/recipe/avocado-lentil-fritters-lemon-avocado-yogurt-sauce/>

Learn how to enjoy a healthy Mediterranean Lifestyle with avocados at: <https://californiaavocado.com/lifestyle/the-mediterranean-lifestyle-with-california-avocados/>

Each year, California Avocados are in season from spring through summer/early fall, with the bulk of the fruit staying in the Western United States.

### CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

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Irvine, CA 92618

Phone: (949) 341-1955

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Website: <https://californiaavocado.com/>

Search recipes: <https://californiaavocado.com/recipes/snacks/>

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Created in 1978, the California Avocado Commission strives to enhance the premium positioning of California Avocados through advertising, promotion and public relations, and engages in related industry activities. California Avocados are commercially cultivated with uncompromising dedication to quality and freshness, by about 3,000 growers in the Golden State. The California Avocado Commission serves as the official information source for California Avocados and the California Avocado industry. California Avocado farmers are committed to responsible and sustainable growing practices, recognizing how important it is to preserve the land for future generations. With proud hands and a deep-rooted connection to the land, they cultivate avocados that not only taste good but do it in a manner that also respects the Earth.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Books

## Hachig Kazarian's Apology for Western Armenian Music: A Layperson's Perspective

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Hachig Kazarian's *Western Armenian Music: From Asia Minor To The United States* (The Press at California State University, Fresno, 2023) is a valuable contribution to the debate over the notion of "authenticity" in ethnic music. The book is largely a response to allegations that the folk and dance music performed by Armenian immigrants to the United States from Historic Armenia/Asia Minor following the Hamidian Massacres of 1894-1896 and the 1915 Armenian Genocide — disparagingly referred to as *deghatsis* — is not authentic Armenian music. At the heart of the massive undertaking is Kazarian's profound love of his people and their traditions. Without proper documentation and printed scholarship material, avers Kazarian, this music is "destined to be lost forever."

Historic Armenia has ceased to exist and what is dismissed as *deghatsi* music — which is different from much of the electronically generated music that imitates the Western pop/rock genre and sounds the same globally — is indeed the only surviving authentic Armenian folk music in the diaspora, notes Kazarian. The survivors who landed in the United States formed bands that played the traditional acoustic musical instruments, such as the *oud*, *kanon* and *dumbek* — considered to be key indicators of authenticity — of their villages. The music these bands performed helped preserve a whole tradition of folk dance and music that would otherwise have been lost, writes Kazarian.

Yet, the explicitly Middle Eastern character of this music — still performed today — prompts critics with the colonial mindset of privileging everything Western and European to characterize it as inauthentic. While Kazarian concedes the detractors' overpowering desire "to separate their musical culture from the music of their oppressors" — Turkish lyrics played a part in fueling the opposition — "this music is absolutely *not* Turkish," he states emphatically. It was Armenian music that was appropriated by the Seljuk Turks, not the other way round, he argues. Denying the Armenian roots of this music would throw it into the hands of other ethnicities, specifically Turkic ethnic groups, and rob Armenian culture and traditions of a key component of its riches, he avers.

Kazarian reproduces over a hundred folk songs and melodies with his own notations and explanatory notes as evidence of the distinctly monodic nature of the music of the rural villages of Historic Armenia. And while he does not deny the profound respect for Armenian folk and dance music of Gomidas (Komitas) Vartabed Soghomonian, hailed by all — Kazarian not excepting — as the "founding father of Armenian music," he wonders why the esteemed ethnomusicologist "never commented on the vast difference between folk music and his polyphonic

compositions." That Gomidas's music is *folk* music is "a misconception," he asserts.

To further argue his point, Kazarian quotes the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok who collected his native folk songs and "raised them," in his own words, "to the level of art songs by providing them with the best possible piano accompaniments." Gomidas "never called his music *art music*; he always referred to his music as Armenian folk song or music," deplors Kazarian. Because of his Western training the Vartabed preferred Western polyphonic/harmonic music over monodic Oriental music, he adds. Surely aware of the odds (and perhaps apologetically?) Kazarian notes that he chose "traditionalism" over "modernization" — synonymous for many with Westernization — because of his desire to be faithful to "the true persona of Armenian music."

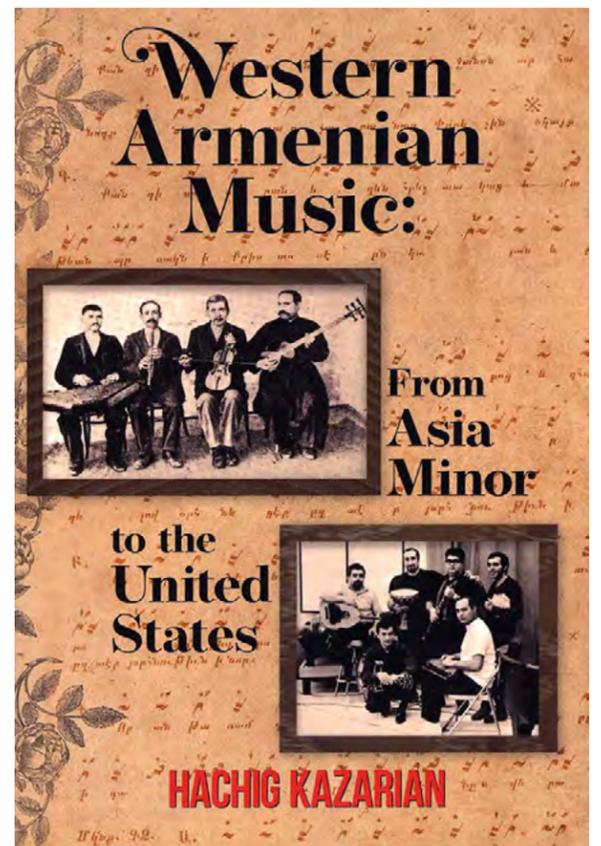
Which is not to say that Kazarian denies the important role Gomidas played in the preservation of thousands of Armenian folk songs. Indeed, the spirit of Gomidas looms large over the volume. "Gomidas writes..." inevitably precedes his "author's notes." Kazarian may, however, have gone a trifle too far in his insistence on neat definitions of the styles of music, reducing a constantly shifting reality to a static phenomenon.

