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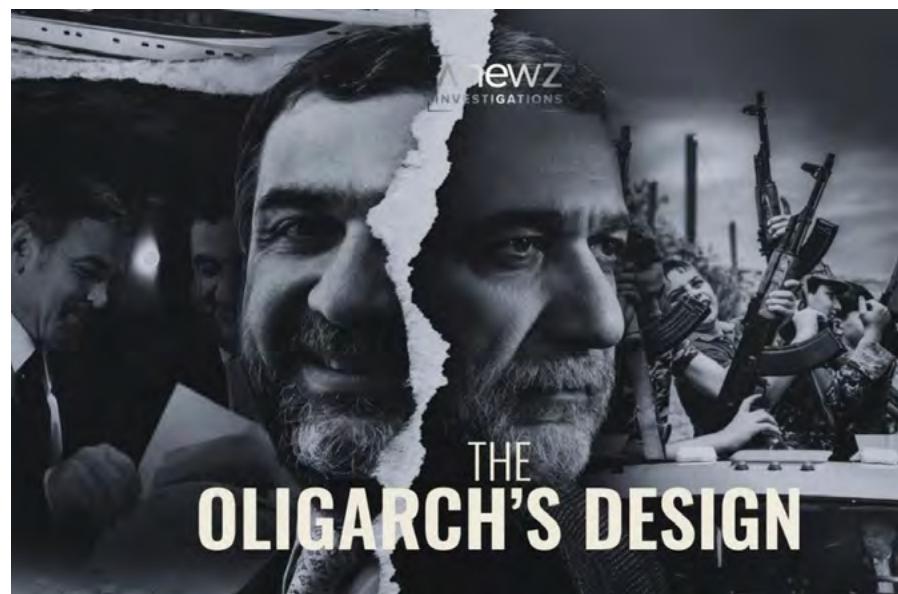
## Longtime Tekeyan Leader Maro Bedrosian Passes Away

HOUSTON, Tex. — Mariam "Maro" Bedrosian, a devoted wife, mother, and grandmother, a passionate advocate for Armenian culture and education, and a woman of extraordinary strength and resilience, passed away peacefully on January 27 at her home in Houston, at the age of 84.



Born in Beirut, Lebanon, on March 14, 1941, to Bedros Karaoglanian and Arousiag Mavilian, Maro displayed an uncommon drive and love of education from an early age. At a time when most girls of her generation stopped schooling after elementary grades, she insisted on continuing through junior high and high school, attending Tarouhi Hagopian High School in Beirut. She continued to blaze trails and break cultural norms when she secured her first job, her first car, her first apartment. She worked for the United Nations and later for the American multinational company Plessey Middle East — positions she earned through her fluency in four languages: Armenian, French, Arabic, and English.

see BEDROSIAN, page 8



Promotional material for documentary "the Oligarch's Design," by AnewZ.

## Did an Azerbaijani State-Funded Documentary Dupe Experts into Taking Part?

By Rasmus Canback

When the documentary "the Oligarch's Design" premiered in Baku on December 20, it was attended by a host of state representatives and Azerbaijani MPs. The channel's management

ewZ, a state-funded channel.

"We conducted the investigation in accordance with international standards," said AnewZ director Rufat Hamzayev, who according to JamNews added that the production started in January 2025.

The film features interviews with foreign experts, prominent investigative journalists, and Armenian public figures. Framed as an investigative documentary, it presents Ruben Vardanyan, a Russian-Armenian businessperson currently facing trial in Azerbaijan, in strongly negative terms.

It suggests that Vardanyan was the central figure behind the Karabakh movement until its collapse in September 2023, when a lightning Azerbaijani offensive

see VARDANYAN, page 5



A still from the documentary during the Baku premiere. Photo: Azertac.

stated that more than 100 people had worked on the production, which was also broadcast in late December on An-

## Newsom Files Complaint Against Oz after His 'Baseless and Racist' Attacks on California Armenians

LOS ANGELES (Combined Sources) — Gavin Newsom accused the Trump administration official Dr. Mehmet Oz of discrimination in a civil rights complaint filed with the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on Friday, January 30.

Oz, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) administrator, recently visited Los Angeles and filmed a video



Dr. Mehmet Oz in Van Nuys, pointing to Armenian shops, in a still from his video (Los Angeles Times photo)

alleging that members of the city's Armenian community orchestrated large-scale healthcare fraud. The post set off a days-long public quarrel that culminated in the California governor's announcement.

"My office is filing a civil rights complaint seeking an investigation into Dr. Oz's baseless and racist allegations against Armenian Americans in California," Newsom said.

see OZ, page 7

## Moscow Repeats Interest in 'Trump Route' Through Armenia

By Astghik Bedevian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Russia remains interested in having a stake in a planned US-run transit corridor that would connect Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave through Armenia, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Friday, January 30.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan agreed to the controversial arrangement during his talks with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev hosted by US President Donald Trump at the White House last August. A special company controlled by the US government is to build a railway, a road, energy supply lines and other infrastructure along what will be called the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP). The corridor would run along Armenia's border with Iran.

see TRIPP, page 4

## Six More Armenian Bishops Prosecuted

By Susan Badalian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenian law-enforcement authorities have indicted six more bishops of the Armenian Apostolic Church, raising to ten the total number of senior clergymen prosecuted amid Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's efforts to depose Catholicos Karekin II.

Unlike three other archbishops and a bishop jailed last year, the six members of the church's Supreme Spiritual Council were not arrested after being summoned to the Investigative Committee on Saturday, January 31. The law-enforcement agency instead banned them from leaving Armenia pending investigation.

see BISHOPS, page 3



Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II chairs a meeting of the Supreme Spiritual Council of the Armenian Apostolic Church, January 14, 2026.

### CALIFORNIA

Beirut Meets Hollywood at Haigazian University's 70th Anniversary Gala



### RECIPE

Lebanese Guacamole With California Avocados

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### COMMENTARY

Pressure On Iran Intensifies

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## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Mirzoyan Meets with Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan had a meeting with the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Michael O'Flaherty, the foreign ministry said in a readout, on February 3.

The two touched upon the cooperation on priority areas within the framework of the Council of Europe, including the continued strengthening of the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

Mirzoyan emphasized Armenia's commitment to implementation of the democratic reform agenda, as well as concrete steps being undertaken in this direction.

The programs aimed at addressing the needs of refugees displaced from Karabakh were also touched upon.

Mirzoyan and O'Flaherty exchanged views on regional issues. Efforts aimed at the continued strengthening of the established peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including humanitarian issues were touched upon.

### Minister Won't Give Date For Armenia's Removal From EU Blacklist

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures Davit Khudatyan could not say on February 3 when the European Union will allow airlines registered in Armenia to resume flights to EU member states. But he insisted that the Armenian government is successfully addressing EU concerns about aviation safety in the country.

The European Commission blacklisted Armenian airlines in June 2020 because of what it described as Armenian authorities' failure to ensure their adequate licensing. The measure was recommended by the EU's Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

The Armenian government pledged at the time to address the EASA concerns. Senior officials from its Civil Aviation Committee expressed confidence that the ban will be lifted by the end of 2022. That has not happened yet, however.

Khudatyan revealed that a team of EASA officials visited Yerevan last September to conduct an "audit" of the local civil aviation sector. The officials found "new shortcomings" in the sector and recommended structural and legislative changes, he said, adding that the Armenian side has already taken most of those actions. He said Armenia is moving "pretty rapidly" towards the lifting of the EU ban but declined to give any dates.

The EU ban has not prevented Armenia's air traffic from growing significantly in recent years, a fact emphasized by Khudatyan.

# Armenia Moves Toward Landmark Law To End Food Waste and Fight Poverty

YEREVAN — While hundreds of thousands of Armenians struggle to access sufficient food, large amounts of perfectly edible products are destroyed every day by supermarkets, warehouses, food producers, and farms. This contradiction has prompted the Armenian Food Bank to initiate a groundbreaking legislative proposal aimed at banning the destruction of edible food and redirecting it to humanitarian organizations.

The initiative was launched by Michael Avetikian, founder and ambassador of the Armenian Food Bank, who, together with his wife, moved from Canada to Armenia and established the first food bank in the history of Armenia and the region after witnessing widespread poverty and food insecurity.

"For us, this is not about charity alone," said Avetikian. "It is about creating a permanent, systemic solution that ensures edible food feeds people — not landfills."

The proposed legislation is inspired by France's successful anti-food-waste law, adopted through the efforts of Arash Derambarsh, and similar frameworks already operating in Canada and other developed

countries. Drawing on this experience, the Armenian Food Bank developed a draft adapted to Armenia's legal and economic environment.

The law would create a unified national chain connecting food producers, distributors, retailers, farmers and humanitarian organizations — eliminating food waste while supporting vulnerable populations.

The proposal has already achieved significant institutional progress.

It has been officially submitted to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, reviewed by the Prime Minister's Office, and formally referred to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs for further development and legislative drafting.

The initiative has also gained public attention, including national radio coverage and widespread online visibility exceeding one million views worldwide.

According to international organizations, nearly one quarter of Armenia's population lives below the national poverty line, and a significant share of households faces food insecurity, particularly in rural areas.

"Every day we receive dozens of requests for food assistance," Avetikian said.

"This law has the potential to protect people across the entire country while also reducing unnecessary disposal costs for businesses."

The Armenian Food Bank emphasizes that the success of this initiative now depends on sustained political leadership and public oversight.

The organization calls on the Prime Minister and Parliament of Armenia to place this legislation under direct control and ensure its adoption in the interest of the people. The Armenian Food Bank has expressed its readiness to fully support the government in implementing the law and coordinating with the private sector and civil society.

"One law can change lives," Avetikian added. "Armenia has a historic opportunity to lead the region by turning social responsibility into state policy."

Founded in Armenia by Michael Avetikian and his wife Yelena, the Armenian Food Bank is the first organization of its kind in the country, dedicated to reducing food waste and supporting vulnerable populations through sustainable, long-term solutions.

# Christian Chaplains Pushed Out of Armenian Military

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Dozens of Christian chaplains have been removed from the Armenian army ranks after reportedly refusing to back Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's controversial attempts to oust the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Catholicos Karekin II.

Defense Minister Suren Papikyan confirmed over the weekend that he effectively abolished the army's Spiritual Service that had been jointly set up by the Armenian government and the church nearly three decades ago. Papikyan, who is a leading political ally of Pashinyan, gave no reason for his move widely linked to the ongoing campaign against Karekin.

As of last week, the service included 42 chaplains serving at military units across Armenia. Thirty-four of them are priests and deacons appointed by the church's Mother See in Echmiadzin.

The eight others are young deacons who have engaged in chaplaincy as part of their compulsory military service. Papikyan's order made them directly subordinate to military officers in charge of army morale, suggesting that they will now be hardly different from other conscripts.

Karekin's office was quick to condemn the order. Ara Zohrabyan, a lawyer representing the church, said it is illegal and will have a negative impact on military personnel.

Zohrabyan argued that an Armenian law regulating the church's relationship with the government entitles it to "permanent spiritual presence in army units." He also cited the 2000 charter of the Spiritual Service stipulating that it cannot be disbanded without the Catholicos' consent.

"As we can see, the minister had no right to single-handedly dissolve the service," the lawyer said in a video message.

Zohrabyan linked the development to recent reports that senior military officials pressured the chaplains to join a dozen pro-government bishops openly supporting Pashinyan's campaign against Karekin. None of the chaplains have supported the revolt. Opposition leaders and other critics of Pashinyan likewise claim that he is

furious with their continuing loyalty to the Catholicos.

In January 15 comments to RFE/RL's Armenian Service, the Armenian Defense Ministry spokesman, Aram Torosyan, did not deny that the chaplains were summoned by the commanders of their respective units and more high-ranking officials in Yerevan.

"They may have numerous discussions with the command of military units on var-

ious topics both related and not related to their service," said Torosyan. But he insisted that none of them was bullied to demand Karekin's resignation.

"The army cannot be involved in political processes in any way," Papikyan told a news conference for his part.

Zohrabyan said the dissolution of the Spiritual Service on the contrary evidence that the military is being drawn into "shameful repressions" against the clergy.

# Further Delay Seen in Drafting of New Armenian Constitution

By Gayane Saribekian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A government-appointed task force will not manage to draft within the next few months a new Armenian constitution demanded by Azerbaijan, one of its members said on January 30.

A change of Armenia's existing constitution is Azerbaijan's main precondition for signing an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty initiated in Washington in August. Baku specifically wants Yerevan to remove a constitutional preamble that mentions Armenia's 1990 declaration of independence, which in turn cites a 1989 unification act adopted by the legislative bodies of Soviet Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. The only legal way to do that is to adopt a new constitution through a referendum.

While publicly rejecting this precondition and insisting that the reference does not amount to territorial claims to Azerbaijan, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has pledged to enact a new constitution. He said in September that it will be put on a referendum after Armenia's next general elections due in June 2026.

The new constitution is to be drafted by the Constitutional Reform Council

headed by Justice Minister Srbuhi Galian. The latter said in November that the text will be ready "by March."

Artur Sakunts, a human rights activist sitting on the council, insisted that it will definitely fail to meet the deadline set by Galian. Sakunts told RFE/RL's Armenian Service that he believes the drafting process will not be completed even before the June elections. Galian already pledged last April to fast-track the process.

Sakunts said the body dominated by state officials has yet to discuss key chapters of the would-be constitution relating to the executive and judicial branches of government. Nor has it addressed so far the thorny issue of the 1990 declaration, added the activist.

Pashinyan said last year that the declaration resented by Baku must not be referenced in the new constitution. He has since continued to deny bowing to Azerbaijani pressure.

Armenian opposition groups have dismissed these assurances and pledged to scuttle the change of the constitution sought by Pashinyan. They say that his continuing unilateral concessions only encourage Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to make more demands on Armenia and will not bring real peace.

# Nagorno-Karabakh's Final President Loses Lawsuit over History Textbook

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

The Yerevan Civil Court has rejected a lawsuit by Nagorno-Karabakh's final president Samvel Shahramanyan, who demanded Armenia's Education Ministry retract information in a ninth-grade history textbook claiming he had signed a decree to dissolve Nagorno-Karabakh. The court on February 3 ruled that there was a lack of sufficient evidence.

Shahramanyan labelled the information saying that he 'signed a decree to dissolve' Nagorno-Karabakh as "false and not true."

The lawsuit was filed in September 2025

against Nzhdeh Hovsepyan, the author of the textbook, and the Armenian Education Ministry, requesting the court oblige both to publicly retract the wording of the phrase.

Shahramanyan signed a decree ordering the dissolution of Nagorno-Karabakh following its surrender in the face of Azerbaijan's final offensive in September 2023.

The decree stipulated that the republic would be dissolved by 1 January 2024, and was published by the Nagorno-Karabakh Info Centre, an official government source which is no longer available.

In the lawsuit, Shahramanyan elaborated on the consequences under which the decree



Samvel Shahramanyan

was made in September 2023.

Following the final Azerbaijani attack on the region Shahramanyan said Baku had

made "a direct demand" that he convene a session of parliament and adopt a declaration on Nagorno-Karabakh's dissolution under the "threat of massacre of the population."

However, Shahramanyan said he refused to act, "realizing the legal, political, and historical consequences of such a step," and reportedly told the Azerbaijani side that "it was impossible to ensure a parliamentary quorum."

After Azerbaijan insisted, Shahramanyan reportedly "proposed replacing the declaration with a decree adopted by him," taking into account "the seriousness of the situation" and the "fact of the blockade."

In his refutation, Shahramanyan claimed that Nagorno-Karabakh published information on the adoption of the decree, "despite not having adopted such a decree."

(This story originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on February 3.)

## Six More Armenian Bishops Prosecuted

BISHOPS, from page 1

They will therefore not be able to attend an emergency conference of the church's top clergy in Austria. Their lawyers and the church's Mother See in Echmiadzin believe the accusations leveled against them are aimed at scuttling the conference scheduled for February 16-19.

The accusations stem from Karekin's January 27 decision to defrock another bishop, who is involved in Pashinyan's controversial campaign to oust the supreme head of the church. The bishop, Gevorg Saroyan, was dismissed earlier in January as head of the church's Masyatsotn Diocese encompassing parts of Armenia's southern Ararat province.

With Pashinyan's encouragement, Saroyan refused to obey the decision and went on to challenge it in court. In an unprecedented injunction, a district court ruled on January 16 that Saroyan must be reinstated pending its verdict on the lawsuit.

The Investigative Committee opened the criminal case following Saroyan's defrocking recommended by the Supreme Spiritual Council. It charged the six bishops sitting on the council as well as another priest with obstructing the execution of a judicial act. They all denied any wrongdoing after leaving a committee building in Yerevan.

"I would not have gone to court because we had made a vow of unconditional obedience to the Patriarch of All Armenians and must keep the vow of obedience," Bishop Makar Hakobyan told journalists.

In a statement issued later on Saturday, the Mother See strongly condemned "yet

another interference by the authorities in the internal affairs of the Church." It said the accusations and the travel ban are aimed at "disrupting" the upcoming conference of the bishops convened by Karekin.

The gathering was originally scheduled to take place in Echmiadzin from December 10-12. Karekin postponed it because of what his office described as "repressions against clergy." The Mother See said afterwards that it will be held abroad for the same reason.

Critics say Pashinyan wants to prevent the meeting because it would almost certainly demonstrate that the Catholicos continues to enjoy the top clergy's backing despite a recent revolt by ten archbishops and bishops loyal to the Armenian premier. Saroyan is one of those clergymen.

Karekin's supporters fear that he too may eventually be arrested and/or indicted. The Investigative Committee's latest moves increased the likelihood of such a scenario. The defrocking order was issued by the Catholicos, not the advisory council whose ecclesiastic members are now also prosecuted.

