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## Former President Kocharyan Set to Again Vie for Power

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Former President Robert Kocharyan has given the clearest indication yet that he will top his Hayastan alliance's list of candidates in Armenia's parliamentary elections slated for June 7.

Hayastan came in a distant second with 21 percent of the vote in the last elections held in 2021. Kocharyan announced last November that he will enter the forthcoming parliamentary race with essentially the same political team that might be joined by new opposition groups or figures. But he said it is not yet clear whether he will be the bloc's candidate for Armenia's prime minister.



Former President Robert Kocharyan

Speaking on a YouTube podcast co-hosted by his political allies at the weekend, the 71-year-old ex-president implied that he will again run for the top government post. Citing his past executive experience, he insisted that he can successfully deal with serious security challenges facing Armenia.

"We now need to position ourselves as a political force led by someone who did that a couple of times, who achieved quite serious success in crisis situations and can do that for a third time," he said. "This should be our message to our voters."

Opinion polls suggest that a recently established movement led by billionaire Samvel Karapetian has replaced Hayastan as the country's most popular force. Kocharyan acknowledged in that regard that his alliance has lost some of its popular support since 2021. But, he said, it has at the same time dented Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's popularity, paving the way for the emergence of new opposition heavyweights. Clearly singling out Karapetian, Kocharyan insisted that he is more qualified to run the country than their leaders.

"The main question is: who can do that? A person who has proven that he can do that, a political team that has proven that it's a fighter or totally new people who have that desire but not yet the [necessary] experience and have not yet proven their worth in the political struggle in practice?" he said.

see KOCHARYAN, page 3

## Azerbaijan Quietly Mobilizes Military Following Iranian Drone Incident

Azerbaijan has assumed what can be described as an aggressive-defensive posture as the government seeks to prevent a repeat of the March 5 Iranian drone strikes in the Nakhichevan exclave.

For officials in Baku, the psychological impact of the Iranian attack was perhaps more significant than the damage and bodily harm it caused. President Ilham Aliyev and his lieutenants in government had gone to significant lengths to foster goodwill with the Iranian leadership during the early days of the US-Israeli blitz, actions that they believed could insulate Azerbaijan from the widening war.

To their evident dismay, their assumptions were proven wrong. An indicator of the shock inflicted by the drone incident could be seen in initial responses of Azerbaijani officials, who used words such as "ingratitude," "hypocrisy" and "despicable" when describing Iranian behavior.

Early on March 6, the Defense Ministry quietly posted an Azeri-language-only notice on its Telegram channel announcing that the army was calling up reservists and had placed military units on alert.



Azerbaijan is mobilizing reservists in reaction to the March 5 drone attack

Meanwhile, Azerbaijani officials, amplified by state-affiliated media outlets, kept up a steady stream of confrontational rhetoric that seemed intent on scaring Iran from sending more drones in Azerbai-

jan's direction. One March 6 headline of a commentary published by the government-connected Caliber news outlet, for example, read: "Drones over Nakhichevan: Iran is playing with fire."

At the same time, the government and state-aligned media have published myriad statements and reports about international support for Azerbaijan and condemnations of the drone strikes.

In terms of direct retaliation, Azerbaijan sealed its land border with Iran, preventing the transit of truck-borne cargo between the two states. A government statement noted that the closure was a temporary measure, indicating that traffic can resume if bilateral relations can be placed back on an even keel. Baku has also ordered the evacuation of its

see MOBILIZATION, page 7

## Pezeshkian Calls Aliyev, Denies Involvement In Drone Strike on Azerbaijan

By Nate Ostiller

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian called his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev on Sunday evening and officially denied Tehran's involvement in the drone strikes on the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan on March 5 — which Baku blamed on Iran shortly after the incident.

The phone call added a further layer of complexity on an already tense situation between the two countries, as rumors continue to swirl that Azerbaijan may be pulled into the war.

Previously, on Saturday, Azerbaijan's security service (DTX) said it had foiled a terrorist plot organized by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards

see DRONES, page 7

## Armenia Congratulates Iran's New Supreme Leader

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Monday, March 9, congratulated Mojtaba Khamenei on succeeding his father, the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as neighboring Iran's supreme leader one week after the outbreak of the war with the United States and Israel.

Iran's Assembly of Experts announced Mojtaba Khamenei's appointment late on Sunday. The new supreme leader will have final say in all political and military matters.