While helpful, definitions can also be limiting as they deny the inevitable criss-crossing of cultures, especially in an area like Asia Minor where histories and traditions have co-existed and overlapped for centuries. Moreover, if, as most musicologists contend, "authenticity" means being true to the *spirit* of the culture, Gomidas's music cannot be said to be inauthentic.

Gomidas was born in Kutahya in Ottoman Turkey, a town with a significant Armenian community, and was immersed in "the cultural context" of the songs he was singing. Soghomon Soghomonian had an exceptionally beautiful voice as he was growing up. In fact, in an article on "Armenian Folk Dance," published in *Tadron yev Yerazhshdutiun* in 1908 — translated into English by Kazarian and quoted in full — Gomidas writes: "Spirit is the most important ingredient of the dance steps . . . and the melody that provides the tone and temperament of the dance."

Gomidas travelled throughout Historic Armenia, touring the remotest villages, and collected and rearranged monophonic village folk songs into polyphonic compositions, always focused on retaining the unique character of Armenian folk music. One could in fact argue that Gomidas' tireless efforts to modernize our music may have contributed to its survival. A culture stays alive because of its ability to evolve. Integrating the inevitable influences that surround it is part of the process of that evolution.

*Western Armenian Music: From Asia Minor To The United States* is in its second printing (2024). Kazarian's meticulous research and serious scholarship, combined



with his sixty-five years' experience performing as a professional musician — Kazarian holds a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Arts degree in clarinet performance from the prestigious Juilliard School of Music — contribute in important ways to documenting Western Armenian music. The enthusiastic musician provides documented background information on each of the American-born Armenian bands — such as the legendary Kef Time Band and the All-Star Band — in the United States. The detailed descriptions he offers of the bands he played with, his fellow musicians, the concerts and the venues are always engaging and add the credible voice of a good storyteller to his argument. The numerous photographs scattered throughout further enhance the documentation.

There will always be controversy regarding the definition of "authentic." Maintaining "purity" is well-nigh impossible, especially in the context of a globalized world where the integration of "others'" lifestyles, mannerisms and mores is an unavoidable truth. Kazarian himself attests to Western Armenian music not being "pure." "It is difficult to separate the elements of the 'Armenianness' and 'Turkishness' of the music . . . when you take into consideration the centuries of co-existing together," he writes.

Kazarian's hypothesis will inevitably stimulate further research into Western Armenian music. I also like to think that the book contributes to our ongoing efforts, both in the homeland and the diaspora, to preserve our cultural heritage in the face of threats to land and to sovereignty. By starting bands that played the traditional folk and dance music with the traditional instruments they had used in their villages, the early immigrants from historic Armenia — the *deghatsis* — helped keep the culture of their ancestral homeland alive in their new home, the United States. "Western Armenian music is now an Armenian American phenomenon, states Kazarian with absolute confidence.

## Arsenyanyan and Hare Record Digital Single Stratum

NORTH HAMPTON, N.H. — *Stratum* from Navona Records brings together the formidable talents of Hayk Arsenyan and Matt Hare in a moving new work for bass and piano that is deeply rooted in the notion of fatherhood. Hare commissioned the work to honor his late father, and it was written by Arsenyan expressly for this duo, who recorded it for the first time as this digital single. "Stratum" explores various extended playing techniques on bass and piano to create new timbres and sonorities that complement lyrical melodies, inspired by Armenian medieval traditions.

Lush harmonies and layered polyrhythmic phrases create a complex, textured soundscape, with virtuosic passages that showcase the broad capacities of the instruments and the performers. Hare's deep,

melancholic lines in the bass give way to Arsenyan's delicate piano passages, making an ethereal splash of beauty that softens Hare's dark, rich and commanding tone. Arsenyan's haunting diminuendo at the end of the piece, made by plucking the piano strings, creates the sounds of church bells and evoke grief and the subtle resolve to live on. As per quote by Byron: "And thus the heart will break, yet brokenly live on." Audiences may wish to listen to the work over and over again.

"Stratum" was published by Zimmerman Publications in Laguna Beach, California, in 2014. The same year it was premiered at the International Bass Convention in Fort Collins, CO, and toured in the cities of the United States and Canada.

New York based pianist and composer

Hayk Arsenyan has appeared in numerous recitals throughout Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Americas, in venues such as Carnegie Hall (New York), Salle Cortot (Paris), the Concourse (Sydney), Cadillac-Shanghai Concert Hall (China), Kumin Hall (Tokyo), Petranka Mozarteum (Prague), Auditorio Delibes (Valladolid), Dar-Al-Assad Opera House (Damascus), Sala Cervantes (Havana), MoBU (Sao Paolo), Tchaikovsky Hall (Moscow), Philippines National Museum (Bacolod), and televised recitals at the Dame Myra Hess Concert Series in Chicago, the Phillips Collection Series in Washington DC and at the Nixon Presidential Museum in Los Angeles.

Hare is a prolific musician championing the double bass. As a performer/composer, he often presents solo recitals of his own

compositions and arrangements. He recently premiered his orchestration of *Stratum*, with the University of California at Irvine's Symphony Orchestra with Arsenyan and himself as soloists. As an educator, Hare is highly sought after to serve as guest clinician for schools around Southern California. He's currently on faculty at the University of California at Irvine, Irvine Valley College, and Saddleback College.