The Mother See and legal experts maintain that Armenian courts have no jurisdiction over the Catholicos' unlimited authority to replace diocese heads. They argue that Armenian priests serve based on their vows to obey the church's centuries-old canonical rules, rather than employment contracts. They say the criminal case opened after the pro-government bishop's defrocking constitutes another blatant violation of the Armenian constitution which guarantees the ancient church's separation from

the state.

Pashinyan again denied on Thursday, January 29, abusing his powers in his drive to oust Karekin. He repeated his demands for the latter's resignation.

Pashinyan began his campaign in late May 2025 right after Karekin accused Azerbaijan of committing ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh, destroying the region's Armenian churches 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.

Pashinyan said until December that Karekin and other top clerics at odds with him must go because they had secret sexual relationships in breach of their vows of celibacy. He has given a different reason for his campaign since then, effectively accusing them of spying for a foreign country, presumably Russia. He has not offered any proof of the allegation publicly dismissed by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on January 20.

In July, Pashinyan urged supporters to gear up for a rally in Echmiadzin designed to "free" the seat of the Catholicos. Armenian opposition leaders responded by telling their own supporters to be ready to gather there to defend Karekin.

Some of the pro-government bishops held a gathering outside the Echmiadzin cathedral on December 18. But its participants were greatly outnumbered by thousands of other people who rallied there in support of Karekin.

## Hungary Unblocks Fresh EU Military Aid to Armenia

By Heghine Buniatian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Hungary has dropped its veto on 20 million euros (\$23.8 million) in fresh "non-lethal" military assistance to Armenia promised by the European Union.

The EU foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, proposed the allocation, which requires the unanimous approval of the bloc's 27 member states, a year ago. All of them except Hungary backed Kallas's proposal. The Hungarian government demanded that the EU also provide "equal support" to Azerbaijan.

Sources told RFE/RL's Armenian Service that Budapest gave the green light for the allocation on January 28 during a meet-

ing of the EU's decision-making European Council in Brussels. It was not clear whether the Council also approved similar aid to Azerbaijan.

The EU had approved its first-ever military aid to Armenia, worth 10 million euros, in July 2024. Its European Peace Facility (EPF) was due to spend the money over the next two-and-a-half years on creating a field hospital and auxiliary facilities for a battalion-size Armenian army unit. The additional EPF funds are supposed to be used in a similar way within the next three years.

Unlike other EU member states, Hungary has openly supported Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Hungarian Foreign Ministry reaffirmed that support

three days after the outbreak of the 2020 Armenian-Azerbaijani war in Karabakh. In September 2023, Budapest reportedly vetoed a statement by the EU member states condemning the Azerbaijani military offensive that displaced Karabakh's entire population and restored Baku's control over the region.

Armenia's former leadership froze diplomatic relations with Hungary in 2012 in protest against the repatriation of an Azerbaijani army officer who hacked to death a sleeping Armenian colleague in Budapest in 2004. The current Armenian government decided to restore the diplomatic ties in 2022 even though Hungary never apologized for the officer's release and continued to support Azerbaijan.

## Family Says Ex-captive Needs Surgery, Lacks Assistance

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The health of Vicken Euljekjian, recently returned from Azerbaijani captivity, has deteriorated, while his family faces severe social hardship, his wife Linda Euljekjian said on February 3.

According to her, Euljekjian's blood pressure is dangerously high, and doctors warn of a risk of sudden cardiac arrest.

"Doctors say there is a risk of sudden cardiac arrest and he needs heart surgery. He also has liver problems and elevated white blood cell counts. The situation is very serious. Ms. Anahit Manasyan supported us with medical assistance, and Nairi Medical Center conducted examinations free of charge," Linda Euljekjian said, as reported by Pastinfo.

She noted that alongside the health problems, the family is struggling with housing and social difficulties.

"We are currently living in a house where there is no social assistance. The situation has become very bad. Some friends rented this house for one month. But he has not received any social aid to pay rent or buy food. I am extremely worried, this situation stresses Vicken even more, which is bad for his health," she said.

According to his wife, Euljekjian has also not yet been able to reunite with his children.

"If my daughter comes, how will I feed her? What will I do? He thinks about everything, and this causes him psychological suffering as well. I am ashamed of this situation," she added.

On January 14, Azerbaijan handed over David Davtyan, Gevorg Sujyan, Vicken Euljekjian, and Vagif Khachatryan to Armenia. Lebanese-Armenian Euljekjian was captured on November 10, 2020, on the road to Shushi and sentenced to 20 years in prison.



## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL

## Armenia to Send Five Athletes to Winter Olympics

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia will be represented by five athletes at the 25th Winter Olympic Games to be held in Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo from February 6-22.

The team includes cross-country skiers Mikayel Mikayelyan and Katya Galstyan, alpine skier Harutyun Harutyunyan, and figure skating pair Karina Akopova and Nikita Rakhmanin, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports reports.

Akopova and Rakhmanin, who secured Armenia's first Olympic berth in pairs figure skating since independence, will carry the national flag at the opening ceremony. They are the first to compete, with their short program scheduled for February 6 and free program on February 8.

Galstyan will race in the women's 20km skiathlon on February 7 and the 10km freestyle interval on February 12. Mikayelyan will contest the men's 20km skiathlon on February 8 and the 10km freestyle interval on February 13.

Harutyunyan will compete in the giant slalom on February 14 and the slalom on February 16.

## Azerbaijan Says It Will not Allow Its Territory to Be Used for Operations against Iran

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AA) — Azerbaijan will never allow its airspace or territory to be used by any state to carry out military operations against neighboring Iran, Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov said Thursday, January 29.

Bayramov held a phone call with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, according to a statement by Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry.

During the call, Bayramov said the recent escalation of tensions in the region is a cause for concern, stressing that Azerbaijan has consistently stressed the need for all parties to refrain from steps and rhetoric that could lead to instability in Iran and its surrounding region.

He highlighted the importance of resolving issues solely through dialogue and diplomatic means in line with the rules and principles of international law.

## Armenia, Israel to Cooperate in Education

YEREVAN (ARKA) — Armenia and Israel have agreed to deepen long-term cooperation in education. This was announced at a meeting between Armenian Minister of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports Zhanna Andreasyan and her Israeli counterpart, Yoav Kisch, on February 2.

Andreasyan was on a working visit to Israel to participate in the "Education 2026" conference, dedicated to developing personalized education policies in the age

## India's Chief of Defense Staff Visits Armenia as Yerevan And New Delhi Discuss Military Cooperation

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan and Chief of the General Staff Edward Asryan held separate meetings with India's Chief of Defense Staff Anil Chauhan, who is visiting Armenia, on February 2. In his meeting with Asryan, Chauhan discussed the importance of holding events in the fields of education, as well as exercises and drills.

The meetings with Armenian officials took place the day after Chauhan arrived in Armenia.

According to the Armenian readout, Papikyan "highly appreciated the current level" of Armenia-India Defense cooperation. Chauhan, in turn, expressed India's willingness "to continue developing cooperation in existing areas and initiate new areas of mutual interest".

The Indian readout additionally added that the discussions with Papikyan, "focused on strengthening Defense Cooperation [sic] across [a] range of security issues".

During the meetings, the three discussed "a number of issues related to the effective

implementation of the activities" planned for 2026.

"Both sides emphasized the importance of holding educational and professional training, drills and exercises, as well as events for exchanging experience in various fields in Armenia and India," the Armenian press statement read.

Asryan also presented the directions of ongoing reforms in the Armenian Army, highlighting the importance of bilateral cooperation in the process.

Aside from meetings with Armenian officials, Chauhan visited two educational institutions under the Armenian Defense Ministry — the National Defense Research University and the Vazgen Sargsyan Military Academy. At the latter, he attended the opening ceremony of an information technology laboratory and a distance learning center.

The X account of the Headquarters Integrated Defense Staff noted that Chauhan's visit "marks an important step in taking forward shared strategic interests and enhancing long-term Defense and security collaboration".

Yerevan has started to "diversify" its re-

lations in the security sector, including with India, following inaction by Russia and the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in the face of Azerbaijan's offensives on Armenian territory in 2021 and 2022.

Armenia reportedly signed a deal in 2022 valued at around \$720 million for 15 Akash surface-to-air missile systems, becoming the first foreign buyer of the equipment. In November 2024, India shipped the first batteries for the systems, with a second batch planned for mid-2025.

Beyond air Defense, India has also delivered Pinaka multiple-launch rocket systems to Armenia.

As part of his visit, Chauhan also went to the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan, despite New Delhi not having officially recognized the Armenian Genocide.

The visit to the memorial has not been reported by the Armenian Defense Ministry. Previously, in October 2024, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said that international recognition of the Armenian Genocide "is not our number one priority."

(This article originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on February 3.)

## French Draft Resolution Pushes for Artsakh Prisoners' Freedom

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The French National Assembly will soon consider a resolution calling for the immediate release of the political leaders of the

going trials of Armenian detainees as part of Azerbaijan's systematic policy aimed at denying Armenia's existence, and as a continuation of efforts to eliminate the Armenian presence in Nagorno-Karabakh and other Azerbaijani-controlled regions. It also denounces the destruction of Armenian historical, cultural, and religious heritage.

Key points of the resolution include:

- Support for forcibly displaced Armenians from Artsakh, who have lost the right to live on their ancestral lands.

- Emphasis on the right to self-determination, which the resolution says must apply to Artsakh's Armenian population. It underscores the international community's duty to demand that Azerbaijan guarantee conditions for safe return and security.

- Condemnation of the ongoing trials and



Artsakh (Karabakh) leaders in custody in Baku

Republic of Artsakh currently imprisoned in Azerbaijan. The resolution will be introduced by Laurent Wauquiez on behalf of the France-Armenia Friendship Group, Factor.am reported on February 3.

The draft resolution condemns the on-

going trials of Armenian detainees as part of Azerbaijan's systematic policy aimed at denying Armenia's existence, and as a continuation of efforts to eliminate the Armenian presence in Nagorno-Karabakh and other Azerbaijani-controlled regions. It also denounces the destruction of Armenian historical, cultural, and religious heritage.

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- Emphasis on the right to self-determination, which the resolution says must apply to Artsakh's Armenian population. It underscores the international community's duty to demand that Azerbaijan guarantee conditions for safe return and security.

- Condemnation of the ongoing trials and

arbitrary detention of former Artsakh political leaders, demanding their immediate and unconditional release.

- A call to the French government to officially request that Azerbaijan free all Armenian detainees in its custody.

The resolution also warns that ignoring the prisoners' situation could undermine the implementation of the joint declaration signed in Washington on August 8, 2025.

On September 19, 2023, Azerbaijan launched a full-scale offensive against Artsakh, subjecting the region to mass shelling. One day later, on September 20, the Artsakh authorities agreed to a ceasefire brokered by Russian peacekeepers and accepted Baku's terms, which included the disarmament of Artsakh's forces and the dissolution of the republic. The assault killed 223 people, including 20 civilians, 6 of whom were children. Forced displacement began on September 24, with over 100,000 Armenians fleeing to Armenia. Only about 20 Armenians remained in Artsakh, most of whom later left or were detained.

## Moscow Repeats Interest in 'Trump Route' Through Armenia

TRIPP, from page 1

Although the deal is seen by analysts as another blow to Russian presence in Armenia, Russia's initial reaction to it was rather cautious. Moscow indicated afterwards that it wants to be involved in the TRIPP. A senior Russian diplomat argued in mid-December that Armenia is a member of a Russian-led trade bloc and that the railway network is managed by Russia's RZhD national rail operator. He also pointed to the presence of Russian border guards along the Armenian-Iranian border.

"Obviously, our partners cannot do without Russia," said the official, Mikhail Kalugin.

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan effectively ruled out a Russian role in the project after holding talks with US

Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Washington on January 13. The Russians could only be involved in "other activity or cooperation relating to the TRIPP," he said.

The Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, said on January 30 that Moscow stands by a proposal to hold "topical consultations" with Yerevan on the matter.

"Regarding the 'Trump Road' project, as it's being called, we confirm our readiness to explore possible options for our involvement, including taking into account RZhD's unique expertise," Zakharova told a news briefing. "But first, it's probably worth carefully reviewing all the details of this initiative's implementation and operation. We understand that its development is only in the initial stages."

Pashinyan discussed the TRIPP with Russian President Vladimir Putin during their December 22 meeting in Saint Petersburg. On his return to Yerevan, he renewed his calls for RZhD to restore three other sections of Armenia's railway network leading to the borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey. The premier spoke on Thursday of "positive signals" coming from Moscow but did not elaborate.

"We hope that our Russian partners will not drag their feet," he said. "If they don't want to make those investments for some reason, we will reclaim those sections and do that on our own."

"All requests from Yerevan are promptly processed by relevant [Russian] agencies," Zakharova said in this regard. She did not comment further.

# Did an Azerbaijani State-Funded Documentary Dupe Experts into Taking Part?

VARDANYAN, from page 1 triggered the mass exodus of more than 100,000 Armenians.

Vardanyan served as the State Minister of Nagorno-Karabakh and is currently charged with more than two dozen crimes in Azerbaijan, including crimes against peace and humanity, terrorism, financing terrorism, and attempted murder.

His international legal team, which has not been permitted to enter the country, has raised concerns that the proceedings do not meet the standards of an independent judiciary. Images of Vardanyan show significant weight loss, and his lawyers have alleged that he has been subjected to mistreatment.

An investigation by OC Media suggests that many of the interviewees appearing in “the Oligarch’s Design,” as well as subcontractors who worked on the film, may have been misled about the nature of the documentary — and for whom production was being made.

## A Turkish-Spanish-Azerbaijani production?

The documentary, as broadcast, did not include any production credit list. However, documents obtained by OC Media — including internal work materials and parts of the crew lists — show that a team of Turkish media workers with close professional links to Azerbaijan was central in the production.

One of them, Atakan Kerkulku, has previously presented several documentaries endorsed by the Azerbaijani government and toured Azerbaijani embassies to screen them, including a film focused on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Another was Ömer Faruk Tunc, a senior producer at the Anadolu Ajansi, the largest Turkish state-run media outlet.

Also key in the production, according to internal documents as well as production staff who spoke to OC Media, was Carmen Marques, a Portuguese director, along with her production company, TPTM Media.

Marques has a background as a producer in the prominent Turkish state-run media outlet TRT World.

Speaking to OC Media on condition of anonymity, one producer who was subcontracted to work on the project but who was not involved in the project’s planning, said he became concerned about the direction the film was taking when he noticed that nearly everyone on the production team used Turkish phone numbers. This, he said, included Marques, who he said was presented as the documentary’s director at that time. This was despite the introduction of a different, EMMY award-winning individual, as the lead creative.

When reaching out to that supposed lead creative, he told OC Media that he had never even heard of the production. He speculated that his name could have been used due to a previous collaboration with TRT World. OC Media has not found any evidence that he was involved in the project, other than that his name is stated in different pitches presented by TPTM Media and the Turkish team.

The aforementioned subcontractor said he grew further suspicious when the production team refused to provide a contract, stating that “mutual consent” was standard practice. According to the source, the Turkish media team, who was responsible for payment, also insisted on paying in cash.

## Participants Misled?

OC Media spoke to around a dozen individuals who appeared in the documentary or who were involved as subcontracted producers. Of these, none said they were aware that the film was being produced for Azerbaijani state media.

All of the subcontractors and non-Armenian expert contributors who spoke to OC Media said that they were instead told the documentary would focus on the Troika Laundromat — a major investigation into corruption in Russian banking networks in which Vardanyan was implicated.

And despite the finished product, pitch documents sent to individuals appearing as experts about the production which have been reviewed by OC Media contained no reference to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. They also made no mention of the involvement of Azerbaijani state media. Instead, they spoke of TPTM Media Spain as the production company. They also suggested they were in negotiations with major international streaming services to broadcast the finished product.

One of the interviewees to appear in the documentary was Vitalijus Gailius, a member of the Lithuanian parliament and the parliamentary anti-corruption committee, who was interviewed in the summer of 2025.

“Since my participation was based purely on legal and corruption prevention evaluation, rather than political or national interests, I believe the authors should ensure that the film is objective, accurate, and fact-based,” Gailius told OC Media.

“The content should adhere to legal and ethical standards, avoiding any misleading or distorted legal interpretations.”

international juridical standards.

Moreover, several sources cited in the note’s background research originate from EU Reporter, a publication that has been accused of operating as a pay-for-publication outlet that has repeatedly given Azerbaijan favorable coverage.

One thing that noticeably changed throughout the project was the name — the presented name in 2025 in the pitch to Babayan is different from the concept note, and lastly from the final product.

Marques refused to comment for this story. Kerkulku and Faruk Tunc, from the Turkish production company, did not respond to a request for comment.

## A Propaganda Exercise?

After being presented with OC Media’s findings, Aidan White, president of the UK-based Ethical Journalism Network, questioned the ethics of the production.

“For legitimate expert voices to be taken out of context and used in a propaganda exercise is shocking,” said White.

“In this case, the TV network should remove the comments from the broadcast until the sources agree to their comments being used in this way.”

“It is clearly unacceptable behavior,” White said, when asked about subcontractors and the non-Armenian expert contributors being told the documentary would focus on the Troika Laundromat investigation, while making no mention of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

“A cardinal principle of ethical conduct when dealing with sources is transparency — to reveal the purpose of the journalism and to be open about how the information will be used,” he said.