Hare is also the founder/director of Bass Forward, a non-profit 501c3 that hosts double bass events around Southern California. Bass Forward loaned instruments to students whose school instruments were unavailable due to the pandemic lockdown. Based out of Southern California, Hare lives in Laguna Niguel with his wife Nadin and son, Emmett.

# Andrea Savorani Neri: A Visual Investigation on His Ancestor

NERI, from page 12

reality, the logical consequence is that it is necessary to avoid suggesting marked, overly defined, overly explicit emotions. This may seem paradoxical because photographs are by definition fixed images, but what I seek in my interaction with people is to achieve a sort of “zero degree” of the face portrayed. I prefer the absence of an expression that would explicitly suggest a state of mind, in order to preserve as much as possible the ambiguity and unknowability of the other. Creating images in itself necessarily implies a choice, but within this limit I would like to respect as much as possible the indeterminate nature of people, as well as that of places. And I believe that the two aspects you have highlighted are interdependent and linked: individuals live in a world whose nature they constantly seek to understand and whose codes they strive to decipher. My ambition is that at least part of this mystery — a mystery that is inherent in the primordial nature of photography as a medium — remains intact in my images.

**Am I right in sensing that loneliness is a central theme in your work? Even your landscapes appear isolated, fragile, almost melancholic — despite their often-vivid colors. How do you relate to this interpretation?**

It is an interpretation that sincerely honors me because it confirms that, at least to some extent, my images manage to evoke the themes and motivations from which they spring. The question of solitude runs through the entire history of art, but perhaps it is even more present in the history of literature. Photography has an indissoluble formal connection with poetry; both means of expression work on the basis of limits, of boundaries: the end of a line for poetry, the establishment of a relationship between presence and absence for photography. And speaking of poetry, your observation reminds me of Salvatore Quasimodo’s extreme synthesis: “Everyone stands alone on the heart of the earth / pierced by a ray of sunshine: / and suddenly it is evening.” I think that loneliness as an existential condition is an essential theme, especially for photography, which, perhaps more than other practices, takes place in silence and, indeed, in solitude. At least, this is the dimension that interests me. And I fully agree when you relate the question of loneliness to the question of the fragility of the landscape. With its unique ability to captivate the observer, photography emphasizes and sublimates the fact that at a specific moment in time, places (or people) had a certain appearance, certain characteristics. But a few events or the passage of time are enough to disrupt places and balances. Perhaps I am once again insisting on a paradox: photography has the gift of capturing the moment, but despite this (or perhaps because of it), it is a perpetual reminder of the fragility of places and people.

**Your great-great-grandfather was the painter Salvatore Valeri (1856–1946), who was married to Maria Lekegian, sister of the Constantinople-born photographer Gabriel Lekegian (1848/1853–1921), later active in Egypt. Please share some information about your Armenian ancestors.**

I am currently working on “Cross-Looking. A Visual Investigation on the Legacy of My Ancestors Valeri and Lekegian” project which has been awarded a Creative Europe grant. The work stems from personal research into the discovery of my origins, the need to reconstruct and reactivate memory, giving new life to connections and links that have been lost, both at a family level with the passing of generations and at a collective level because they have been buried

by historical events. I have always known that my great-great-grandfather was a painter who, at a very young age, emigrated to Constantinople where he spent more than 40 years painting and teaching painting. His name was Salvatore Valeri and his wife, my great-great-grandmother, was Maria Lekegian, an Armenian from Constantinople. Their lives, like those of millions of others, changed dramatically with the end of the Ottoman Empire, the advent of the Young Turks and the founding of the Republic. In 1923–1925, they left Istanbul and settled in Faenza, in the house where four subsequent generations lived, including myself. It was the hometown of Giuseppe Neri, who married my great-grandmother Italia, one of the three children of Salvatore Valeri and Maria Lekegian. I have always known this story because, when they left Constantinople to settle in Faenza, the Valeri-Lekegian family took their belongings with them, includ-



Alek, a metal engraver, in his workshop in Galata, near the Yolkuzade Mosque. Istanbul, 18 December, 2025 © Andrea Savorani Neri

ing almost all of Salvatore’s paintings. My grandfather Alessandro was the last member of the family to be born in Constantinople, in 1921. I grew up looking at those pictures, oil paintings, watercolors and ink drawings. But the passing of generations, the cycles of history, and the shifts in space had erased a fundamental element from the family memory: that Maria Lekegian’s older brother was Gabriel, who, after training as a painter in Constantinople (and perhaps in Rome), emigrated to Cairo, where he began a dazzling career as a photographer. I discovered this connection about eight years ago, when I unearthed the portrait that his sister Maria had kept among her belongings from a box in the basement. It was then that I decided to take photographs following the traces of these two intertwined and linked destinies: one ancestor was a painter and the other a photographer, both of whom emigrated at a time when the two artistic practices had a very special relationship within the visual arts.

A century later, it is still difficult for us to realize how complex the balance and relationships between different cultures were within the geographical areas that we simplify by calling the West and the East. My ambition is that the work I am doing with Cross-Looking will allow me to reconstruct the mosaic of those crucial years, of which my family has preserved only a partial and faded memory.

Photographing the rediscovery of the lives and works of my ancestors is an exciting endeavor and, as a photographer, discovering in retrospect that I had an ancestor who was a photographer more than a century ago raises profound questions about the choices we make and the invisible traces that the past leaves on the present.

There is also a historical aspect, both in a

broad sense and in the specific sense of the visual arts: Salvatore Valeri has remained semi-hidden in the history of Western art, largely because almost everything he produced never left the family house after 1923; Gabriel Lekegian, on the other hand, is mentioned in every text dealing with photography in the Middle East between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, apart from the thousands of images produced by his studio, very little is known about him. For me, looking at these two figures means looking at the lives of two emigrant artists who lived between the end of one era and the (dramatic) beginning of another, a pivotal period in the history of the visual arts. This memory, now faded, could help to reconnect a heritage that is deeply common and shared between Europe, Egypt and the former Ottoman Empire. It would be very presumptuous of me to suggest new perspectives on the practice of contempo-

revan, Istanbul, Cairo and Italy) embodies different aspects of the unique narrative I am trying to construct through photography. In Cairo, the visual density and stimuli linked to my storytelling are so dense that it is not easy to summarize. The city stimulates a deep sense of urgency, a visceral need to observe and document through photography before the places are erased, and with them their memory. In Cairo, Lekegian covered a wide range of subjects, landscapes and portraits with his images. I structured my work around three main axes: first of all, finding and observing the places linked to Gabriel’s life story: the location of his photography studio; the key spaces of the Armenian community to which he belonged; the Armenian Catholic and Orthodox institutions, etc. Something of that world still remains, even if only in the interstices, while other things have disappeared, such as the Hotel Continental-Savoy, where the Lekegian family organized the reception for their daughter Elise’s wedding. The second axes of my research consists of visiting the places that Gabriel photographed (but also painted by Valeri, who created many of his canvases in Cairo), making an almost mystical pilgrimage, I dare say, to physically set foot in the same places and look at them from a similar but not identical point of view. I did this, for example, with the inner courtyard of the Sultan Hassan Mosque, photographing the large ablution fountain repeatedly, almost obsessively, of which Lekegian made one of the glass negative plates that I love most. The fact that I work with essentially the same tool that my ancestor used also gives strength to the gesture of taking the picture: on a tripod, with a large-format camera. For Lekegian, it was glass plates; for me, it is 4x5-inch color film, but the approach is exactly the same. Finally, there is the encounter with people. Lekegian, like Valeri, with whom he shared his artistic training and family ties, was particularly devoted to portraiture, not so much in the studio (although this was a commercial necessity) as on the street. For me, in addition to meeting the inhabitants of Cairo, there was the encounter with people who, by sharing their specific knowledge of those years with me, provided a window onto the description of that world. I would like to mention here just a few of the many people in Cairo who were kind enough to spend time with me, helping me with my research, posing for photographs, and giving me tips and advice: Omniya Abdel Barr, architect and historian of Islamic architecture; Haig Avakian, an Armenian intellectual from Cairo, who accomplished the extraordinary task of compiling a large collection of Lekegian’s images in two volumes, published in 2020 by Tchahagir, introduced by the most comprehensive and well-documented text ever written on the life of the Armenian photographer; Francis Amin, Egyptian researcher and historian, leading expert on the history of photography in Egypt; Chris Mikaelian, whose family has run Reader’s Corner in Downtown Cairo for three generations, a historic place where various communities, not only the Armenian one, met and mingled. They were my guiding lights before and during my work in Cairo, and our dialogue on this research is only just beginning.

**And could you please share your impressions and photographic experience from your trip to Armenia? Did you feel any sense of kinship while you were there?**

My stay in Armenia last September represents the most metaphorical chapter of my narrative. Gabriel Lekegian and Salvatore Valeri were not born in what is now Armenia, they did not live there, at least as

**continued on next page**

**Could you share your impressions from your recent visit to Cairo, where you retraced Gabriel Lekegian’s footsteps and searched for traces of his studios and work?**

Each artistic residency in my project (Ye-



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

## CONNECTICUT

**APRIL 25** — The Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of Connecticut will hold its annual program, on the 111th anniversary of the Genocide, on Saturday, at 10:30 am. Historic Connecticut House Chamber at the State Capitol, 210 Capitol Avenue, Hartford. The program will include the Martyrs' Service. Clergy from Armenian Churches in Connecticut will participate in the service. Keynote speaker will be Bryan Ardouny, Executive Director of the Armenian Assembly of America. A reception will follow. For questions call Melanie at 860-651-0629.

## 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 6** — Co-Creating the Matenadaran Garden: Talk by Nairi Khatchadourian, curator and director of AHA collective. Sponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Boston and the Armenian Tree Project, Friday, 7:30 p.m., Baikar Building, 755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, free admission. For more info, email [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com)

**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 20** — City of Smile fundraiser, Jingo Hat Masterclass, Holy Trinity Armenian Church, Cambridge. Friday, 7 p.m. A hands-on culinary experience where tradition meets the taste! Cook, Learn, and Taste. Seating is

limited. Tickets \$100, which includes lovely take home gift. <https://www.ticketsource.com/null/t-zozvmlo>

**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 11** — All ASA Clubs and University students of Greater Boston are invited to "HyeVibes- An Evening of Armenian Music and Dancing." Live music performed by Berklee University ASA students. Hosted by Tekeyan Cultural Association of Boston and A.G.B.U. New England District @ Baikar Building, Watertown. Details to follow.

**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

## MICHIGAN

**THROUGH APRIL 30** — Watertown, Mass.-based Project Save Photograph Archive, which collects and preserves pictures and ephemera from generations of Armenian families around the world, will have its first exhibition outside Massachusetts this winter. Sponsored by the University of Michigan Center for Armenian Studies in Ann Arbor, the exhibition highlights photographs from key moments in Armenian history, as well as photos collected from Michigan and other midwestern families. Hours vary. Center for Armenian Studies, University of Michigan Ann Arbor Weiser Hall 500 Church St., Ann Arbor. 734-647-4143. For more info visit [projectsave.org](http://projectsave.org).