## International Ambitions

AnewZ was launched shortly ahead of the COP29 climate summit in Baku in late 2024, where it served as one of the event’s main media partners. Its management includes several foreign journalists, lending the outlet an international profile. One of them is Guy Shone, the editor-in-chief, who has a background from Euronews and BBC.

The channel is part of Global Media Holding, a media consortium linked to the Azerbaijani state oil and gas company, SOCAR. The outlet was initially awarded a contract worth 5 million (\$2.9 million), a sum that was later increased to 11 million manats (\$6.5 million) shortly ahead of COP29.

One of its founders, Orkhan Amashov, previously worked for Caliber, a platform known for its close ties to the Azerbaijani government and its vitriolic, often-conspiracy minded coverage of Armenia and Armenia’s allies. Amashov is the son of the chair of the Press Council of Azerbaijan. He was also interviewed in the documentary as an expert voice.

Critics have suggested that AnewZ is an attempt to create an English speaking international platform similar to RT (formerly Russia Today).

A few days before the planned publication of this investigation, AnewZ broadcasted another documentary, this time focusing on Armenia’s alleged role in Russian sanctions evasion. OC Media confirmed that this documentary too partly involved the same media teams as in the Oligarch’s Design — and as with Oligarch’s Design, OC Media could also confirm that several of the cited foreign experts were not aware that it was produced for AnewZ.

AnewZ did not respond to a request to comment.

After publication, former Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis, who was featured in the sanctions evasion documentary, reached out to OC Media, confirming that “it was not [his] intention to participate in an Azerbaijani propaganda piece.”

For ease of reading, we choose not to use qualifiers such as “de facto,” “unrecognized,” or “partially recognized” when discussing institutions or political positions within Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and South Ossetia. This does not imply a position on their status.

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



The premiere of the documentary in Baku (photo Azertac)

Another interviewee told OC Media that her interview was conducted in 2019 for a different context and for another production. She said she never gave consent for the material to be used in an Azerbaijani production.

One pitch was made public by Samvel Babayan, a former official in the Nagorno-Karabakh administration who appeared in the documentary. Babayan wrote that the interview was conducted by Marques of TPTM Media. He cited a pitch provided to him by the documentary-makers, saying it was introduced to him as aiming to explore “Armenia at a historic crossroads with deep cultural roots and global aspirations” and with no mention of the Vardanyan case. Other Armenians appearing in the documentary who OC Media spoke to said they were interviewed in September 2025.

## The Final Result

The Spanish production company that worked on the film, TPTM Media, along with Carmen Marques (who is listed in open sources as the company’s director), appears to have left the production in late October 2025, around two months before it premiered on AnewZ.

Despite TPTM’s last minute exit from the project, internal documents appear to show that this was not the point at which the documentary’s core focus came about.

A concept note apparently used for internal planning from the summer of 2025, several months before the interviews in Armenia, closely mirrors the structure of the final product, including the appearance of a majority of the interviewees and presentation of facts, even though some details differ.

The concept note was circulated by the Turkish media team, as well as TPTM Media. While the concept note’s opening section focuses on the Troika Laundromat, the majority of the description centers on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from an Azerbaijani government perspective. It concludes that the trial against Vardanyan upheld



# Community News

## St. Vartan Camp Names New Director

NEW YORK — With the blessing of Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan and the approval of the Diocesan Council, the Saint Vartan Camp Executive Board is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Zarakouhi Vartanian-Hajinian, Pharm.D., MBA, CPPS, as the new Camp Director. Her appointment marks an exciting new chapter in the continued growth, mission, and legacy of Saint Vartan Camp.

Following a comprehensive selection process, the Executive Board unanimously selected Vartanian-Hajinian for her clear vision, strong leadership experience, and deep commitment to faith-based youth formation. Her dedication to nurturing the next generation aligns closely with the mission and values that have shaped Saint Vartan Camp for decades. Members of the Board, including Rev. Hratch Sargsyan, who participated in the interview process, were particularly impressed by her insight, energy, and lifelong connection to the camp community.

This appointment reflects the Board's commitment to strengthening the camp's future while remaining firmly rooted in its Armenian Christian identity. Speaking on behalf of the Executive Board, Ani Chamesian shared: "Saint Vartan Camp has long been a place where lifelong friendships are formed and faith is nurtured through our Armenian heritage. I experienced this personally, having met my husband at camp. Dr. Vartanian-Hajinian's deep love for camp and her passion for youth make her uniquely suited to lead Saint Vartan Camp into its next chapter."

Born in Armenia and raised in Cranston, RI, Vartanian-Hajinian grew up immersed in Armenian School, Sunday School, and Saint Vartan Camp — experiences that instilled a lifelong love for faith, culture, and service to the Armenian Church. A licensed pharmacist and healthcare leader, she brings extensive experience in leadership, mentorship, program development, and team building, grounded in a collaborative and mission-driven approach.

An active member of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church, Vartanian-Hajinian serves as the volunteer Parent Youth Director of the parish's ACYOA chapter, where she revitalized a previously dormant program into a vibrant community engaging more than twenty youth through regular monthly activities. She is also actively involved in planning and supporting the upcoming ACYOA Juniors October Sports Weekend, ensuring youth programming remains rooted in faith, fellowship, and community.

Reflecting on her appointment, she shared: "I am deeply honored and grateful for the trust placed in me. Saint Vartan Camp has played a meaningful role in my life, and as a devoted mother of a camper, I am committed to nurturing the next generation. I look forward to working alongside our Board, clergy, staff, alumni, and families to build upon

see DIRECTOR, page 11



Joyce Philibosian Stein (4th from left) with her family

## Beirut Meets Hollywood at the Ebell Of Los Angeles Celebrating Haigazian University's 70th Anniversary

By Louisa Janbazian

LOS ANGELES — Haigazian University's year-long 70th Anniversary celebrations, launched in New Jersey and carried through New York, Yerevan, Dubai, Beirut, Montreal, Riyadh, Cairo, Athens and Doha, reached a memorable and elegant culmination in Los Angeles on Saturday, January 24. Under the theme "Beirut Meets Hollywood," nearly 300 spiritual leaders, educators, alumni, benefactors, community representatives, and distinguished guests gathered for the gala at the historic Ebell of Los Angeles to honor the University's enduring legacy and impact.

The evening, cochaired by trustees Tina Segel and Raffi Kendirjian, also served as a heartfelt tribute to longtime trustee and benefactor Joyce Philibosian Stein, recognizing her decades of unwavering commitment and service to Haigazian University.

The program opened with warm welcoming remarks from the cochairs, who introduced a distinguished group of guests, including His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America; His Eminence Kegham Khatcherian, Prelate of the Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America; Rev. Hendrik Shanazarian, Minister to the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches of North America; Rev. John Khanjian, Ph.D., former President of Haigazian University; Rev. Paul Haidostian, Ph.D., current President of Haigazian University; Inge Markarian, wife of founding President Rev. Dr. John Markarian; Gary Phillips, AMAA Board President; and Serge D. Buchakjian, AMAA CEO/Executive.

The co-chairs also recognized the former Women's Auxiliary of Haigazian, who for decades worked tirelessly to raise support for the University, many of whom were present in the audience.

Following the national anthems of the United States beautifully performed by Nazani Mncherian, Kendirjian introduced the former President of Haigazian University Rev. Dr. John Khanjian, whose leadership and steadfast devotion during his presidency left an enduring mark on the University and invited him to the podium for the invocation. In his prayer Khanjian remembered the founding members of Haigazian University, the Armenian Missionary Association of America, and the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East. He gave thanks to God for their vision and faith in establishing the University in 1955, and for the countless lives blessed through Haigazian's mission over the past seventy years.

A video presentation followed, highlighting the University's rich history, spirit and legacy. Dr. Hasmig Baran, Chair of the Board of Trustees, then greeted the guests on behalf of her fellow trustees and introduced Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian. In her remarks, she noted, "Rev. Dr. Haidostian exemplifies openness, professionalism, and mutual respect. His collaborative approach and sound judgment greatly enhance the effectiveness and fulfillment of our Board's work. Working alongside our President has been a true pleasure."

In his address, Haidostian reflected on the significance of the moment, stating: "We conclude Haigazian University's 70th anniversary with remarkable elegance here in Los Angeles, yet this conclusion is, in truth, a beginning, the start of a new phase in a rapidly changing world. At Haigazian University, it is not global threats

see ANNIVERSARY, page 10

## Artsakh Support Cafes Create Healing And Belonging for Displaced Elders

DANA POINT, Calif. — With support from the Armenian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA Inc.), the Artsakh Support Cafes provided vital psychosocial support to elders displaced from Artsakh, creating spaces of community, dignity, and connection during a period of profound loss and transition.

Over a six-month period, the Cafes operated in four locations — Ararat, Vanadzor, Echmiadzin, and Abovyan — serving 97 elders displaced from Artsakh. The program offered safe, welcoming spaces where participants gathered regularly for companionship, emotional support, and a renewed sense of routine following displacement.

An unexpected and deeply meaningful outcome of the program was the participation of elders from Armenia, who asked to join the Cafes alongside displaced elders from Artsakh. This organic integration strengthened the program's impact, fostering shared understanding, mutual care, and inter-community solidarity.

As relationships formed, elders from Armenia extended friendship and support to elders from Artsakh, helping ease isolation and grief through conversation, cultural familiarity, and presence. Over time, the Cafes evolved from structured support programs into true communities of belonging.

"Displacement does not only take away homes — it disrupts identity, routine, and connection," said Dr. Jane Mahakian, president of Alzheimer's Care Armenia. "The Artsakh Support Cafes restored something essential for our elders: a place to belong. Healing emerged not only through structured support, but through human connection and shared culture."

The Artsakh Support Cafes highlight the effectiveness of culturally responsive, community-based initiatives in addressing the emotional and social needs of displaced elders — an often-overlooked population in humanitarian response efforts.

Building on the program's success, Alzheimer's Care Armenia plans to sustain and expand the Support Cafes, continuing to bring together elders displaced from Artsakh alongside elders from Armenia to support long-term community healing.

The organizers expressed their gratitude to the Armenian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA Inc.) for making the initiative possible and for its continued commitment to supporting vulnerable Armenian communities.

Alzheimer's Care Armenia (ACA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, as well as their families and caregivers. Through culturally responsive programs, community education, professional training, and psychosocial support services, ACA strengthens dementia care infrastructure in Armenia and supports vulnerable elder populations affected by displacement, isolation, and cognitive decline.



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Newsom Files Complaint Against Oz after His ‘Baseless and Racist’ Attacks on California Armenians

OZ, from page 1

In the complaint filed with the HHS, Newsom’s office argued that Oz’s “racially-charged and false public statements” could discourage people in the targeted community from participation in hospice and home-care programs.

The governor’s office noted the claims had “already caused real-world harm” by significantly slowing business at an Armenian bakery that is shown in the video.

Oz and the CMS did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the complaint or the content of the video, and they have not publicly shared details that confirm the fraud being alleged. But the Trump administration has frequently alleged there is widespread fraud in Medicare, Medicaid and other social service programs in Democratic states.

The conflict began when Oz posted a video online last week in the Van Nuys neighborhood of Los Angeles pointing to a four-block radius that he said was home to 42 hospices, suggesting potential fraud. He references a business that he says was part of a \$16m fraud scheme.

Then, while standing in front of a building that includes an Armenian bakery, he alleges that roughly \$3.5 billion in hospice and home care fraud has taken place in Los Angeles and “quite a bit of it” was run by “the Russian Armenian mafia.”

Oz, whose parents emigrated to the US from Turkey, describes the Armenian script on the businesses’ signs while the camera pans to the bakery.

“You notice the lettering and language behind me is of that dialect,” he says in the video. He also claims there “has not been a lot of attention on these problems” in California.

Newsom disputed the claims in the video and noted on social media that California had revoked more than 280 hospice licenses and banned new licenses starting in 2022 because of concerns about fraud. Then the two leaders exchanged multiple sharp attacks in a back-and-forth on social media.

In one post, Newsom said there were “historic sensitivities,” presumably referencing Oz’s Turkish heritage and the history of conflict and violence between the country and Armenia, and said “any and all acts of hate have no place in California.”

In his official complaint letter, Governor Newsom wrote: “Such racially charged and false public statements by anyone involved in administering these critical federal healthcare programs seriously risk chilling participation in those programs by individuals targeted by the statements. They also reflect discriminatory animus, and reveal a discriminatory motive that could infect how investigations of alleged fraud are conducted. The risk of those harms is compounded when the statements came from the top decision maker at CMS. Additionally, Dr. Oz’s comments have already caused real world harm, as the bakery targeted by his comments reported a 30% drop in sales after this video’s release.”

California Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis stated that she “agrees 1,000% with the action Gov. Newsom has taken in response to the outrageous actions of Dr. Oz, who clearly seeks to disparage and stigmatize an entire community, the vast majority of whom are proud, law-abiding American citizens. Oz should be ashamed of himself, but sadly, he probably isn’t.”

## ANCA Suit

The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) also filed a federal civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department

of Health and Human Services (HHS) over Oz’s comments.

The complaint, filed on January 30, builds on immediate ANCA mobilization following Dr. Oz’s January 27-28 posting of a video on official Health and Human Services social media accounts that ethnically profiled Armenian-owned businesses in Los Angeles’ Van Nuys neighborhood. ANCA’s swift response triggered a cascade of condemnation from California Governor Gavin Newsom, who filed his own civil rights complaint, and Congressional, state, and local leaders who denounced the ethnic scapegoating. Oz serves as Administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Within minutes of Dr. Oz posting his video, ANCA Executive Director Aram Hamparian publicly called out this discriminatory conduct: “Dr. Oz is painting Armenians with a broad brush, tarring our entire Armenian American community for the alleged crimes of a few individuals. This sort of ethnic scapegoating against Americans of Armenian heritage is as toxic as it is dangerous, all the more so when done by a dual Turkish citizen – an unapologetic genocide denier who served proudly in Turkey’s armed forces. More evidence that the ANCA was right to keep Dr. Oz out of the U.S. Senate in 2022.”

ANCA Policy Director Alex Galitsky responded that Oz was “targeting the Armenian community with the same vile dehumanizing rhetoric we saw fuel the collective punishment of Minnesota’s Somalian community,” a statement picked up by the New York Post.

The ANCA Western Region swiftly condemned Oz’s actions in an official statement. “Public officials carry a special responsibility to uphold both the letter and the spirit of the Constitution,” stated Oshin Harootoonian, Chairman of ANCA’s Western Region, in remarks covered by CBS News. “When enforcement rhetoric drifts toward ethnic generalizations, it weakens civil rights protections and puts entire communities at risk. Armenian Americans, like all Americans, deserve equal justice under law – nothing less.”

Hamparian told the Associated Press (AP) that Oz’s comments invoke stereotypes about the Armenian community, which has deep roots in California, adding: “Things have been dealt with at the state level, prosecutions have been made. But Dr. Oz is taking this in an entirely destructive direction by scapegoating, by fear-mongering, by staging the theoric collective indictment of all Armenians.”

Hamparian told USA Today that Oz was trying to bully a group with deep roots in California. “I think he’ll find that we’re not a group you can bully,” he said.

Like Governor Newsom’s complaint, the ANCA filing charges that Oz’s statements and conduct violate Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs receiving federal financial assistance. Armenian Americans constitute a protected class under Title VI on the basis of shared ancestry and national origin.

“These actions, made while overseeing and publicly representing federally funded health programs (Medicare and Medicaid), risk chilling participation, access, and trust in those programs among Armenian Americans,” the ANCA complaint states.

The complaint requests that OCR investigate whether Dr. Oz’s statements and video constitute national origin discrimination or create a hostile environment in HHS-funded programs; require appropri-

ate corrective actions, including public clarification, staff training on nondiscrimination, removal or amendment of the video if warranted, and measures to prevent recurrence by federal officials; and issue findings and take any necessary enforcement action consistent with Title VI and HHS policies.

## Congressional Leaders Condemn Ethnic Profiling

U.S. Sen. Adam Schiff (D-CA) declared: “Dr. Oz’s demonization of Armenian Americans and targeting of their small businesses is racist and must end. Attacking fraud does not require bigoted attacks on an entire community.” Senator Schiff pledged to work with federal and state partners to conduct oversight and an independent review of the racial profiling.

Congressional Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Frank Pallone (D-NJ) called the comments “deeply irresponsible and harmful” and stated: “It’s a desperate ploy to scapegoat a community that has given so much to the fabric of American life, and an attempt to mimic Trump’s efforts to vilify entire ethnic or racial groups.” Fellow Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Brad Sherman (D-CA) called Dr. Oz’s rhetoric “abhorrent and discriminatory – but unfortunately unsurprising given his long history of denying the Armenian genocide.”

Rep. Laura Friedman (D-CA) declared: “You flew across the country to film yourself pointing at Armenian-owned businesses in Los Angeles. That’s not a fraud investigation – it’s ethnic profiling.” Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA) asserted: “Dr. Oz’s comments targeting the Armenian American community are racist and reinforce harmful rhetoric used against Armenians for too long. Filming himself outside Armenian-owned businesses and spreading false narratives is ethnic scapegoating that puts all Armenian Americans at risk.”

Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA) stated: “Let’s be clear: this isn’t ‘exposing fraud’ — it’s a photo-op on a taxpayer-funded trip to LA where you stood outside Armenian-owned businesses (including a bakery) and baselessly accused them of committing health care fraud.”

Rep. Luz Rivas (D-CA) condemned “Dr. Oz’s racist remarks perpetuating harmful stereotypes about the Valley’s Armenian American community.”

Central Valley Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) noted that “Dr. Oz’s demonizing rhetoric is discriminatory toward the Armenian-American community in California” and emphasized that “his historical views against the Armenian people are being used to demonstrate how far this Administration will go to stretch the truth.”

## State and Local Leaders Stand with Armenian Community

California State Assemblymember John Harabedian, who is a former prosecutor in Los Angeles County, called Oz’s video “patently ridiculous,” telling POLITICO California Playbook: “The director of Medicare and Medicaid Services is driving around Los Angeles in a limo, standing in front of a lavash bakery, saying that the entire Armenian community is some secret mafia that commits health care fraud.”

Harabedian took to social media over multiple days, condemning the racist assertions. In a statement by the California Armenian Legislative Caucus Foundation, Harabedian, who chairs the group, said Oz’s remarks were both misleading and inflammatory.

California State Senator Sasha Renee Perez reposted commentary by ANCA Policy Director Alex Galitsky, stating, “This type of intimidation, harassment, and tar-

ring of our community over the actions of a few isn’t necessary for a legitimate investigation into any real abuse – it is ethnic scapegoating par excellence, and they’re not even trying to hide it.”

Los Angeles Councilmember Adrin Nazarian, who represents the Van Nuys area where the video was shot, claimed Oz did not have “genuine concern about fraud” and called his comments “blatant racism.” “Medical fraud is serious. No one is denying that,” Councilmember Nazarian told CBS News. “Why zoom in on Armenian businesses? Couldn’t the point about one fraud case have been made without dragging an entire community into it?”

California gubernatorial candidates Ian Calderon and Xavier Becerra each strongly condemned Dr. Oz’s video. Former California State Assembly Majority Leader Calderon posted that “Any attempt to target, stereotype, or intimidate people because of their heritage has no place in our politics or our state.” Former Congressman Becerra, who served as Secretary of Health and Human Services under the Biden Administration, called the targeting of LA’s Armenian community “completely unacceptable. His ethnic scapegoating and baseless claims of fraud have no place here.”

## Dr. Oz’s History of Armenian Genocide Denial

ANCA’s complaint notes Dr. Oz’s troubling history regarding Armenian issues. As a dual Turkish-American citizen who served in Turkey’s armed forces, Dr. Oz has consistently refused to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide – the systematic killing and deportation of 1.5 million Armenians by Turkish Ottoman Empire forces from 1915-1923.

During his 2022 Senate campaign, Dr. Oz repeatedly dodged questions about recognizing the Armenian Genocide, despite bipartisan Congressional recognition and President Biden’s official acknowledgement. His appointment to lead CMS raised immediate concerns within the Armenian-American community about potential bias in administering programs affecting Armenian Americans..

## Armenian Assembly Calls Out Oz’s Statements

The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) unequivocally condemned targeted attacks on ethnic minorities and the Armenian community. In their January 28 letter to Dr. Mehmet Oz, Co-Chairs Talin Yacoubian and Oscar Tatosian categorically rejected recent remarks that selectively target Armenian Americans. In the letter, the Assembly acknowledged the Administration’s responsibility to address waste, fraud, and abuse, while underscoring that such efforts must not rely on racism and unjust stereotyping.

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

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

(Material from the *Guardian*, the ANCA and the Armenian Assembly were used to compile this story.)



## OBITUARY

# Longtime Tekeyan Leader Maro Bedrosian Passes Away

BEDROSIAN, from page 1

Maro was raised in a loving Armenian family that carried the deep wounds of history. Her father, orphaned during the Armenian Genocide during World War I, later served in the French Foreign Legion during World War II. Her mother's parents were also survivors of the genocide. Despite economic hardship, Maro's childhood was rich with family warmth, spending weekends with her extended family throughout Beirut and the mountains of Lebanon, where she was the oldest of nine cousins.

In 1967, Maro married Sirop Bedrosian in Beirut. Together they built a life that spanned continents, raising their family in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, and eventually the United States. Sirop, who spent his career with Nalco Chemical, survives her. Maro devoted herself fully to her family: her daughter Isabelle (Hovig) and sons Bedros (Maria) and Haig, and later to her seven beloved grandchildren — William, Carina, Brianna, Alina, Rosie, Clarisse, and Joshua. Her love of family was fierce, her support unwavering, cheering her children and grandchildren through many milestones and accomplishments.

A woman of remarkable eloquence, particularly in her native Armenian, Maro possessed a natural magnetism that drew people to her. Friends described her as smart, loving, passionate, strong-willed, a natural leader, irreplaceable and a modern Armenian Hero. She believed deeply in unity



over divisiveness and worked tirelessly to bring people together. She loved the poetry of Vahan Tekeyan, drawn to the plain yet profound language he used to capture Armenian feelings and identity. Among her favorites were his poems about the beauty of the Armenian language and "Hashvehatar" [Balance Sheet].

Maro's passion for Armenian causes defined much of her adult life. She served as treasurer of the Tekeyan Cultural Association's Central Board for over 30 years, a role she held from the 1990s until her passing. She also served on the board of the AGBU Chicago Chapter during the 1990s.

While she worked on countless initiatives to support Armenia, her greatest pride was founding the Sponsor A Teacher initiative under the presidency of Vartkess Balian, a program that raised funds in the Armenian diaspora to support teachers in Armenia financially, ensuring they would remain in the country to educate and inspire the next generation of Armenians. Through this work, Maro invested in the preservation of Armenian heritage, language, and culture for generations to come.

Beyond her dedication to Armenia, Maro had a zest for life. She was fundamentally a very curious person who sought answers to problems through politics and philosophy. She loved to discuss events of the day, to understand their significance and to analyze them in the context of our lives and history. A natural storyteller, she was able to relay these curiosities into a great source of wisdom and advice for her children and others. She was passionate about investing in stocks, having taken classes to educate herself on financial management. She loved the casino, where her skills as a former bridge player translated beautifully to the blackjack table — and she always left a winner. She traveled extensively throughout North America, Europe, and the Middle East. She was also a wonderful cook who believed "the way to the heart was through the stomach."

Maro's strength of mind and will were legendary. Diagnosed at age 50 with col-

orectal cancer, she fought back three times, surviving two subsequent episodes of metastatic disease against incredible odds. Unbeknownst to her then, she was trailblazing a new path for patients with this disease when she insisted on being treated with surgery rather than the standard approach of chemotherapy. Through multiple illnesses, she defied the odds again and again, with grace and determination and became known as the "miracle patient."

Maro's legacy lives on in her children and grandchildren, in the hundreds of teachers and students whose lives were changed through her Sponsor A Teacher program, and in the countless people in the Armenian community who were touched by her leadership, generosity, and vision. She dedicated her life to ensuring that Armenian culture, language, and heritage would flourish for generations to come.

A celebration of life was held on Saturday, January 31, at Geo H. Lewis & Sons Funeral Home in Houston, with a luncheon afterwards at Amalfi Restaurant. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the Tekeyan's Sponsor A Teacher program in Maro's memory.

"What is left in life for me? Only what was given away. Strangely, only that. ...Whatever went to others came back sweeter, stronger, to stay forever at my side. And whatever Love took, God did not lose but returned like incense to perfume my life." — Vahan Tekeyan

## Diramayr Yeretzgin Anahid Kalayjian

### Deeply Involved in Armenian Church

Diramayr Yeretzgin Anahid Kalayjian, wife of the late Reverend Fr. Vertanes Avak Kahana Kalayjian, and mother of the Reverend Fr. Avedis Kalayjian, passed away on January 23. She was 92.

Yn. Anahid was a faithful servant of our Lord; a font of learning and energy; and a gracious presence among our people, who drew countless people to the church through her warmhearted personality and indomitable spirit.

She was already a woman of learning and accomplishment when she married Fr. Vertanes Kalayjian in 1969. Rev. Vertanes was passionate about asserting the church's mission in the surrounding world, and his wife became a partner and support to his ministry.

The parishes in the Eastern Diocese where Rev. Kalayjian served as pastor were blessed by their mutual care. These included Holy Cross and St. Stepanos churches in New Jersey. But it was Washington's St. Mary Church that became most deeply associated with the couple, and enjoyed their leadership for more than a generation. The

two were married for 47 years, before Der Hayr's passing in 2016.

Throughout her life, Yn. Anahid embraced the role of teacher, striving to awaken parishioners to the treasures of the Armenian Christian heritage—and to awaken them to a deeper awareness of Christ's personal presence in their lives. Over the years, countless people would find inspiration and consolation in her humane, compassionate spirituality. In particular, the example of Der Hayr and Yeretzgin inspired their children to take up this legacy—and led one to answer the Lord's call to ordination as a priest of the Armenian Church.

She leaves her children Dr. Zaven and Edita, Berj, and Fr. Avedis and Karen; her grandchildren Jirair, Hrak, Pargev, Zorair, Aram, and Arev; and all of her loved ones. May God console them in their grief.

Funeral arrangements for Yn. Anahid Kalayjian are as follows:

The Wake Service will be held in Washington, DC, at St. Mary Armenian Church (4125 Fessenden St., Washington). Visiting hours will be held on Thursday, February



12, beginning at 5 p.m. The dahn gark (wake) service will be held at 6:30 p.m. A memorial reception will follow in the church hall.

Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parhamyan will preside over the wake service and deliver a eulogy.

The Funeral Service will be held in Fair

Lawn, NJ, at St. Leon Armenian Church (12-61 Saddle River Rd., Fair Lawn), on Saturday, February 14. A visitation period will begin at 9 a.m., with the funeral beginning at 10 a.m. The burial service will follow at George Washington Cemetery (234 Paramus Rd., Paramus, NJ).

A *hokejash* will follow the burial, at the Assyrian Church of the Virgin Mary (644 Paramus Rd., Paramus, NJ).

The family has requested that in-lieu-of-flowers donations in Yn. Kalayjian's memory may be made to the following: (a) St. Mesrob Armenian Church (4605 Erie St., Racine WI 53402; or stmesrobchurch.org/donations); (b) St. Mary Armenian Church (4125 Fessenden St. NW, Washington, DC 20016; or donorbox.org/stmaryschurch-2); and (c) Holy Cross Armenian Church (318 27th St., Union City, NJ 07087).

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## OBITUARY

## Dorothy E. 'Dottie' (Giderian) Elanjian

### Dedicated Teacher, Mother and Wife

WOBURN, Mass. — Dorothy E. "Dottie" (Giderian) Elanjian of Woburn, January 26, 2026, passed peacefully at home at age 86 with her loving husband by her side.

She was the wife of C. George Elanjian, mother of Janine M. Gregory and her husband Jim of Woburn, Loren E. Baccari and her husband Dom of Woburn, and J. Rafael Elanjian and his wife Julie of Burlington; "Grammy" of Marissa Gregory and her fiancé Ira Lough, Sophia Gregory, Derek Baccari, Jenna Baccari, Sean Elanjian and preceded in death by her beloved granddaughter Sloane Elanjian; sister of Joyce (Giderian) Hurd and her late husband Chet and Jacqueline R. Giderian all of Hudson, N.H.; aunt of Stacey D. Hurd, her partner Nate High of Bedford, N.H. and George G. Hurd, Hudson, N.H. and great-aunt of Carly High and Jonathan Hurd.

She was born July 23, 1939, in Nashua, NH, and resettled in Woburn MA in 1969 devoting her time to raising her family and living her dream vocation as a high school English teacher for Woburn Public Schools.

Dottie was raised at 100 Vine Street in Nashua, by her parents, Mary (Najarian) and John G. Giderian. Both parents' families immigrated to the United States from Armenia after surviving the Armenian Genocide with Dottie's father and other family eventually leading distinguished careers in their chosen vocations.

At an early age, Dottie possessed a deep love of learning and curiosity about the world around her with a keen interest in the performing arts, at times to the chagrin of her two younger sisters tasked as Dottie's audience or given a role when Dottie's imagination was at play. Dottie had a unique gift for music, playing the piano and reproducing a chord simply by hearing it. She had a lifelong love for singing and dance, including a talent for tap dancing. Throughout her youth, Dottie loved performing for others such as in dance recitals and even did some very early modeling.

Dottie's early passion for the arts including music and dance remained central to her life, always rejuvenating her spirit and whose flair for drama and fashion would later captivate her students, inspiring them to discover their own voices and cultivating creativity and self-expression through literature and the written word.

After graduating from Plymouth State College in 1961, Dottie met the love of her life, C. George Elanjian, at an Arme-

nian dance where they forged an instant connection. They married August 11, 1963 beginning a partnership spanning 63 years. As a couple, they celebrated their shared Armenian heritage and often attended Armenian events. They never shied away from a dance floor showcasing their joy of movement and rhythm and it was not uncommon to find Dottie singing and dancing to various genres of music while doing household tasks. Dottie always surrounded herself with beauty. She had timeless tastes for fashion and found joy in home decorating, especially to celebrate holidays and displaying cherished mementos that were meaningful to her.

Dottie's marriage with George was filled with family traditions and an unwavering devotion to their children marked with lively debates, affection, and laughter. As a mom, Dottie was very giving to her children with sometimes grand, but more often thoughtful gestures of care such as notes of encouragement, surprise treats in unexpected places, and encouraging each of her children's individuality. Dottie and George made time for each other when it counted most, something not always easy with their fierce work ethics in their respective careers. They built a tight circle of friends to share dinners or attend church and cultural events. Dottie also forged lifelong friendships rooted in her youth shared with her siblings or with her Woburn and Gloucester neighbors and professional colleagues with lasting bonds defined by mutual admiration, respect, and shared interests.

As her family grew, Dottie especially adored her grandchildren and was a constant presence in their lives. She was their biggest supporter and fiercest advocate. Grammy often wrote special letters for each grandchild filled with life advice, championing their strengths and sharing her hopes for them. One of Dottie's life heartbreaks was losing her granddaughter Sloane who remained forever in Dottie's heart and in her mind.

For the last 27 years, Dottie always found peace spending her summers in Gloucester. She cherished sitting on her front porch in her rocking chair with a book in hand and a flower bud tucked behind one ear, sharing a glass of wine or a Bloody Mary with her husband or guests, waving to strangers, or strolling the shops and summer fairs. For over 2 decades, Dottie hosted countless



cookouts for family and grandkids, family friends and their kids opening her home and her heart to multi generations who love to gather on her back patio or around her table in between time spent at Good Harbor Beach.

One of Dottie's starring roles was that of an English teacher that was her lifelong dream she imagined starting in first grade. She secured her first professional position the year before getting married in 1962 teaching middle school literature for 2 years at the Winslow School in Tyngsboro. She had a unique experience teaching at the Boston Center for the Blind learning Braille to best connect with her students until 1966 when she left teaching to start a family.

Dottie took a 14-year hiatus showering attention to her growing family while volunteering in the community and at St. Stephen's Apostolic Church, but her aspirations to teach never wavered. She returned to education in 1980 as a special ed tutor and did multiple short and long term subbing positions for Woburn Schools. Although often temporary posts, students quickly took notice of Dottie and the way she engaged student learning. In the words of one English Language Learner in her college essay, she wrote that Dottie acted as the "liberator who freed [her] from the language barrier". In 1993 in the wake of budget cuts and potential layoffs, Dottie received true affirmation of her talents, in-

fluence and passion to teach when countless students rallied and petitioned school officials for her to have a permanent place in the English Department at Woburn High School. In 1995, Dottie finally secured a full time English teacher position that offered her the stability she earned quickly living up to the reputation that preceded her. She transformed room 1212 into a magical place for learning, with one former student describing Dottie's classroom as "a beautiful oasis". She brought books to life to evoke critical thinking, expand world views, and sparked creative expression. Dottie was often known for her endless quotes such as "show, don't tell", her eclectic music selections, and for her infamous tea parties with her heroin's journey students. Many former students credit her with discovering their love for the written word or pursuing careers in teaching because of her influence, the ultimate tribute. She touched so many students in ways that defied teaching standards as described in countless thank you notes or essays about her from students and parents.

She received a Teacher of the Year recognition in 1999 from the Department of Education and a 2005 H.S. yearbook dedication upon her retirement highlighting the profound respect and admiration she earned in her career.

Her lasting bonds with her sisters and niece and nephew's families is a forever connection from the heart that her illness or distance never erased.

Dorothy was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease seven years ago. Throughout her illness, her husband George, cared for her with extraordinary love, patience, and devotion. He ensured she was able to remain in the comfort of her home, surrounded by family, love, and dignity. Dottie passed peacefully with her husband holding her hand, sharing their final moment in a lifelong bond.

The family extends their sincere gratitude to Charity Wanjiru, Dottie's devoted live-in caregiver, for her compassionate and loving care with Dottie and to Beth Israel Health Hospice care.

A Funeral service was held on Thursday, February 5 at Saint Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church, Watertown. Interment followed at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge.

In lieu of flowers, remembrances may be made in her memory to St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church, 38 Elton Ave, Watertown, MA 02472 or Beth Israel Lahey Health at Home Hospice, Lahey Hospital & Medical Center Attention: Gift Processing 41 Mall Rd. Burlington, MA 01805.

## John S. Davagian II

### Devoted to Family, Youth Soccer

CONCORD, Mass. — John S. Davagian II of Concord, passed away peacefully on January 27, 2026, surrounded by his family. He was the husband of Joyce (Najarian) Davagian, with whom he shared more than 60 years of marriage.

Born in New Haven, Conn., on January 7, 1945, John's family later moved to Belmont, Mass., where he grew up.

John was a proud graduate of Governor Dummer Academy. His high school experience left an indelible mark, which he reflected upon with great pride throughout his life. Following his secondary education, John went on to earn his BA from Lehigh University and his JD from Boston University.