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

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far as we know, and they did not paint or photograph the territory within the current borders of the Republic of Armenia. And yet their names and their ties to the Armenian community and culture are unshakeable. To take my pictures, I therefore sought a symbolic link with the territory, and two interpretations emerged as I progressed with my work: the observation of people on the one hand, and the observation of archaeology on the other. These are two of the main themes of Lekegian's work. But what archaeology could I look at, knowing that Lekegian had

photographed the remains of ancient Egypt extensively, while I was in a former Soviet republic? Reflections made together with Vigen Galstyan (one of Cross-Looking's partners as director of the photography department of the National Gallery of Armenia) led me to focus precisely on the Soviet past and in particular on the archaeology of the industrial era. An often-uncomfortable legacy, not particularly appreciated, certainly (perhaps we could say hopefully) destined to disappear. But it is an important legacy because only through it can we avoid reducing the narrative about Armenia to two

themes that, like heavy boulders, occupy the collective imagination about the country: genocide on the one hand, and Christianity and its architectural and cultural heritage on the other. The uncomfortable, almost malodorous Soviet industrial past has the merit, so to speak, of reconnecting the country to a historical context and territorial relations, rather than isolating it, making it unique, an exception, on the basis of the catastrophe of the genocide and the grandeur of its Christian origins. This is how I spent almost a month studying and photographing places such as Nairit factory on the southern out-

skirts of Yerevan, or Alaverdi, Vanadzor, Gyumri and Metsamor. I photographed these places as if I were observing the monumental, disturbing, mysterious dimension of the remains of ancient Egypt: cooling towers instead of pyramids; enormous chimneys as if they were ancient minarets. However, I never neglected the relationship with the people I met along the way. And if there is one thing about Armenia that did not surprise me, it is the great hospitality, warmth and generosity that I already knew through my network of Armenian friends and colleagues living abroad.

## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**  
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# Has the Trump Administration Achieved What No Other U.S. Administration Has?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Over the past year, the Trump administration has been actively advancing its geopolitical interests in the South Caucasus and beyond. This has occurred under conditions in which the historical roles of Russia and Iran in the South Caucasus have significantly weakened.

In recent decades, Russia exercised real influence in the region. As for Iran, its influence was shaped less by direct political, economic, or military presence and more by the fact that neighboring states could not ignore Tehran's interests when shaping their foreign policies and bilateral relations with other players. Today, however, the situation has changed substantially for both Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is difficult to assess to what extent Iran's concerns are taken into account by Yerevan—and even less so by Baku. Moreover, the complex internal and external challenges currently facing Iran further complicate its ability to secure and sustain its role in the South Caucasus, even in terms of having its interests formally considered by its neighbors.

As for Russia, the situation is also complicated. President Ilham Aliyev has openly accused Russia of adopting an unfriendly stance toward Azerbaijan and has shaped his foreign policy narrative accordingly, thereby reducing Russian leverage over Baku. At the same time, Russia has significantly lost its instruments of influence and pressure over both Armenia and Azerbaijan, while in Georgia it still lacks decisive influence.

In other words, whereas the South Caucasus once operated under a relative balance — Turkey as Azerbaijan's political patron, Russia as Armenia's, and the collective West as Georgia's primary partner — that equilibrium has now been disrupted. The roughly 25-year balance has effectively collapsed. The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, the 2022 war in Ukraine, and several additional factors led to a substantial decline in Russia's influence over Armenia, as well as a weakening of the collective West's influence in Georgia. Turkey, however, managed not only to preserve but even to expand its influence over both Azerbaijan and Georgia, particularly in the economic sphere, while gradually acquiring additional leverage in Armenia.

This configuration has also enabled Azerbaijan to emerge as the local power in the South Caucasus, with all the implications that follow.

Against this backdrop, over the past year we have witnessed an unprecedented activation of the Trump administration in the South Caucasus. This is unprecedented in several respects. First, no previous U.S. administration had succeeded in establishing

such deep influence in the region — primarily due to the weakening of Russia and Iran. Second, conditions have emerged that allow the United States to promote the development of a Central Asia–Europe connectivity corridor that bypasses Russia, effectively pushing Moscow out of key regional positions.

As for China, although it is an emerging global power, it still lacks the institutional experience, historical depth, and soft-power infrastructure traditionally associated with established great powers. In this regard, the United States remains a highly competitive actor.

It is evident that Washington will seek to expand its influence as rapidly as possible, so long as it does not face serious geopolitical balancing against its strategic objectives. At the same time, the United States is likely to employ political, economic, and diplomatic tools to prevent coordinated counteraction by Russia or other actors.

One such tool could be a policy of intensified pressure on Iran, potentially including a military component. Such a development would further reduce Iran's influence not only in the South Caucasus but across the broader Middle East.

Taking these and other factors into account, one may conclude that the Trump administration has succeeded in penetrating the South Caucasus more deeply than any previous US administration, while laying potential foundations for a long-term strategic presence, including within the framework of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) initiative.

In fact, since 1991 no US administration had managed to establish the structural and political foundations necessary for Washington to secure

a qualitatively new level of presence in the South Caucasus — one with the potential to evolve into a sustained strategic foothold.

At the same time, the groundwork for such a presence has been shaped by comprehensive efforts aimed at reducing the historical roles and significance of Iran and Russia, including through the involvement of other international actors. In these processes, Washington has played a leading role — both during Trump's first term and under the Biden administration — ensuring the coordinated and consistent advancement of American interests.

(Suren Sargsyan is an expert on US foreign policy, researcher and author. He is a graduate of Yerevan State University, American University of Armenia and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Suren Sargsyan is a founder of the Armenian Center for American Studies, a research center based in Yerevan.)



## Statement of the Assembly of Bishops of The Holy Armenian Apostolic Church

The Assembly of Bishops convened February 17–19, 2026, in the city of Sankt Pölten, Austria, at the invitation and with the blessing of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, has concluded its deliberations.