He was the president of Sutton Corporation for more than 30 years, working alongside his father, wife and cousin. Sutton specialized in marine and deep foundation construction, with projects that in-

cluded the U.S. Navy Submarine Base in Groton, Connecticut, the MIT Library, and numerous bridges across New England. In 1997, John returned to the practice of law and founded Davagian & Associates, now known as Davagian, Grillo & Semple, where he focused on construction and contract law. He was known for his steady counsel, integrity, and practical approach, especially in helping clients navigate complex projects and disputes. John had the pleasure of serving on the Cristcot Board of Directors, a company founded by his daughter, for over 15 years. Additionally, he was a dedicated member of the Council of Armenian Executives for over 50 years.

John was also deeply passionate about youth sports and gave generously of his time to the youth soccer community. He volunteered for many years with Massachusetts Youth Soccer. As Vice President of the organization, John helped inaugurate

*The BayStater* magazine and he played a key role in developing the Mass Youth Soccer Fields at Progin Park in Lancaster, Mass. To recognize his exceptional contributions, he was inducted into the Massachusetts Youth Soccer Hall of Honor, serving as a lasting legacy to his belief in teamwork, community, and opportunity for young athletes.

John is preceded in death by his parents, John Sr. and Vehanush (Peggy). John is survived by his wife, Joyce; his children, Jennifer J. Davagian and John S. (Jay) Davagian III with his wife, Amy; his grandchildren, Alexander Ensign with his wife, Dana, Kathryn Davagian, and Alison Davagian; and his loving sister, Jane D. Tchaicha with her husband, Josef Pavlic; his nephews, Khaled and Jeremy Tchaicha, and many cousins.

Funeral Service were held at Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church, 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge, on Friday, February 6. Interment followed at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be



made to Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church, 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge, and The Governor's Academy (formerly known as Governor Dummer Academy), 1 Elm Street, Byfield, MA.



# Beirut Meets Hollywood at Haigazian University's 70th Anniversary

ANNIVERSARY, from page 6 or local uncertainties that define us, but our unwavering commitment to educating future generations with professionalism, teamwork, ethics, faith, and a lifelong devotion to learning and service."

The highlight of the evening was the Lifetime Achievement Award presentation honoring Joyce Philibosian Stein for her extraordinary contributions to Haigazian University. In her remarks, Mrs. Stein expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Gala Committee and attendees for the honor. She recalled that the University's founding was made possible through the generosity of Mary Mehagian, daughter of Dr. Armenag Haigazian — an Armenian Genocide martyr for whom the University is named and her husband Avak (Steven) Mehagian, and through the vision and leadership of her father, Stephen Philibosian. Mrs. Stein shared how the idea of establishing an American style liberal arts University in Beirut, Lebanon was first conceived and born on a snowy March evening in 1955

at her father's hilltop home in Radnor, Pennsylvania. "Without doubt, Haigazian became my father's passionate vision," she noted.

University leadership presented Mrs. Stein with a special award in recognition of her decades of service, generosity, and dedication—contributions that have left an indelible impact on the institution and its students.

Adding to the evening's celebratory spirit, worldrenowned Armenian pianist Vahagn Hayrapetyan and his ensemble, who traveled from Yerevan for the occasion, delighted guests with a special musical performance, as well as one of the greatest Oud players in the world, Naser Musa.

The celebration concluded with the ceremonial cake cutting, accompanied by the Haigazian University Alma Mater, and a closing prayer. Guests were then invited to continue the evening at an after-party featuring specialty coffee, traditional knaffe, and a dessert reception.

Reflecting on the spirit of the evening,



Members of Gala Committee



Joyce Philibosian Stein holding her award

the cochairs said in their message: "For seventy years, Haigazian University has been a place where Christian faith, academic excellence, and Armenian heritage come together to educate and inspire generations of leaders, thinkers, and servants. Through decades marked by civil war, regional challenges, and severe financial crises, the University has remained steadfast in its commitment to integrity, service, and intellectual inquiry."



????????

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

## IJAGS Examines Law, Activism, and the Global Recognition of the Armenian Genocide

The *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* (IJAGS), a peer-reviewed academic journal published twice a year by the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI), has released Volume 10, Issue 2 (2025), a special issue titled "Law, Activism, and the International Recognition of the Armenian Genocide." The issue is guest-edited by Julien Zarifian (University of Poitiers) and Edita Gzoyan, Editor-in-Chief of IJAGS, who in this volume also serves as Guest Editor.

Positioned at the intersection of international law, memory politics, activism, and education, the special issue examines why, despite overwhelming historical and archival evidence, international recognition of the Armenian Genocide remains uneven. Central to this inquiry is the role of persistent, state-sponsored denial by the Republic of Turkey, which has long obstructed pathways to justice, accountability, and historical truth while simultaneously

catalyzing global Armenian mobilization for recognition as an act of dignity and truth-telling.

The contributors collectively show that recognition is neither a single political act nor merely a function of geopolitical alignment. Rather, it is an evolving process shaped by legal interpretation, domestic constitutional frameworks, civil society engagement, educational initiatives, and the enduring memory of survivors and their descendants. The analysis examines parliamentary resolutions, executive declarations, judicial proceedings, and truth-seeking initiatives as distinct yet interconnected mechanisms through which recognition has advanced across different national contexts.

Beyond historical acknowledgment, the issue underscores the contemporary relevance of recognition. In a global environment still marked by mass atrocities, denial and distortion continue to undermine

accountability and weaken genocide prevention efforts. The Armenian Genocide case illustrates how unresolved historical injustices reverberate across generations, influence foreign policy debates, and affect regional and international security, most starkly evident in the forced displacement of the indigenous Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh in 2023. Recognition, the issue argues, must therefore be understood not as symbolic but as a foundational element of international legal norms and the protection of vulnerable communities.

Gzoyan and Zarifian commented on the special issue saying: "Recognition of the Armenian Genocide is not merely a question of historical acknowledgment. It is a legal, political, and ethical process that directly affects contemporary struggles against denial, impunity, and mass violence, while also affirming the dignity, memory, and rights of the victims and their descendants. This issue demonstrates how law, activism, and memory together shape pathways toward justice."

The volume brings together leading scholars and practitioners from multiple disciplines. Rosa Ana Alja Fernández examines the invocation and misinterpretation of the principle of non-retroactivity under the Genocide Convention in recognition debates; Thomas Hochmann analyzes the normative value of France's Law of 29 January 2001 recognizing the Armenian Genocide; Federico Gaitán Hairabedian explores Argentina's transitional justice mechanisms and truth-trial experiences in the context of the Armenian



Genocide recognition process; and Melanie O'Brien traces decades of academic activism in Australia, highlighting the entanglement of recognition politics with national memory and civic mobilization.

Collectively, the contributions underscore that law, activism, and memory are inseparable in the struggle for recognition. By situating the Armenian Genocide within broader debates on denial, justice, and prevention, this special issue speaks not only to scholars of Armenian studies but also to all those engaged in confronting mass atrocities and in strengthening the rule of law.

The full issue is available online: *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2025) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51442/ijags.0067>.

## St. Vartan Camp Names New Director

**DIRECTOR**, from page 6  
the camp's strong foundation of faith, service, and community."

As Camp Administrative Director, Vartanian-Hajinian will oversee overall camp operations and the implementation of new and enriching programs, working closely with the clergy Spiritual Directors. Her focus will include enhancing the camper experience, supporting staff development, and strengthening community engagement, while remaining faithful to the spiritual and

cultural values of Saint Vartan Camp.

She will also work in close partnership with the clergy representatives on the Executive Board, including Rev. Vart Gyozalyan and Rev. Khachatur Kesabalyan, to guide, inspire, and lead the next generation through a dynamic and meaningful camp experience.

Additional details and upcoming initiatives will be shared in the weeks ahead.

Follow along at [www.stvartancamp.org](http://www.stvartancamp.org) and @stvartancamp.

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# Arts & Culture

## Writers on Writers: Aris Janigian Interviews Arpi Sarafian

LOS ANGELES — Recently, author Aris Janigian, the author of several books, including *Something from Nothing*, *Bloodvine*, *Waiting for Lipchitz at Chateau Marmont* and *Riverbig: A Novel*, interviewed fellow writer (and one of the book reviewers for the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*) Arpi Sarafian about her latest book, a collection of essays titled *The Second Endless Crossings: Reflections on Armenian Art and Culture*.

**Janigian:** In reading these essays, I am reminded of how expansive Armenian artistic production has been over the last five or so years — the approximate time span these reviews and essays cover. But I made the same observation in my last interview with you in 2020, when the first volume of *Endless Crossings* was published. I don't think I am just imagining this continuing flowering of the arts among our people, but you would know much better.

Sarafian: The Armenian people have always taken their creativity and their beauty for granted. Our millennia-old legacy deeply rooted in its unique language, alphabet and faith is not something that we feel we need to take the trouble to showcase. It is just there for the world to witness and to appreciate. Our contributions to world civilization from the earliest days of history have in fact earned us the title, "the Cradle of Civilization." While it is true that there is an outpouring of creativity at milestones like the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide, the unusual productivity of these past few years must be an indication that something has changed.

It is perhaps true that the darker the skies the more visible the stars, yet I see the extensive Armenian artistic production of the past five or so years—the first-ever exhibit of Arshile Gorky's oeuvre by an Armenian museum (Watertown's Armenian Museum of America), special concerts featuring Armenian composers, the Armenian State Symphony touring Germany, soprano Asmik Grigorian, named Best Female Singer at the International Opera Awards, joining other stars for a Christmas gala at the prestigious Carnegie Hall, and so much more—as perhaps an attempt to affirm our continuing presence. On August 31, 2023, the prestigious French music and art talk show *Le Grand Echiquier* featured a stunning special highlighting Armenian culture and drawing attention to the challenges faced by our nation. The upsurge may just be an effort to mask that deeper angst, the fear of extinction, following the shock of the tragedy of Artsakh and the ongoing threats to Armenia's security.

What in 2015, the Centenary of the Armenian Genocide, was a celebration of "Rebirth from ashes" seems

see INTERVIEW, page 14



Director Jivan Avetisyan (Karine Armen photo)

## Master Class by Filmmaker Jivan Avetisyan

By Karine Armen

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

at its headquarters.

"We are excited to host these intimate events," said Armen Karaoglanian, CEO of Armenian Film Society. "There's nothing more meaningful than being in close conversation with filmmakers, one-on-one."

The presentation, conducted in Armenian, drew a strong turnout of young film enthusiasts. Avetisyan guided attendees through the filmmaking process based on his own career, beginning with his first feature film, "Tevanik." He discussed storytelling, script development, casting, production, and post-production.

Avetisyan is an award-winning international film director. He is a member of the

European Film Academy. His three movies, "Tevanik," "The Last Inhabitant," and "Gate to Heaven," focused on the lives of people of Artsakh and the conflict there. He lived in Stepanakert for many years and was an eyewitness to the 44-day Artsakh war.

"I am thankful to my producer, Adrineh Mirzayan, for her dedication during the years," Avetisyan said, adding "I am excited to see wonderful filmmakers in the audience." He acknowledged documentary filmmaker Ani Hovannian and Zareh Arevshatian, who is a film

scholar, archivist and media coordinator.

Jivan Avetisyan said, "Honesty is at the heart of filmmaking. When working with scriptwriters, actors, and the crew, it ensures that every emotion, every moment and every human reality portrayed on screen resonates with truth. I always choose subjects that touch my heart." He discussed the importance of building relationships with your team, as they are the foundation of collaboration and essential to bringing the film's vision to life. Also, one needs to develop trust to gain supporters. He tells his stories to the screenwriters, and they create the script. "I

see FILMMAKER, page 16

## Suzanne Ajamian

*The Quiet Power of Creation*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN-LONDON — Suzanne Ajamian is a multidisciplinary visual artist whose life and work were forged in the crucible of war, displacement, and the resilience of living with a disability from childhood. Born in Beirut into an Armenian refugee family and raised amid the violence of the Lebanese Civil War, she discovered art not as a pastime but as a lifeline — a place where color, line, and imagination could survive even when the world around her could not.

Suzanne studied Fine Arts at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA), where she apprenticed under Mrs. Gulen Torossian Der Boggossian, developing a visual language rooted in clarity, contrast, and emotional truth. In the early 1990s, she moved to the United Kingdom, where she specialized in oil painting and became a resident artist at the Delfina Studio Trust on a prestigious scholarship.

Suzanne Ajamian has held solo exhibitions in Beirut, London, and Hong Kong, and has participated in numerous exhibitions across Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the United States. In 1999, she represented the United Kingdom at the Very Special Arts Festival in Los Angeles with the support of the Arts Council of England. Her work now lives in public and private collections across Lebanon, the UK, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Europe and the United States. Suzanne Ajamian also writes poetry in English; some of her poems are included in the online e-book *The Hangout*.



Dear Suzanne, you've described art as a refuge and a language from an early age. How did your childhood experiences of war, displacement, and disability shape the way you first began to create?

My childhood unfolded in the shadow of war, exile, and a body forever changed by injury, and yet art became the one place untouched by destruction. In a world that shifted beneath my feet, drawing offered a still point — a quiet room inside the

see AJEMIAN, page 13



# Suzanne Ajamian: The Quiet Power of Creation

AJEMIAN, from page 12

storm. It allowed me to speak when words failed, to build a universe where I could exist freely. Creation became my refuge, my resistance, and my earliest act of survival.

**Your time in London at the Delfina Studio Trust exposed you to an international artistic community. How did that period influence your exploration of identity, perception, and the structures that shape human experience?**

Delfina opened my world like a window thrown wide. Surrounded by artists from every corner of the globe, I began to understand identity as something fluid, layered, and constantly reborn. London's cultural density sharpened my awareness of how perception is shaped — by history, by memory, and by the invisible structures we inherit. Those years gave me the courage to question everything, including the act of seeing itself.

**First, I have learned about you while working on my book on Armenians in China, from the travelogue of Syrian Armenian writer Toros Toranian. You spent over two decades living and working in Hong Kong. What did that experience teach you, both as an artist and as a person?**

Hong Kong was a city of light and density, a place where movement never ceased and contrasts lived side by side. Its rhythm seeped into my work, teaching me to find beauty in fragmentation and harmony in contradiction. Yet beneath that brilliance, I endured a long, silencing marriage that tried to erase my voice and my art. Surviving it taught me that creativity is not fragile — it waits, it endures, and it rises again when the soul is ready.

**You are now rebuilding your artistic life with *The New Me Project*. What this**

## project represents and how it reflects your current creative vision?

*The New Me Project* is a return to my own inner landscape — a place I lost and have now reclaimed. My work no longer begins with the outside world; it begins with memory, intuition, and the sacred architecture of the self. Each piece is a ritual of healing, a stitching together of the life that was interrupted. This project is my rebirth — a movement from silence to presence, from survival to becoming.

## Having lived in different countries, do you still feel connected to the broader Armenian artistic community?

I am an Armenian citizen as well and my connection to the Armenian artistic spirit is woven into my bones. It lives in the resilience I inherited, in the stories carried across generations, in the instinct to rebuild from ashes. Even far from Armenian circles, I feel the pulse of a shared memory and a shared creative fire. When I meet Armenian artists, it feels less like an introduction and more like recognition. Yes, I have Armenian citizenship, but I have not yet been able to visit Armenia. In my teenage years, I imagined myself studying and living there — walking the same roads my ancestors once walked, hearing my language carried in the air, feeling that quiet recognition that only a homeland can give. But because of my disability, travel was never simple. The journey I longed for remained just beyond reach, like a place I could see in my heart but not touch with my hands. Still, the longing itself became a companion — an inner Armenia I have carried with me all my life.

## My next question is traditional — what can you tell about your ancestors?

My father, Antoin Ajamian, was born in Antakya (Antioch), a major transit point during the Armenian Genocide. After los-

ing his father young, he became responsible for his two younger brothers and his elderly mother. At sixteen, he left for Syria, studied at a French military school, learned seven languages, and served as a translator in the French Foreign Legion, monitoring international broadcasts for coded Nazi messages.

When Armenian refugees were relocated to Lebanon, he helped them rebuild their identity papers. He later refused a translation post in Madagascar to stay with his ill mother, resigning from the French army and working instead in Bourj Hammoud as a multilingual police officer.

My mother, Yeghabet Djabrayan, arrived in Lebanon as a child after her family fled Belen (Beylan) near Iskenderun during the Genocide. She married my father, though her dream of becoming an opera singer was discouraged. Together they raised three daughters — Dicky, Marlen, and me.

During the Lebanese Civil War, I contracted polio at age three and spent more than five years at Hôpital Monseigneur Cortbawi. My parents sold their property to save my life. When the hospital came under attack, my treatment was cut short, leaving me permanently in a wheelchair.

My ancestors are the quiet guardians of my work, shaping everything I create. Armenia is our matriarch, a living archive of resistance who survived the unspeakable and still stands. I carry her witness and make room for the voiceless. I have not been to Armenia, yet she lives in my heart and imagination. One day I hope to stand where their stories first took root.

For four generations, my family has lived in the shadow of conflict — from my grandparents who survived the Armenian Genocide to my own childhood during the Lebanese Civil War. Becoming disabled during the war changed the course of my life, but surviving at all is what feels truly

extraordinary. In a family shaped by displacement and violence, endurance itself became our defining story.

## Are there Armenian artists and writers who are dear to you?

Many Armenian artists are deeply dear to me. The painters who shaped my imagination include Arshile Gorky, Jean Carzou, Ivan Aivazovsky, Martiros Sarian, Kevork Mourad, and Sossi Madzounian. Their work carries the colors, wounds, and spirit of our people, and I feel that every time I look at their art.

Among writers, William Saroyan has always held a special place in my heart. His stories celebrate the resilience of ordinary Armenians, and I have always felt seen in his words. I am also deeply connected to the work of the British Armenian author Nouritza Matossian who wrote *Black Angel: A Life of Arshile Gorky*. Her biography captured the pain and brilliance of Gorky with rare honesty. We became friends, and she even attended my exhibition at the Quakers' Gallery in 1998, just before her book was published. That memory remains precious to me.

## Could you mention some Armenian artists you met and loved?

Some of the Armenian artists who shaped me are the ones I was fortunate enough to know personally. My former art teacher, the sculptor Gulen Torossian Der Boghosian, was one of my earliest inspirations, and I have always admired the work of her husband, Shahe Der Boghossian, as well as their daughters, Maral and Nanor, who are artists in their own right. I also hold deep affection for the paintings of Levon Jamochian and the unforgettable Paul Guiragossian.

There are many Armenian artists whose work I cherish, but my years living in the Far East kept me far from the Armenian art

## Hagopian's Documentary 'Memories Flow Beneath It, From Valley to Quabbin' Screens in Medford

**MEDFORD, Mass. —** On Wednesday, February 11, filmmaker Roger Hagopian will present his documentary "Memories Flow Beneath It, From Valley to Quabbin," at Medford Public Library.

This 69-minute film traces the displace-



Roger Hagopian (Wicked Local photo)

ment of people and the loss of a way of life in the Swift River Valley of central Massachusetts when the Quabbin Reservoir flooded four towns in order to create water infrastructure for 52 Boston metropolitan communities, including Medford. Several interviewees include former valley residents, historians, and authors, including J.R. Greene, who has written numerous books on the subject.

The ever-westward evolution of the water

systems begins with springs on the Shawmut Peninsula of Boston in 1630, an aqueduct from Jamaica Pond, and involves the consideration of the Mystic Lakes and Spot Pond, before resorting to the Cochituate System emanating from Natick, which became insufficient due to the mass immigration of refugees from the Irish Famine, thus drastically increasing Boston's population. The Great Boston Fire of 1872 exposed the limitations of the water supply, leading to the Sudbury and Wachusett systems. Italian immigrants, some of whom were stonemasons, found work on these infrastructure projects as the system expanded

ed further. State House debates, Supreme Court decisions, and incredible civil engineering innovations, led to the creation of the Quabbin Reservoir. Former Valley residents recall their rural industrial and agricultural towns, family life, and the years leading up to their expulsion. The cold processes of eminent domain and eviction caused lifelong trauma to the valley residents, especially the elderly. Generations of history were demolished by 1938 and



A still from "Memories Flow Beneath It"

the people were not given housing and employment assistance by the state — they were on their own.

Expert commentary is given by noted historian, the late Howard Zinn. The music track is graciously provided by pianist, Jacqueline Schwab, who has performed on numerous Ken Burns PBS documentaries, beginning with The Civil War through The American Revolution.

About the Filmmaker: Roger Hagopian lives in Lexington, where he learned filmmaking at the local cable television studio there. A history lover since his youth, he has had film screenings on the Armenians

and the Genocide, World War II veterans, factory workers, and local American history, including the Middlesex Canal, which ran through Medford, at universities, high schools, public libraries, historical societies, churches, temples, community centers, and other public and private venues. He has also appeared on local cable television stations and radio programs. After the film, Roger will be present to discuss it with the audience.

The film will be shown on February 11, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., with discussion to follow, at Bonsignore Hall, Medford Public Library, 111 High St., Medford.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Writers on Writers: Aris Janigian Interviews Arpi Sarafian

INTERVIEW, from page 12

to have morphed into the expression of an existential fear. Despite multiple concerns, survival was not an issue in 2015. We honored the memory of our victims and celebrated our excellence with peace of mind. Nothing could shake the powerful sense of identity our history and our rich artistic and cultural heritage had given us. It was still possible to believe in the advancement of the cause of justice for our people, notwithstanding Turkey's ongoing denial of the horrendous deed. Artists involved in the centennial observations boldly demanded justice with the "I remember and demand" slogan.

The recent flowering of the arts may also be an indication of the need for more urgent relief from pain in this new dark chapter in our history. As the celebrated philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has famously observed, "We have art in order not to die of the truth." The numerous initiatives—the recent CivilNet series on the House Museums in Armenia, the unprecedented efforts to revive Western Armenian, or to introduce our uniquely talented composers—Alan Hovhaness and Arno Babajanian among others—and a myriad award-winning musicians performing in the most prestigious Halls internationally—might just be a frantic attempt to showcase our beauty, the subtext being, beauty deserves to survive. We are too beautiful to die.

Culture has always been our forte but in a morally bankrupt world, where brutal force is flaunted and when even the holiest of institutions is willing, for monetary compensation, to renege on ethical and moral principles and compromise its mission of spreading love and justice, to continue to spread beauty may just not be enough to keep us afloat. When "take, take, take" is the mode, when occupying and dominating is the norm, to cling to our revered poet Vahan Tekeyan's, "What remains to me [of life is], strange enough, only what I gave away," may just be delusional, even if some of us, like Arousak Sahakyan, the ethnographer folklorist from Armenia, the very embodiment of her culture's values and aspirations, should prefer to remain marginalized and be perceived as powerless rather than join in the bullying and the hoarding.

The Armenian people will always rejoice in uncovering an unpublished medieval hymnal. We shall never stop reviving our ancient wine legacy or stop weaving a 3,500-year-old Dragon Rug back to life to preserve a millennia-old weaving tradition. In the words of Arman Nshanian, producer of the recent Echoes of Our Ancestors, a show illuminating Armenian History and Culture, and director of Armenia's official entry for Best International Feature at the 93rd Academy Awards, "Songs of Solomon" (the movie that depicts the life of the musical genius Komitas Vartabed), it may simply be true that "Our culture is really what defines us." The words of the celebrated Armenian writer Kostan Zarian are worth quoting at length: "Culture is not wealth, civilization or state power, but pure spirituality, a light that enlightens and enriches life. So, if you study our history in detail, you will see that from the beginning, from the mythical days, we have run after the light."

**Janigian:** Over the past five years, we've also had to watch our ancient culture in Artsakh extinguished and a people who had lived there continuously since antiquity exiled, perhaps forever. December 10, 2025 would have marked the thirty-fourth anniversary of the Artsakh Independence Referendum yet, on September 19, 2023, the entire population of Artsakh was ethnically cleansed

from the land. The exodus set a new standard for trauma, contended the participants at the November 2, 2024 "Art-sakh Uprooted: Aftermaths of Displacement" Symposium of the University of Southern California's Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies. In what way did this loss register among our artists and scholars?

Sarafian: With the loss of Artsakh preserving our identity as Armenians has taken on a new urgency. Our academicians are meeting the challenge valiantly with groundbreaking research and publications that focus on what needs to be done in the present and the future so new genocides can be prevented. Their innovative approaches to the research of our past extend the documentation beyond state archives to include personal accounts, letters, diaries—thus far untapped sources—as trusted historical sources and as irrefutable evidence of the truth. The goal is to reach out to the international community and expose the falsities in order to combat Turkish denialism, avers Dr. Bedross Der Matossian, author of the highly acclaimed *The Horrors of Adana*.

The unimaginable loss has also triggered an unusual flowering of the arts. Especially eye-catching are the creative projects that deal with the trauma more specifically. French Armenian photojournalist and documentary filmmaker Astrig Agopian digs into questions of cultural heritage and identity with her timely exhibit, *Like There's No Tomorrow*. "What would you take if you had to leave home immediately?" asks Agopian. The coffee jars and the family heirlooms Artsakh Armenians carried as they fled the war are all that remain. Equally powerful are the award-winning feature length documentaries, such as *Sweet Land* and *There Was, There Was Not*, by Armenian filmmakers, that deal with the emotional toll of the tragedy on the inhabitants of Artsakh.

While it is true that the world stood by and watched in indifference, it is also true that there has been a powerful human reaction to the inhumanity of the horrendous deed. If humanity is to survive mankind will need to change course. The transformative role women can play in renouncing violence as a primary solution to resolving our conflicts has in fact been frequently evoked. One can only hope that the desire that frees history from the mentality that glorifies the conqueror will prevail beyond the newspaper editorials.

The fear cannot be dismissed. The existential threats are real. Azerbaijan's systematic destruction of Artsakh's cultural heritage, its continuing threats to Armenia's sovereignty and unimpeded access to the new transit corridor through Armenia's Syunik region are worrisome. It is indeed getting more and more difficult to reconcile our creativity with the new reality of oppressive governments that have a greater power to destroy what has taken decades, sometimes even centuries or millennia to accomplish.

Nonetheless, programs that highlight the role of our heritage in preserving our identity as Armenians abound. Armenians will always take pride in having survived the attempt to exterminate them. To quote director/producer Arman Nshanian once again, "We are so much more than the genocide," the subtext being, once again, we are too beautiful to die. We deserve to survive.

**Janigian:** Many of your essays cover artists or associations that use contemporary, academic language and themes—as if they are appealing for the attention of American cultural elites—and yet want to be rooted in the much older artistic ethos of our own culture. Sometimes they straddle these two worlds

with success, other times not so much. Can you comment on this?

Sarafian: I have always been an advocate of simplicity and accessibility and was in fact well aware of perhaps an excessive use of contemporary academic language and themes in my "The Common Reader: The Case of William Saroyan" piece. Yet, I felt I needed to go to some length to clarify my meaning to "the common reader" who would have little or no familiarity with the various "critical perspectives" or "theoretical approaches" the more elitist (yes!) academic readership thrives on. My essay may just be an attempt to expose the elitism and also to bring attention to Saroyan's work.

I took on the case of William Saroyan, a writer who we both feel has been largely excluded from literature departments, partly because of the prevailing mentality in academia in the years around 1930-1960, roughly the period when Saroyan's work was being published, that privileged authors whose writing is more complex. Saroyan's writing is "simple," not requiring the close textual analysis that texts with more complicated structures and imagery do to interpret. Yet, I contend, Saroyan's work has the "complexity" of human truth, arguably the greatest virtue of any literary work.

At times the work itself may invite some academic language. For example, in *A Book, Untitled*, Shushan Avagyan alternates between different narrators, a strategy which often confuses the reader used to a more traditional linear narrative style. Placing the novel within a more contemporary theoretical framework and approaching it as "a postmodern experiment of mixing multiple voices" might help illuminate the reader and make the experience of reading the book more pleasurable. Another instance where academic language might be helpful would be Ara Iskandarian's *Godless Hour—A Yerevan Tale* where the stone statues in the Rose City of Yerevan come to life and give an account of their part in Armenian history and culture. Familiarizing the reader with "magical realism," a literary style that blends the world of facts with the world of the imagination to explore the "facts" of our complicated existence would, again, make the novel more accessible.

It is true that the focus on theory sometimes detracts from the simple joy of reading. Yet, theory can also enhance the reading experience. The problem is not as much with the theory or the language used as it is with the creation of an opposition which inevitably leads to a hierarchy that excludes an extraordinary writer like Saroyan. I am hopeful that the trend to contextualize in more recent literary theory will steer Saroyan back into the canon.

Mine is not an apology for the use of academic language. It is simply a desire to bridge the gap between the two separate worlds. I should think that evoking the title of Virginia Woolf's 1932 second collection of essays, *The Second Common Reader*, in my own *The Second Endless Crossings* shows where my allegiances are. There is "another kind of criticism, the opinion of people reading for the love of reading, slowly and unprofessionally, and judging with great sympathy and yet with great severity," writes Woolf in her essay "How Should One Read A Book?"

**Janigian:** In concrete ways, how can the Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center in Glendale, which is scheduled to open in 2026, contribute to supporting contemporary artists, particularly those outside of the visual arts.

Sarafian: Having lived at the crossroads of geographies throughout our long history, I believe we are uniquely equipped to

fulfill the museum's mission of promoting "understanding and appreciation of America's cultural and ethnic diversity by sharing the Armenian American experience."

Stating missions, as in "inclusive and meaningful projects," or "educational programs exploring their history" is easy and all too abstract. Yet, making specific recommendations may not be very useful either as, ultimately, the artists themselves provide the specifics in producing the material with their vision and their creativity. Which is not to say that a museum committee made up of experts with extensive knowledge of the arts cannot be helpful in providing guidelines.

I would think that the best way to support our artists is to give them visibility. The aesthetic appeal of the more traditional visual arts—paintings and sculptures—has always attracted audiences of all backgrounds and ages. Focusing on newer voices could further attract younger audiences and have the added advantage of ensuring the continuity of the culture. Regularly scheduled screenings of films—also visual—by ethnic filmmakers, with discussions to follow, could promote dialogue and make the viewing experience meaningful.

Much in line with the museum's stated mission of "appreciation of America's cultural and ethnic diversity," music, a non-visual art form, can be a powerful bridging device. While it promotes awareness of the individual culture, music also transcends borders. Concerts featuring solo artists or bands and larger orchestras have been known to attract audiences across ethnic backgrounds.

The greater challenge for me is the showcasing of the literary output. I have attended poetry readings with just three attendees. Lectures seem to alienate. The ongoing book presentations, with brief introductions and questions to follow, by ABRIL Books would perhaps be a good model to follow. I would like to add that choosing to focus on the Armenian—clearly on the radar of an Armenian American museum—rather than the Korean or the Mexican writer should not be perceived as exclusionary, as the ensuing discussions would inevitably highlight the relevance of our own cultural legacy to the common concerns of the various ethnic groups. The challenge is educating the public by making the museum into a forum where ideas are freely exchanged, not simply "taught."

Larger community events like festivals that focus on tasting the food, listening to the music and appreciating the artistic heritage and other traditions of the various ethnicities have proven to be very effective ways of engaging with different cultures, always central to the museum's mission of promoting diversity and inclusiveness.

Fundraising galas are certainly not to be ruled out, especially given their recent unprecedented success. Among other things, they would help provide financial support to the artists who often juggle full-time jobs with their artistic careers.

My hope is that understanding the "other" will contribute to the creation of a more harmonious society.

Much will depend on the extent to which the noble mission statements are fulfilled. To what extent, one wonders, has the mission of the Holocaust Museum LA, "to educate and inspire a more dignified and humane world" been accomplished? Bringing attention to the ongoing atrocities is essential. Our future is at best unpredictable.

**Janigian:** Would it ever be possible to have a nationwide symposium of the Armenian arts, one that would bring *continued on next page*



# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



"The California avocado is a native American plant with a long, distinguished history. Today, the most popular variety is the Hass. The mother tree of all Hass avocados was born in a backyard in La Habra Heights. California avocados are generally in season from spring through summer with some California-grown avocados available earlier or later depending on location. During peak season, California Avocados are available at stores around the United States, with distribution in California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Oregon and Washington, and in select grocery stores around the rest of the United States. All California Avocados should be labeled with a sticker or label of origin."

"California avocados are ethically sourced, meaning they are grown responsibly and with integrity. California Avocado growers are independent farmers who are governed by laws and regulations of the State of California and the United States that require stringent food safety and labor practices. In addition, for California avocados ethical sourcing includes safeguarding the well-being of workers, the environment and the community. Produce managers at your local grocery store are a great resource for answering questions and helping you find exactly what you're looking for. Let them know your preference for locally grown fruit. Many farmer's markets carry California avocados when in season. Just be sure to ask the grower/vendor if their avocados are from California."

"California avocados can be enjoyed by anyone at any age. Its creamy consistency makes it one of the first fresh foods a baby can enjoy. A 50-gram serving of avocados provides 6 grams of unsaturated fats, known to be important for normal growth and development of the central nervous system and brain. Kids love to dip vegetables into guacamole, teens and adults enjoy avocado sliced on salads and spread on sandwiches, and older adults savor the health qualities of those fats with benefits."

"California Avocados can seamlessly appear at any meal or snack. They are a nutritional powerhouse. Add them to smoothies, omelets, soups, salads, vegetable 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. Because of the fat profile of avocados, it's not surprising that many vegans use them in lieu

## from previous page

together artists in many mediums, so that we can learn from one and better support one another? Relatedly, how can we start another publication like the old ARARAT magazine?

Sarafian: "The Armenian arts" covers too broad a spectrum to allow an in-depth exploration of the topics addressed. Even with focus on a single creative medium, such as literature or music, the theme would still need to be narrowed down to make meaningful in-depth discussions possible — which is what a symposium typically aims to accomplish. For example, rather than the broader Contemporary Fiction or Poetry topic, a literary symposium could focus on the impact of forced

displacement in the work of Contemporary Armenian Writers, etc.

It is always exciting for a group of experts, artists or scholars to come together and exchange views, share their research and their work and learn from each other, perhaps even learn to support one another. That, however, may be a luxury we cannot afford at this historical moment when matters of greater urgency are at our door.

Even if one should adhere to the notion that beauty is what defines art, the social relevance of the symposium would still be key. The inherently critical stance of artists invites reflection on social issues and could play a key transformative role, without being preachy. USC's "Artsakh Uprooted: Aftermaths of Displacement," although not a

of dairy or eggs. Try them instead of mayonnaise in tuna salad, for example, or in breakfast smoothies."

The sumptuous flavors of Lebanese cuisine, including roasted peppers, garlic, chickpeas, and spices blend with fresh California Avocados in this zesty guacamole.

## INGREDIENTS:

1/2 cup yellow or orange bell pepper, or jarred roasted pepper, diced  
4 ripe, fresh California Avocado, seeded and diced  
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice, more to taste  
1/2 teaspoon freshly grated lime zest  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin  
1/2 teaspoon ground coriander  
1/2 teaspoon ground sumac  
1 teaspoon ground Aleppo pepper, plus a sprinkle for garnish  
1/4 cup canned chickpeas (garbanzo beans), rinsed, divided  
1/2 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste

## PREPARATION:

To roast the yellow or orange bell pepper, heat oven to 400°F. Roast one pepper on a tray for 15 to 20 minutes or until blistered on top side. Turn to other side and roast for 15 to 20 minutes longer. Remove from oven and place in a paper bag for 5 minutes to steam. Peel and remove skin, stem and seeds, then dice the pepper. Reserve remaining pepper for another use.