Following its sessions, the bishops issued the following declaration:

We, the twenty-five bishops of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin of the Catholicate of All Armenians, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, give thanks and glory to the Heavenly Lord, who granted us the grace at the beginning of the season of Great Lent to renew in prayerful unity our episcopal vows made before the Holy Altar of the Descent and, in spiritual retreat, to be strengthened in our sacred calling — so that in these troubled times we may con-

tinue our fruitful mission with greater zeal and responsibility for the bright future of our Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, the strengthening of the faith of our faithful people throughout the world, and the enrichment of their spiritual life.

We offer filial gratitude to His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, at whose fatherly invitation the bishops serving in the homeland and the diaspora gathered together to reflect jointly on the challenges facing the Armenian Church and to seek paths toward overcoming them.

With deep concern and condemnation, we record that, due to unfounded criminal prosecution, the departure from Armenia of the Chief Shepherd of the Armenian Church and six of our brother bishops was obstructed, preventing their participation in this esteemed ecclesiastical gathering. Because

of this artificially created obstacle, we were compelled to receive the Pontifical Message of the Catholicos of All Armenians through videoconference. Messages were also sent to this gathering by the Hierarchs of our other Hierarchical Sees: His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia; His Beatitude Patriarch Nourhan Archbishop Manougian of Jerusalem; and His Beatitude Patriarch Sahak Archbishop Mashalian of Constantinople.

During its three-day sessions, the Assembly examined the following topics:

\* “The Mission of the Church in the Contemporary Era and Existing Challenges in the Homeland and Diaspora”; (presented by His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian)

\* “The Present State of Church-State Relations and the Situation Surrounding  
*continued on next page*



## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Two Armenian Officials Waste Taxpayers' Money on a Useless Trip To Los Angeles

Instead of working to improve the disastrous situation in Armenia and strengthening the homeland's security, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is busy alienating the Armenian diaspora.

Pashinyan sent two of his top officials to Los Angeles last week ostensibly to “counter the disinformation” emanating from Armenians in the United States: Lilit Makunts, Pashinyan's Chief Advisor and former Ambassador to the US, and his Chief of Staff, Arayik Harutyunyan. Rather than countering “disinformation,” they were in fact disseminating “disinformation” about conditions in Armenia. They not only wasted their time, but more importantly, wasted the Armenian taxpayers' money.

Here are some of the mistakes this duo made during their visit:

1) They spoke to a small gathering of Armenians at the Armenian Society of Los Angeles in Glendale on February 18. Since no announcement was made about their arrival, almost no one from the community knew that they were in town. There were no notices in the Armenian media about their appearance. If they concealed the news of their visit fearing protests or criticism, then they should not have come at all. An indication of their paranoia was the fact that they had invited only a handful of their followers and stationed two people at the entrance to ensure that no unwelcome guests would show up.

2) If their intent was to counter the anti-Armenia “disinformation campaign”:

a) Why didn't they hold their meeting in a much larger hall so their message could be heard by thousands of local Armenians instead of just one hundred? Shockingly, I was told that not even the local Armenian Consul General attended.

b) Why didn't they invite the media to the briefing?

c) Why didn't they hold a press conference with the Armenian media to spread their message to the community? If they can't face the Armenian media, how will they be able to confront Armenia's real enemies?

d) On April 1, 2025, Armenia hired the US lobbying firm Mercury Public Affairs for a monthly fee of \$50,000. The contract signed by then-Ambassador Makunts stated that Mercury was to provide to Armenia “strategic communi-

cations and media relations services.” Why would Armenia pay a professional firm the large sum of \$50,000 a month and not use its services? Mercury could have easily organized the press conference for both the American and Armenian media, and arranged meetings with government officials and leaders of Armenian and American organizations.

e) Another mistake Makunts and Harutyunyan made was leaving off their US itinerary Zareh Sinanyan — the so-called High Commissioner for the Armenian diaspora, who is supposed to be in charge of Armenia's relations with the Diaspora. If Zareh had any backbone, he would have submitted his resignation that same day. However, the real fault lies with Pashinyan, who lacks the experience to run a government. Otherwise, he would have not hired someone like Zareh who is so unqualified. Sadly, an incompetent prime minister appoints equally incompetent officials. Furthermore, Pashinyan appointed Makunts as ambassador to the US, even though she lacked the necessary experience for such a post in the world's most important capital. She served for four years as ambassador to Washington, rarely meeting with government officials. Instead of dismissing her, Pashinyan rewarded her with the high post of Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister. This is a case of the blind leading the blind. Her only notable accomplishment was teaching Pashinyan some English.

f) Regrettably, neither Makunts nor any other Armenian official said a word about Vice President JD Vance's deletion of the term Armenian Genocide from his Twitter (X) post after visiting the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan two weeks ago. Last week, when asked by FOX-TV to comment on Vance's offensive deletion, Makunts “declined to comment.” Furthermore, she described Turkey as a country with which “we have had a very difficult history!”

I became aware of an even stranger situation last week when I learned that Anna Hakobyan, the prime minister's partner, had flown from Qatar via Los Angeles to Fort Worth, Texas, where she visited the Buddhist monks' Huong Dao Vipassana Bhavana Center. In a video she posted on Facebook, she made tearful remarks comparing the Buddhist monks' 2,500-mile “Walk for Peace” across the United States to Pashinyan's march from Gyumri to Yerevan in 2018. She posted a video of herself walking with “the Peace Dog, Aloka,” who accompanied the monks just as Chalo, the Armenian dog, she said, accompanied Pashinyan during his celebrated march.