Gently combine avocado, juice, zest, garlic and seasonings with the roasted pepper. Stir in half of the chickpeas. Taste, then add salt if desired.

Top with remaining chickpeas and a sprinkle of Aleppo pepper. Serve with lime or lemon wedges, fresh vegetables, crackers, pita bread and baked pita chips.

For this recipe, go to: <https://californiaavocado.com/recipe/lebanese-guacamole/>  
For all recipes: <https://californiaavocado.com/recipes/>  
Serves 8

\*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.

How Avocados Fit Into Today's Popular Diets: <https://californiaavocado.com/nutrition/how-avocados-fit-into-popular-diets/>

For 5 Ways to Get More Nutrition in Your Meals with California Avocados, go to: <https://californiaavocado.com/how-to/get-more-nutrition-in-your-meals-with-avocado/>

## CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

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Go to: <https://californiaavocado.com/about-us/>  
Contact: <https://californiaavocado.com/contact-us/>

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 more than 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. Because of our unwavering belief in the quality of California Avocados, we're dedicated to sharing information, promoting our product and supporting those who use, produce, sell and serve California Avocados.



Always check for the California label when you shop. For avocado history, go to: <https://californiaavocado.com/avocado101/the-history-of-california-avocados/>

It could be argued that if we could bring artists and scholars together for a symposium of the arts, we could also bring together our community leaders to discuss our current problems, such as the Church/State divide which has acquired a worrisome course at a time when staying unified is key to overcoming the greater existential threat to our homeland. The challenge is bringing different voices into the same space so ideas can be shared and discussed.

Whatever the scope, outlining the goals of the symposium clearly is paramount.

A choice of venue that maximizes attendance would also assert our presence and, once again, reaffirm our art/culture as our most effective political tool.



# Master Class by Filmmaker Jivan Avetisyan

FILMMAKER, from page 12  
am still learning and improving my skills." He emphasized the value of feedback and a growth mindset.

"If I don't connect with an actor during casting, I will not cast them. Every member of the team must be fully committed for us to succeed," he explained. Avetisyan also added that he believes a female director of photography would be a better fit for "Angels 2020," as women often bring a deeper sensitivity to emotional layers.

During the question-and-answer period Avetisyan answered questions in his usual friendly, humble tone. Ani Hovannessian asked how he decides whether to make a feature film versus a documentary. He replied, "Revival is an example of a film that incorporates live footage I shot myself or that others captured and integrated into the narrative. For 'Angels 2020,' I drew on

the experiences of over 80 healthcare professionals and created four stories for the film."

He is also working on his fifth film, "Angels 2020," about the challenges doctors faced in Artsakh during the war. Avetisyan has interviewed over 80 healthcare professionals and included footage from the war taken by him or his colleagues. He uses many metaphors and symbols.

"Revival" is Avetisyan's fourth feature movie and will premiere in Los Angeles and New York in the fall of 2026. During his visit to Los Angeles, Avetisyan had other movie screenings, "Tevanik" and "Gate to Heaven," organized by different Armenian organizations in Glendale.

To support the production of Angels 2020, those interested can donate at <https://rearmenia.com/en/fundraisers/8fbc6727-a8af-4527-8a3c-f966f6df052f?tab=story>



From left, CEO of AFS Armen Karaoglanian, producer Adrineh Mirzayan, documentary filmmaker Ani Hovannessian, and director Jivan Avetisyan (Karine Armen photo)

**FRESNO STATE**  
Armenian Studies Program

THE ARMENIAN STUDIES PROGRAM, FRESNO STATE  
THE TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION METRO LOS ANGELES CHAPTER,  
AND ARMENIAN ARTS PRESENT

**"WESTERN ARMENIAN MUSIC:  
FROM ASIA MINOR TO THE UNITED STATES"**

**9հՅԵՂՈՎՆ-BOOK LAUNCH  
WITH LIVE MUSICAL EXAMPLES**

**GUEST SPEAKER: AUTHOR HACHIG KAZARIAN  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
PROF. BARLOW DER MUGRDECHIAN**

**POSTPONED**

**Hachig Kazarian** was born in Detroit, Michigan and is a retired secondary instrumental music educator with 46 years of teaching experience. He received his professional credentials from the Juilliard School of Music, where he earned a B.S. and M.A. degree in clarinet performance. He also attended Eastern Michigan University, where he received an M.A. degree in Music Literature/Ethnomusicology. Kazarian has performed Western Armenian music for many Armenian churches, societies and patriotic organizations throughout the United States.

**Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian** is the Berberian Coordinator of the Armenian Studies Program and general editor of the Armenian Series of The Press at Fresno State.

**Sunday, February 22, 2026 • 5:00PM**

**The Center for Armenian Arts**  
250 N. Orange St., Glendale, CA

Parking is recommended at the Orange Street Parking Structure (first 90 minutes is free)  
Address: 222 N. Orange Street, Glendale, CA 91203

**ARMENIAN MIRROR-SPECTATOR**

ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR  
OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

DECEMBER 12-APRIL 26, 2026 —The Armenian Museum of America is proud to announce the opening of a landmark exhibition, "Arshile Gorky: Redrawing Community and Connections." This is the first exhibition of Arshile Gorky's work in an Armenian museum, and it caps off a series of programs initiated by the "100 Years of Arshile Gorky" Committee in the City of Watertown. Twenty-five works from lenders across the country including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Housatonic Museum of Art, Yale University Art Gallery, and many private collections. The exhibition is curated by Kim S. Theriault. Sponsored by the JHM Charitable Foundation. Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown. Hours: Thurs.-Sun., 12pm-6pm. Please visit <https://www.armenianmuseum.org/arshile-gorky> for more information.

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

FEBRUARY 11 — "Memories Flow Beneath I, From Valley to Quabbin" screening and talk. Local filmmaker Roger Hagopian presents his documentary "Memories Flow Beneath It, From Valley to Quabbin." This powerful 69 minute film traces the displacement of people and the loss of a way of life in the Swift River Valley of central Massachusetts when the Quabbin Reservoir flooded four towns in order to create water infrastructure for 52 Boston metropolitan communities, including Medford. Several interviewees include former valley residents, historians, and authors, including J.R. Greene, who has written numerous books on the subject. 6.30 to 8.30 p.m., Bonsignore Hall, Medford Public Library, 111 High St., Medford.

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

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)

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. [ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support](http://ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support)

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

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

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

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

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



## COMMENTARY

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



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# Pressure on Iran Intensifies

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In recent days, developments surrounding Iran have been unfolding at an extremely rapid pace, with possible scenarios pointing in very different directions. Just a week ago, President Trump was dispatching naval forces to the Middle East, stating that he hoped Iran would come to the negotiating table. Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio declared that the option of preventive strikes against Iran was currently on the table. Iran, for its part, announced that its armed forces were prepared for any possible developments, despite the protest actions taking place inside the country.

Shortly thereafter, US naval forces — specifically the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln and its accompanying strike group — were deployed not far from Iran's maritime borders, prepared for possible action. However, no such action ultimately took place.

The next phase was marked by a significant escalation of US pressure: the imposition of sanctions on countries trading with Iran, along with intensified diplomatic activity by three Arab states of the Persian Gulf allied with the United States seeking to persuade President Trump to pursue a deal rather than war.

The subsequent phase involved concrete steps by third countries. First, several states began evacuating their citizens from Iran, while others announced their intention to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization.

It is evident that we are currently dealing with a situation in which developments around Iran are unfolding according to a phased logic. In the initial phase, large-scale protest actions took place inside Iran. The authorities managed to contain and stabilize the situation, and no external intervention — at least in the form of military action — occurred, despite strong pressure and harsh rhetoric from the United States.

It is clear that President Trump, consistent with his negotiating style, is applying maximum pressure on Iran with the aim of forcing the country's leadership to sit down at the negotiating table and ultimately abandon its nuclear program. Trump used this tactic before with different countries such as North Korea. At the same time, Iran has consistently stated that its nuclear program is exclusively peaceful in nature, a claim that Washington does not accept. It is also evident that within the Trump administration there are influential circles advocating a hardline approach toward Iran and pushing for the implementation of tougher measures against Tehran.

As for a change of power or a revolution, conditions that could have enabled such a development existed weeks earlier, when mass protests were taking place across Iran. At that time, President Trump chose not to take any action and instead waited to see how events would unfold. Undoubtedly, this decision was made on the basis of careful political calculations and assessments of intelligence information.

Of course, the key question remains what objective the United States is pursuing with regard to Iran: whether it is seeking the overthrow of the current authorities, merely attempting to bring

them to the negotiating table, or contemplating Iran's possible fragmentation along the lines of Iraq or Syria. The coming developments will provide answers to these questions. However, it should be taken into account that if the Trump administration had aimed to overthrow the current authorities, such an opportunity may have presented itself during the period of mass protests, when it appeared that demonstrators were quite close to achieving a change of power. The administration's decision not to intervene at that moment suggests that its objective was somewhat different from simply pursuing a revolutionary change of power in Iran.

At present, developments around Iran appear to have somewhat receded into the background of the international news agenda due to the Jeffrey Epstein scandal in the United States. Leading media outlets are more focused on this issue than on the possibility of war with Iran or negotiations. Nevertheless, the *New York Times* reported that talks between the United States

and Iran are expected to take place in the coming days, which could bring a degree of clarity to this highly volatile situation.

Naturally, the issue that concerns us most is what might happen in the South Caucasus in the event of a large-scale war. In reality, beyond the risks already present in the South Caucasus — discussed in my previous article — there is another important factor that deserves attention: the strengthening of Turkey's position in the region. Historically, Russia and Iran have served as counterweights to Turkey in the South Caucasus, limiting Ankara's role and influence and preventing more active Turkish involvement, including in the context of the absence of Armenian-Turkish relations.

Today, however, international politics appears to be moving in a direction where such counterweights to Turkey in the South Caucasus are diminishing. Iran finds itself in a complex domestic and foreign policy situation and is likely to focus primarily on confronting the United States and Israel rather than advancing its interests in the South Caucasus or elsewhere due to limited resources on the ground. The same applies to Russia, where no resolution to the Ukrainian crisis is in sight, draining Moscow's resources and limiting its ability to consolidate its position in the South Caucasus.

As a result, it can be stated that for the first time in modern history, Turkey is emerging as the principal player in the South Caucasus, with all the political, economic, and geopolitical consequences that this entails. It is evident that Turkey is not only beginning to take advantage of this historical opportunity but is already doing so in full.

(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.)



## Land Grabs, 'Love Child' and Coup Claims Rock First Christian Nation

By Jack Clover

Standing inside the cathedral in Echmiadzin, a place of continuous worship for 1,700 years, it is hard not to be moved as a young priest sings a psalm in Old Armenian.

As the syllables sound out an elderly lady sits before the altar, raises her hands to the heavens and weeps.

The cathedral, reputedly the world's oldest, has been inspiring the faithful since St. Gregory the Illuminator in 301 was granted a vision from God that determined its creation.

That year, Gregory converted King Tiridates III to the faith and persuaded him to make Armenia the world's first Christian country before neighboring Georgia fol-

lowed suit, and before the Roman Empire formally converted in 380.

But all those centuries later, a row between church and state, involving arrests, an alleged coup plot and claims of a secret love child is threatening the future of this ancient institution.

Nikol Pashinyan, the prime minister, has been locked in a dispute for months with Karekin II, the Catholicos, or head of the Armenian Apostolic church, culminating this month in him announcing reforms that would lead to the removal of the country's top priest.

The church has been critical of the government at a time when Pashinyan faces a fragmented political opposition, and at the heart of the row is the prime minister's approach to peace with Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan seized control of the predominantly ethnic Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 almost overnight, and 100,000 civilians were displaced, ending more than 30 years of war with an Armenian defeat. A peace deal between the two sides was signed in August in the Oval Office and enthusiastically touted by President Trump, but it is not uniformly popular at home.

The deal, upon which Pashinyan's political survival depends, rests on Armenia in effect ending all its claims to Nagorno-Karabakh and other lands beyond its borders. Pashinyan calls this policy Real Armenia. The church, however, still recognizes the region, known as Artsakh, as one of its key dioceses. Indeed, it is dotted with

see LAND, page 20



# ‘America First’: Armenia’s Reckless Gamble

By Philippe Raffi Kalfayan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The ostentatious rapprochement between Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the clique of autocrats led by President Trump, coinciding with the Davos forum and the establishment of the “Peace Council,” is reshaping the landscape of Armenian diplomacy. The Armenian prime minister’s decision to attend and sign Armenia’s free membership is a fundamental diplomatic blunder, a slap in the face of the UN, an institution that the United States and Israel certainly want to see disappear, but which it is premature to bury (if the Trump era does not end quickly, global chaos becomes a plausible development). This Armenian move is a setback to the long-standing friendly relations established with France, and also a stab in the back to the European Union, which opposes this new, brutal Trump entity; no surprise to anyone is the exception of Hungary’s Viktor Orban.

The Armenian prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, who should have resigned the day after the surrender on November 9, 2020, needs concrete achievements to confirm and ratify the proclaimed peace and thus secure his re-election. There has been an acceleration of US diplomatic shuttles in the region — where the risk of an American attack on Iran is looming. More importantly, additional details have been provided on the implementation of the Trump Route for Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP). They constitute the immediate topical subject that we are analyzing here.

Is the Armenian government not rushing too quickly to try to conclude concomitant agreements with Azerbaijan and Turkey under pressure from the United States, agreements that the vast majority of the population view with skepticism or do not approve of? So many of the imposed concessions are unilateral and heavy, possibly trapping Armenia a little more into a corner from which it may not be able to extricate itself. Does it assess lucidly this new interest of the United States to be present in the South Caucasus?

Is Armenia’s pivoting to the United States well thought out or imposed? In order to assess the situation it is necessary to examine the new American policy in the world (I), its transposition to the South Caucasus through the TRIPP project (II), and the perception of this “instrument of peace” in light of statements made by Azerbaijan (III).

## I – What is the new American policy?

Donald Trump’s National Security Strategy breaks with multilateralism and Kissinger’s famous Realpolitik. Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations theory often serves as a smokescreen and a tool for destabilizing resistant democracies. Only 29 countries would remain, according to a Foreign Affairs article. President Trump is promoting autocracies and far-right movements worldwide. On July 17, 2025, Secretary of State Marco Rubio ordered American diplomats to refrain from commenting on the fairness or integrity of foreign elections and on the democratic values of foreign countries unless there is a “clear and compelling” foreign policy interest for United States. Previously, in the same vein, the Trump administration had dismantled the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the funding it provided around the world to promote democracy and defend freedoms.

The end of liberal internationalism and multilateralism gave way to the principle of “America First” and the end of international law gradually built up since 1945. This law was based in theory on the sovereignty and equality of States and a Charter prohibiting the use of force to settle disputes. Mark Carney, the Canadian prime minister, retrospectively describes this period as one of hypocrisy due to the manifest double standard that characterized it, but a western hypocrisy that the world risks regretting.

The new strategy explicitly focuses on the national interest of the United States, emphasizing territorial protection, economic prosperity, and security. It reaffirms the central role of American military and economic power (“Peace Through Strength”). Diplomatic relations become bilateral and transactional.

China and Russia are identified as strategic competitors. Trump’s interventionism in world affairs is primarily aimed at China, the only global power capable of one

day challenging its hegemony. Actions against Russia are an integral part of this game of Go. The strategy stipulates that the United States will deny its competitors the possibility of positioning forces or taking control of strategic assets (ports, communication networks, natural resources). Interventionism is therefore primarily economic and geopolitical in nature. The implementation of a new “Monroe Doctrine” on the American continent (desired regaining control of the Panama Canal as well as Canada, seizing control of Venezuela’s oil reserves, direct interference in the elections of South American states) and the direct or indirect control, through allies, of other regional areas are part of this strategy. The takeover of Greenland and the Syunik Corridor (southern Armenia) are two areas illustrating this strategy: limiting competitors’ access to strategic natural resources by controlling access routes.

The second component of this foreign policy is a constant: unconditional and unwavering support, regardless of the US administration, for Israel’s objectives. This policy, supported by the pro-Israel lobby, aims to promote Israeli hegemony over the Near and Middle East region. After the destruction of Iraq and Syria, the last state to be destabilized from within is Iran; the rigidity and totalitarianism of the current regime, and the ongoing bloody repression against its own population, are undeniably factors contributing to the achievement of this objective. The military and strategic support provided to Azerbaijan

relations are pacified.

•Sustained commitment from the United States. This element is more enigmatic, even worrisome. Does it imply that continued US support is not guaranteed?

•Regional cooperation and stability. This factor is difficult to interpret, especially considering that regional stability must include the situation concerning Iran, but also Georgia, and the ongoing negotiations around the complex Kurdish question.

•Effective strengthening of the capacities of Armenian institutions. Which institutions are being referred to? Democratic institutions, national security, or economic operators?

The January 14 agreement cites the objectives and benefits for both Armenia and the United States.

The advantages expected by the United States are clear and consistent with its foreign policy objectives: the opening of new markets for American investments, businesses, and goods; improved trade connectivity in the region, facilitating the transport of raw materials, critical minerals, and rare earth elements to American markets; and the diversification of trade routes between the United States, Europe, and Asia, thus ensuring the free movement of people and goods despite geopolitical fluctuations.

This last point deserves closer attention because it suggests that traffic on this multimodal road would be guaranteed regardless of geopolitical events. This means that

the world could collapse around the road and states could fight with each other, but the road would still exist and operate. This is eerily similar to the Syrian experience I described in my aforementioned article, where American protection of Syrian oil wells remained unmoved by all the events that have occurred in Syria since 2011. This interpretation is all the more worrying given that the January 14 Agreement still makes no mention of responses to Armenia’s national security concerns.

The benefits mentioned for Armenia are opportunities in terms of employment, joint ventures, technology transfer, and training. The effect of the announcements parallel to this Agreement regarding development and cooperation in the field of Artificial Intelligence should not be alluded. There is no differential advantage for Armenia. Azerbaijan has signed the same type of agreement in this area.

Thus very weak returns for a surrender of control over the strip of land conceded by Armenia. Armenian leaders maintain that sovereignty and territorial integrity are guaranteed under this Agreement. On these points, the text clearly mentions that national law will apply over the entire area including in the land strip of the Trump Route and that the borders will not be affected. However, the status of the development company TRIPP is more ambiguous.

Legally, the company responsible for developing TRIPP is granted the right to exploit the strip of land for an initial period of 49 years. The United States holds a 74% stake and Armenia 26%. A second phase of an additional 50 years is planned, with Armenian participation potentially increasing to 49%, thus still remaining a minority stake.

Any change in the shareholders of the “TRIPP development Company” (including sale, gift of shares, merger, spin-off, reorganization, or any other legal or de facto act) and in the ultimate beneficial owners must be subject to the prior agreement of the governments of the United States and Armenia. This provision raises questions, and many commentators in Armenia have raised them. Who might be these “ultimate beneficial owners”? Who would have the last word if the United States and Armenia have opposing views on the choice of these beneficiaries? If we observe the Trump method in his management of transactions, it is very likely that the balance of power on the diplomatic level associated with a minority position in the capital of the Consortium will be unfavorable to Armenia.

Furthermore, what will happen to granting passage to *continued on next page*

## THE ADVANTAGES EXPECTED BY THE UNITED STATES ARE CLEAR AND CONSISTENT WITH ITS FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES: THE OPENING OF NEW MARKETS FOR AMERICAN INVESTMENTS, BUSINESSES, AND GOODS; IMPROVED TRADE CONNECTIVITY IN THE REGION, FACILITATING THE TRANSPORT OF RAW MATERIALS, CRITICAL MINERALS, AND RARE EARTH ELEMENTS TO AMERICAN MARKETS; AND THE DIVERSIFICATION OF TRADE ROUTES BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES, EUROPE, AND ASIA, THUS ENSURING THE FREE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE AND GOODS DESPITE GEOPOLITICAL

against Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was dictated by its desire to geographically isolate Iran. Any weakening of Iran represents a direct threat to Armenia because Iran was a guarantor of security for southern Armenia, just as Armenia represents an exit and transit route to the north for Iran.

It is in light of these two components of Trump’s foreign policy that the TRIPP Agreements should be analyzed and interpreted.

## II – The TRIPP Development Company: What Is Said and Not Said

As I analyzed in my August article, the Washington Agreement of August 8, 2025, was ambiguous on many points but revealing on others. Following US diplomatic exchanges in Azerbaijan and Armenia, a new bilateral Armenian-US text was signed and released on January 14, 2026: the TRIPP Implementation Framework Agreement. It improves significantly on the first text with some useful clarifications; however, pitfalls appear in the details.

The official text states in very diplomatic language that: “Decisions affecting certain sensitive issues and which have been the subject of reservations should be jointly resolved by a US-Armenia steering committee.” What are these sensitive issues and reservations to which reference is made? It is also recognized that the success of the Agreement depends on five factors. They reveal as many challenges or questions:

•Continued institutionalization of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This means that the agreement can only be fully realized if the peace treaty is definitively signed and ratified by both parties. However, the current conditions are not yet met, particularly the amendment of the Armenian Constitution and the clarification of a route allowing for “unhindered circulation” and “without contact with Armenians”.

•Progress toward the full normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey. This factor adds an additional challenge and delay, as Turkey has consistently stated that it will only normalize relations once Armenia-Azerbaijan



## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## When the Homeland Is Collapsing, All Armenians Must Come To Its Rescue

In the last several years, various hired pens have written dozens of commentaries criticizing the Armenian diaspora's hard line toward Azerbaijan and Turkey. Many of these "writers" are lavishly compensated by Azerbaijan. Most of these articles have appeared in various Israeli newspapers. Regrettably, I cannot respond to every one of them; otherwise, I would be writing about nothing else every week.

Making an exception, I decided to respond to an article written in Turkish by Tugce Tecimer titled "The conflicting interests of the diaspora and the Armenian government: The ANCA example," which is posted on the website of the Center for Eurasian Studies at Ankara University. The reason I am replying to her is that, unlike the other anti-Armenian "writers" who are full of venom, she did not use abusive language.

Tecimer is the managing editor of the Armenian Studies Center. Interestingly, on her LinkedIn page, she states that she has "professional working proficiency" in Armenian, "elementary proficiency" in Russian, and "English." She received her Ph.D. in history from Istanbul University and a degree in "Armenian language and culture" from Ankara University. In recent years, Turkish universities have been inviting professors from Armenia to teach Armenian to Turkish students. You can guess why.

Tecimer starts her article by stating: "The ANCA (Armenian National Committee of America) has been operating for many years as one of the most influential lobbying organizations claiming to defend the interests of the Armenian diaspora and, indirectly, Armenia in the United States." She goes on to present her main argument: "However, one of the structural problems frequently encountered by diaspora-based interest groups like ANCA is the incompatibility between the material and political priorities of diaspora organizations and the political line of the homeland state and the strategic interests of the country [United States] whose citizens they are. The ANCA example once again demonstrates the tension caused by this dilemma."

I will try to show that this is a false argument. I have been the target of similar comments by some pro-Pashinyan Armenians who disagree with my criticisms of the prime minister. Rather than presenting counterarguments, Pashinyan's defenders make baseless personal attacks instead of trying to answer my criticisms.

They falsely accuse me of:

- 1) Supporting Armenia's former leaders;
- 2) Being pro-Russian or getting paid by the KGB;
- 3) Having no right to criticize the government since I do not live in Armenia.

Naturally, they are all false arguments.

1) I have been a staunch critic of all leaders, past and present. More importantly, I said my criticisms boldly to the leaders' faces while sitting in the Presidential Palace, and not hiding like some do behind a computer keyboard. Most of my critics did not dare to open their mouths when these leaders were in power, afraid that they would either lose their jobs or worse.

2) Obviously, I am neither pro-Russian nor a KGB agent. Those who say such shameful things imply that only KGB agents are anti-Pashinyan. There is an Armenian saying that perfectly describes this situation: "Swearing indicates a lack of evidence."

3) To those who say that I have no right to state anything critical about Pashinyan since I live in the Diaspora, I reply:

a) You are trying to silence my criticism of Pashinyan not because I live in the Diaspora but because you don't like what I am saying. If I were defending Pashinyan, you would never tell me that I have no right to express my opinion.

b) Armenia is the homeland of all Armenians worldwide. No one has the right to tell another Armenian not to speak about the homeland, regardless of where they are living.

c) As a human being and as a journalist, I have the right to express myself freely. No one can shut me up just because they disagree with me.

d) Why is it that is it acceptable to comment about events taking place in many other countries, but when it comes to Armenia — our homeland — we are asked to remain silent?

e) I am a dual citizen of Armenia and the United States; therefore, I have the full right to comment on developments in the country of which I am a citizen.

f) Those who say that it is unpatriotic to criticize the Armenian government, my response is that, on the contrary, when you see that your homeland is on the verge of collapse, it is actually unpatriotic to remain silent.

g) Most Pashinyan supporters cannot distinguish between criticism of the Pashinyan government and the State of Armenia.

Returning to Turkish scholar Tecimer's article, she is wrong that the ANCA should not criticize either the Armenian or the US governments. When someone sees the homeland is on the wrong course, is she suggesting that we turn a blind eye and ignore what is going on?

How can the ANCA not react, witnessing what is happening in Armenia? Since Armenia's current leader is pursuing policies that are not in the best interests of the country, should we all blindly follow and praise those policies or should we do everything we can to rescue the nation?

It is understandable that those who challenge the government's policies will suffer consequences, such as loss of employment, public scorn, accusations of being unpatriotic, and even arrest and imprisonment. But that is the price to pay to reverse the wrong-headed policies of the country.

It is ironic that Tecimer thinks it is wrong for the ANCA to criticize Israel for arming Azerbaijan, since the US supports Israel. Meanwhile, Tecimer is doing exactly what she criticizes ANCA for. Since Pres. Erdogan is harshly critical of Israel, she should follow her own advice and not go against the policies of her government.

from previous page

the roads, railways, and gas pipelines linking Iran to Armenia? It is clear that as long as Iran is not subservient to the United States, this passage will be closed by the US.

Armenia was recently scolded by President Trump who asked them to provide justifications for the continuation of Armenian trade with Iran, a country under US sanctions, de facto extraterritorial.

In conclusion, Armenia submits to the American diktat, loses control of part of its strategic territory and (temporarily?) breaks its centuries-old friendship with Iran. The "America First" policy and Israel's influence prevail without surprise.

### III – Aliyev, the Master of the Game

Azerbaijan, which was consulted before this January 14, 2026 Agreement, has acknowledged it, but its president is expressing nuanced views on the finalization of the peace treaty and, above all, asserting his control over the success of this project. Until August 2025, Azerbaijan's policy was based on neutrality towards the blocs and a strategy aimed at strengthening its role as a gateway between Asia and Europe. Since then, it has conspicuously distanced itself from Moscow and continues to act as an ally of Israel.

During the Washington Agreements on August 8, 2025, Trump endorsed President Aliyev, calling him a strongman who had successfully resolved his country's problems — namely, reconquering Nagorno-Karabakh by force and in violation of international law.

Cynically, in Davos, President Aliyev presented himself as the architect of peace between Armenia and his country. He even steals the spotlight from the Armenian Prime Minister's cherished "crossroads of peace" project: Aliyev declares that "Azerbaijan is the only reliable, safe, and welcoming destination country allowing Europe to establish a link with Central Asia." Aliyev even claims credit for the TRIPP project: "We will create a new transport corridor linking Asia to the Caspian Sea,

passing through Azerbaijan, Armenia, Nakhichevan (which is part of Azerbaijan), Turkey, and Georgia, in addition to the existing corridors." This statement indicates that he is the true mastermind behind the TRIPP project. Its success depends on his goodwill. A corridor already exists that bypasses Armenia to the north: the BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) oil pipeline, which satisfies the British (BP being the architect and main user), Georgia (which views the Trump route with suspicion because it is excluded from it), and Turkey. Another bypass route is already under construction along the Iranian side of the border to connect Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan. Its completion and operation will depend on the course of geopolitical events in Iran.

Finally, the difference in the treatment of the two Caucasian countries by the US administration is beyond a shadow of a doubt, given the respect that President Aliyev inspires in President Trump but also in consideration of Azerbaijan's financial and therefore commercial capabilities. Which makes Aliyev say that "We are entering a new phase of cooperation with the United States, whether in terms of politics, economy, energy or even defense". This indicates that Azerbaijan will be able to buy a new generation US military equipment, further strengthening the imbalance with Armenia.

### Conclusion

Aliyev has shown himself to be the key player in the Caucasus. This new route would be useful but is not essential. Furthermore, we must not forget Georgia, although the pro-Russian Georgian government faces domestic turmoil whose management has been sanctioned by the United States and Europe. Meanwhile, Georgia maintains good relations with Azerbaijan. The Trump route is detrimental to Georgia's interests.

The regional issues are inextricable as long as these extra-regional geopolitical maneuvers continue. Azerbaijan holds many advantages. Time is on its side, and the next condition for signing the peace treaty is already in

the works: the Western Azerbaijan Organization is preparing for the return of Azerbaijanis to Armenia. A major international conference convened on December 4, 2025, gathering 100 lawyers from 60 countries; Aliyev was the guest speaker. The Armenian Foreign Intelligence Service has just published a report that considers this project a threat to the country's security. The opening of borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan and the return of Azerbaijanis will inevitably lead to the economic and demographic takeover of the country and to the emigration of Armenian citizens.

According to STRATFOR, Armenia and Azerbaijan will take modest steps this year to implement the agreements reached last year with a view to establishing peace and thus reducing the risk of another war. The two countries will likely continue their trade relations cautiously and strive to build trust, but through moderate trade cooperation rather than comprehensive economic integration.

As far as Armenia is concerned, no strategy worthy of this word is perceived. One cannot even speak of strategic ambiguity. It will always be possible to cancel some of the agreements, but as time goes on, the chances of backsliding peacefully and in a multilateral diplomatic framework diminish or disappear. Critics would argue: does Armenia have a choice? Yes, it always does. In any case, it was necessary to adopt the behavior and attitude of a vassal state. Aligning with the leader of the "America First" policy is more like a gamble rather than a well-thought strategy. President Trump has already chosen his long-term partners. It is doubtful that Armenia is one of them. Moreover, Armenia has already conceded the control of the Corridor. They may object to it being called the "Zangezur Corridor," but it would that in all but name.

(Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, based in Paris, is a lawyer, lecturer in international law and a former secretary general of FIDH (International Federation of Human Rights), who has earned a Ph.D. in international law. He is a regular columnist for the Armenian Mirror-Spectator.)



# Hermes Menswear Designer Véronique Nichanian Bows out after 37 Years

PARIS (Panorama.am) — Hermes menswear designer Véronique Nichanian presented her final collection on January 24, in Paris after nearly four decades in the role, as the 71-year-old prepared to pass the baton to young British designer Grace Wales Bonner, Reuters reported.

R&B star Usher mingled with Hermes executive chairman Axel Dumas ahead of the Paris Fashion Week show in the Palais Brongniart, with a more star-studded crowd than usual for the luxury house known for eschewing flashy marketing and celebrity ambassadors.

Models wore silk turtlenecks with leather trousers in a navy blue, black and taupe palette. Overcoats featured leather patches and shearling lining.

A shiny khaki crocodile-skin suit was a standout look, while Nichanian also mixed in pieces from earlier collections, like a navy leather suit with topstitched pinstripes from 2003 and a mocha calfskin jumpsuit from 1991. Jackets in orange and yellow provided flashes of color.

Walking out to close the show, Nichanian got a standing ovation from an audience including fellow designer Paul Smith, rapper Travis Scott and actors James McAvoy and Chace Crawford.

Wales Bonner named by Hermes in October, is the first Black woman to lead a major fashion house. She will present her debut menswear collection next January.



Véronique Nichanian



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GEGHUNI CHITCHYAN –  
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EDUARD BAGHDASARYAN –  
Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra  
with Violin soloist Sargis Karapetyan

ARNO BABAJANIAN/ARR. ARAKELIAN –  
Elegy in Memory of Aram Khachaturian

ALAN HOVHANESS –  
Symphony No. 1, "Exile"

Land Grabs, Coup Claims  
Rock first Christian Nation

LAND, from page 17  
ancient monasteries and churches, now  
without congregants.

Now the government is exerting pressure on the church to change aspects of ancient liturgy to reflect the loss of Nagorno Karabakh, but the church has pushed back.

Father Sepuh Asatryan, 46, a senior priest from the Etchmiadzin See, said: "Even though we cannot accept the reality about the situation in Artsakh, it is not that we're against peace. We are for peace, who doesn't want peace? But we want peace with dignity."

The cathedral, much of it built in the 15th century upon the ancient foundations, stands serene, surrounded by beds of lavender, despite the ructions around it.

The dispute intensified last May when Pashinyan accused the Catholicos of breaking his vow of celibacy and fathering a child, which he denies. The government then arrested several priests, among them Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, accusing some of them of plotting a coup. Galstanyan has been charged with preparing acts of terrorism.

When one priest from a southern Armenian town compared Pashinyan to Judas and claimed he had been circumcised, implying that he was not a Christian, the prime minister offered to expose himself in public.

By the end of last year, Etchmiadzin, Armenia's Holy See, became the site of protests. On December 19 supporters of the prime minister tried to burst into the cathedral as the Catholicos was leading an advent service.

The government has also pushed certain bishops to remove references to the historical dioceses of Armenia and the Catholicos from the wording of services that are about three times older than the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer. The holy see has said the prime minister is seeking to create a schism in the church.

Before parliamentary elections in June, watched both in the Kremlin and the West, Pashinyan's crackdown on the church is likely to intensify.

Mariam Kanayan, an activist, said: "The prime minister is promoting [his own] peace ideology, and the church is opposing. Any institution ... that is independent and can change the opinion of society is a threat to the prime minister."

Pashinyan's planned reforms of the church, supported by ten bishops, propose the removal of the Catholicos, followed by elections and the adoption of a new church charter. Last month he said: "We must free our church ... from the schism; we must return the church to the people."

As the arrests continue, and the state pushes on with its attempts to shape the church, centuries of continuity may end.

Armenia has had a tumultuous history and has spent much of it annexed by large neighboring powers from Sassanid Persia to Imperial Russia to the Soviet Union.

Asatryan said: "I was born in this town. So I always visited the cathedral. My parents, my grandparents, my uncle, my aunt, they all brought me to the cathedral." He expressed hope that St. Gregory's legacy, the church enabling the state, can endure.

He continued: "From the church perspective, we always thought that we need to support the state and to support the statehood, to help however we can. The church played a huge role in passing [that idea] from generation to generation."

"We have existed [in Etchmiadzin for more than] a thousand years. There are hardships still to come... but as long as we exist here, the state will exist."

(This commentary appeared in the *Times*, a British publication, on February 2.)

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