Hakobyan also posted a puzzling comment on Facebook last week saying: “The civil marriage of Prime Minister Pashinyan and I is over.” Some people interpreted this message as an announcement of separation, while others thought the couple finally got married in some kind of ceremony after decades of living together and having four children. A year ago, Pashinyan announced on Facebook that he and Anna had neither a church wedding nor a civil marriage. I wish the newlyweds much happiness.

from previous page

the Church in Armenia”; (presented by His Grace Bishop Grigor Khachatryan)

\* “The Protection of the Church's Autonomy from Political Exploitation and Ways of Overcoming the Current Situation.” (presented by His Grace Bishop Ashot Mnatsakanyan)

After substantive and constructive discussions conducted in a spirit of brotherly love and mutual understanding, we solemnly reaffirm the orders and principles sanctified by the tradition and centuries-long experience of our Holy Church in both its saving mission and its national life, noting in particular:

(a.) The head of the Armenian Church, founded by the preaching of the Holy Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew, is Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22). This divinely established institution is governed by Holy Scripture, the doctrine and canons of the Church, and the principle of apostolic succession under the pastoral leadership of the Armenian Patriarchs. The mission of the Holy Armenian Apostolic Church in the homeland and diaspora includes the spiritual care and Christian education of our people and the preservation of national and spiritual identity.

(b.) Throughout its centuries-long history, the Armenian Church — as “the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15) — has continually renewed itself in accordance with the needs of the times, keeping alive its essential mission to proclaim the Gospel of Christ and lead the people to salvation.

(c.) As the most ancient institution of pan-national significance, the Armenian Church has always advocated the existence of Armenian independent statehood and has supported — and continues to support — its strengthening and progress, with the firm conviction that the homeland state is the defender and guarantor of the endurance of

the Armenian people and the realization of national aspirations. The Armenian Church has never served foreign powers or external interests but has maintained unwavering loyalty exclusively to the Armenian people, its statehood, and the preservation of national identity.

In this context, the episcopal order expresses deep concern regarding the undesirable current state of church-state relations and, within this dangerous situation, calls upon the authorities of the Republic of Armenia:

\* to cease persecutions against the Church and respect the centuries-established sovereignty and autonomy of the Church, grounding church-state relations upon mutual respect, clear separation of competencies, and priority of national interest;

\* to end repression against clergy and the Catholicos of All Armenians through fabricated accusations and defamation;

\* to release the four imprisoned bishops, the priest, and the faithful who acted in defense of the Church;

\* to act exclusively according to the Constitution, legislation, and international law, remaining faithful to democratic principles by guaranteeing freedom of conscience, religion, and belief, and ensuring public harmony rather than division;

\* to resolve existing disagreements in a spirit of dialogue, without preconditions and without unproductive ultimatum rhetoric.

At the same time, the Assembly of Bishops exhorts the eight erring bishops:

\* to act in awareness of their vow of loyalty to Holy Etchmiadzin and the Catholicos of All Armenians;

\* to raise and resolve matters concerning internal church life exclusively within authorized ecclesiastical bodies;

\* to refrain from anti-canonical actions, divisive steps, and separatist manifestations that threaten schism and weaken the

Church's mission in the life of our faithful people. In this regard, the omission of the name of the Supreme Patriarch during the Divine Liturgy is ecclesologically unacceptable, and a direct blow to the unity of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Armenian Church.

Rejecting any reform movement imposed under external pressure, we deem it imperative that the overcoming of challenges facing the Armenian Church and all corrective efforts be carried out solely within the Assembly of Bishops and the Church's highest canonical bodies.

We, the bishops of the Armenian Church, reaffirm our fidelity to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Catholicos of All Armenians as the visible symbol and guarantee of the unity, reconciliation, and harmony of the Church, for “God is not the author of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33).

With the blessing of the Chief Shepherd of the Armenian Church, we commit ourselves to convening the Assembly of Bishops regularly in order to address and overcome the challenges before the Church and to strengthen our pastoral ministry in the life of our people.

We exhort the clergy of our Holy Church to remain steadfast in their calling and service, “being an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

The Church shall unwaveringly continue its sacred mission despite external pressures, remaining faithful to the Holy Gospel and the orthodox doctrine of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church.

We also call upon our faithful people, as “one body and one Spirit” in Christ (Eph. 4:4), to remain loyal and united around our Apostolic Holy Church and through prayer, dedication, and good works to strengthen and illumine our national and spiritual life.

Deeply concerned by the sham trials and unlawful verdicts carried out in Baku against the leadership of Artsakh, we call upon the international community and sister Churches to continue efforts toward the swift release of the captive Armenian sons.

From the depths of our hearts, we pray that the beneficent God, through the intercession of the Holy Mother-of-God and all the saints, may keep our Holy Church steadfast and unshaken, strengthen Armenia's independent statehood, and guide the life of the Armenian people throughout the world in peace and prosperity. We ask that the Lord grant peace to the whole world, to all nations and peoples.

“Finally, brethren, rejoice, be complete, be comforted, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11).

[Signed]

His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian; His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian; His Eminence Archbishop Vicken Aykazian; His Eminence Archbishop Aram Ateshian; His Eminence Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan; His Grace Bishop Ashot Mnatsakanyan; His Grace Bishop Armash Nalbandian; His Grace Bishop Ararat Galtaghchyan; His Grace Bishop Markos Hovhannisyanyan; His Grace Bishop Hovakim Manukyan; His Grace Bishop Tatev Hakobyan; His Grace Bishop Nareg Berberian; His Grace Bishop Abgar Hovakimyan; His Grace Bishop Serovbe Isakhanyan; His Grace Bishop Daniel Findikyan; His Grace Bishop Tiran Petrosyan; His Grace Bishop Oshagan Gulgulyan; His Grace Bishop Theodoros Zakaryan; His Grace Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan; His Grace Bishop Koryun Baghdasaryan; His Grace Bishop Kirakos Davtyan; His Grace Bishop Aren Shahenyan; His Grace Bishop Grigor Khachatryan; His Grace Bishop Bartev Barseghyan; His Grace Bishop Khoren Arakelyan



# Data or Dogma? A Critical Review of Khachkar Studios' 'U.S. Armenian Christian Ecosystem'

By Dr. Hratch Tchilingirian

In recent months, Khachkar Studios — a media outlet affiliated with billionaire Paul B. Kazarian's Charles & Agnes Kazarian Foundation — has flooded Armenian news cycles with claims of a “historically unprecedented” \$100 million investment to revitalize the “The Failing U.S. Armenian Christian Ecosystem.” Armed with corporate terminology like “Social Return on Investment (SROI),” “Benchmarking,” and “12 Body Parts,” the studio presents itself as a data-driven savior of “failing” churches.

However, a closer look at their published materials, methodology, and the actual nature of their “investment” reveals a project that is heavy on corporate jargon but strikingly light on academic rigor, transparency, and human expertise.

## The \$100 Million Question: Cash or “In-Kind”?

The headline-grabbing \$100 million figure is the cornerstone of Khachkar's PR campaign. Yet, their own press releases clarify that this investment is “shepherded by 5,000 pro bono senior management hours.”

In the world of professional consulting, 5,000 hours of “senior management” time — particularly if billed at the rates of a billionaire financier — can be valued at millions of dollars on paper without a single cent of liquid capital ever changing hands. If Khachkar Studios is counting the “professional time” of its own founder as a primary component of this \$100 million, the figure is less a philanthropic gift and more an internal accounting exercise.

In the 2023 IRS filing, the “book value”

of the Foundation's “total assets” is shown as \$209 million. The Foundation's “core competency is to improve Government Financial Performance (GFP) and Government Total Balance Sheet (GTBS) literacy.” From this perspective, “\$100 million” is almost half of the Foundations assets ostensibly being “invested” in Khachkar Studios.

## Methodological “Black Box”

Khachkar Studios claims to have conducted an “18-month research” project including “69 years of Armenian Church related materials and world-class benchmarking data.” They frequently cite a “3% faithfulness rate” among U.S. Armenians, ranking the community in the “bottom decile” of 23 Orthodox groups.

There is no publicly available white paper detailing the methodology behind these numbers. Where did the “verified attendance counts” for 106 parishes come from? Were they self-reported, observed, or estimated? They define “faithful” strictly as those attending non-holiday Sunday services. This narrow KPI ignores the complex ways Armenian identity and faith intersect through community service, cultural education, and private devotion. The “data” provided on the Khachkar website often consists of one-page PDF summaries and “Briefing Packets” that repeat the same conclusions without showing the raw data or the statistical models used to calculate, for example, the 6.1x SROI.

## The AI-Generated Authority

For a project supposedly dedicated to “revitalizing human faith,” the output of Khachkar Studios is remarkably devoid of human presence. Their extensive library of

podcasts and “Good News” videos (Workstream #2) consists almost entirely of AI-generated voices and avatars.

This creates a bizarre paradox: a studio claiming to “empower role models” and “build discipleship” is doing so through synthetic media. The reliance on AI suggests a lack of actual scholars, theologians, or community leaders willing to put their names and faces behind these “studies.”

## Who Are the Experts?

There is no “About” information on Khachkar Studios' website, other than the statement that it “is an affiliate of the Kazarian Foundation — created by Paul B. Kazarian in 1993. The Foundation's filings reveal that beyond Paul Kazarian and the institutional names of his firms (Japonica Partners, JI-Analytics), there are no listed advisory board members of Khachkar Studios, for instance, professionals, sociologists, theologians, or other academic experts.

Research into a centuries-old religious institution requires more than just “management excellence”; it requires an understanding of ecclesiology and ethnic sociology. Without a transparent list of qualified professionals running these “studies,” the conclusions feel less like social science and more like a top-down corporate audit.

## The “Ecosystem” Fallacy

Khachkar's “12 Body Parts” systems map attempts to consolidate the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic and Evangelical churches into a single “ecosystem.” While these groups share an ethnic heritage, they possess vastly different ecclesiological structures, governance models, and historical trajectories.

By flattening these distinctions into a single “underperforming” metric, Khachkar ignores the unique strengths and challenges of each denomination. The “Framework” assumes that a “one-size-fits-all” corporate management strategy — designed for “global large caps” (as per Kazarian's Japonica Partners profile) — can be seamlessly applied to the nuanced life of a parish.

## Data or Dogma?

Transparency is the bedrock of credible research. If Khachkar Studios wishes to be taken seriously by the community it seeks to “save,” it must move beyond slick PDFs and AI-generated podcasts. It must publish its full methodology, name its experts, and clarify exactly how much of the \$100 million is actual liquidity versus “in-kind” consulting fees.

Until then, the “Armenian Christian Ecosystem” study remains less a scientific discovery and more a private “pet project” dressed in the borrowed robe of data science.

For sure, “Armenian Christianity” today undoubtedly faces major institutional problems and serious challenges, but the central question is how to address these complex issues and develop effective, sustainable solutions. This requires not only sound methodology but also open communal dialogue — one that involves the clergy, lay leaders, and the faithful in a collective discernment process. Top-down directives alone have rarely proven sufficient; lasting change depends on conversations that reflect the lived experiences and concerns of the wider community.

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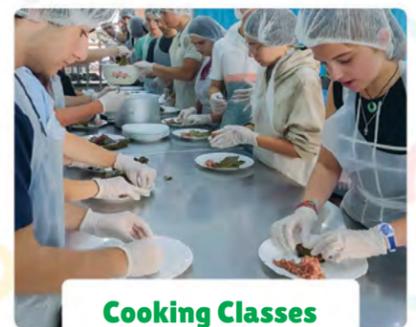
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