"I am confident that the strong ties between Armenia and Iran will continue to develop, recording new successes," Pashinyan said in a congratulatory message publicized by his office. "Taking this opportunity, I wish the friendly people of Iran prosperity and lasting peace."

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People hold placards with an image of Iran's new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, with late Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, during a gathering in Tehran, March 9, 2026

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Musical 'Anahid' Tells True Story Of Genocide Survivors



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## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Pashinyan Discusses Middle East Tensions With EU Leaders

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on March 10 discussed the situation in the Middle East and possible ways to reduce regional tensions during a videoconference meeting initiated by European Council President António Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

Participants exchanged views on the current developments and potential solutions, emphasizing the importance of intensifying diplomatic efforts.

In his remarks, Pashinyan said that Armenia is closely monitoring the events.

The prime minister highlighted the importance of diplomatic initiatives aimed at reducing tensions and stabilizing the situation, stressing the need to resolve the crisis as soon as possible. Pashinyan also reaffirmed Armenia's readiness to support all constructive initiatives aimed at promoting peace and stability.

### Gymnasts Miss Antalya World Cup Stage

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Armenia men's national artistic gymnastics team will not take part in the third stage of the World Cup, which began on March 10 in Antalya, Turkey.

The team has been unable to return from a training camp in Qatar, the Armenian Gymnastics Federation reported.

The Armenian team had also missed the second stage of the World Cup, as it was held in Baku.

### Archbishop Ajapahyan Files Lawsuit against Former Priest

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan, the head of the Shirak Diocese, has filed a lawsuit against former priest Stepan Asatryan, known as Father Aram.

Information about the case was published in the Datalex judicial information system.

According to the claim, Ajapahyan demanded a retraction of statements he says defame his reputation, and has also requested monetary compensation, Aysor.am reported.

The case has been assigned to Judge Emin Abgaryan of the Civil Court of Ararat and Vayots Dzor.

At the same time, it became known that the court has returned the statement of claim along with the attached documents, indicating that violations in the filing must be corrected within three days.

Earlier, Asatryan had demanded that the decision by Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II to defrock him be declared invalid and that he be reinstated in his pastoral position.



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addresses the Nuclear Energy Summit in Paris, March 10, 2026.

## Yerevan Still 'Assessing Proposals' For New Nuclear Plant

PARIS (Azatutyun) — Echoing statements by other Armenian officials, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan indicated on Tuesday, March 10, that his government has still not decided which foreign country or company should build a new nuclear plant in Armenia.

Pashinyan made no mention of a US-Armenian nuclear agreement finalized last month when he addressed the global Nuclear Energy Summit in Paris organized by the French government and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"Armenia has made a decision to pursue small modular reactor technology," he said in a speech. "Currently, we are carefully examining technologies and assessing proposals from international partners. The selection process is guided by the consideration of reliability, long-term sustainability and our commitment to the highest standards of nuclear safety, security and non-proliferation."

Pashinyan and US Vice President JD Vance signed a joint statement on the

"completion of negotiations" on the agreement after their talks in Yerevan on February 9. It was widely construed as a further indication that the Armenian government wants to rely on the United States in its ambitious plans to replace the Metsamor nuclear plant with a modern facility equipped with small modular reactors (SMRs), a new and relatively untested technology.

"American technology is going to be coming to this country," Vance told reporters after the talks.

"That means up to \$5 billion in initial US exports, plus an additional \$4 billion in long-term support through fuel and maintenance contracts," he said, clearly alluding to the construction of the new Armenian nuclear plant.

Russian officials expressed concern at such a prospect in the following days. Sergei Shoigu, the secretary of Russia's Security Council, argued on February 13 that the US itself does not yet have a functioning SMR plant. He claimed that the possible construction of such a facility

in Armenia would therefore pose an environmental threat to not only the South Caucasus country but also Russia.

Narek Apitonyan, Armenia's deputy minister of territorial administration and infrastructures, told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on February 16 that Yerevan is still weighing up various options for implementing its nuclear project. Pashinyan similarly downplayed the nuclear agreement with the US when he spoke to reporters on February 13. He said it will only give Armenia access to "complete information about the modular reactor technologies that the United States has."

The \$9 billion in total funding cited by Vance nearly matches Armenia's entire state budget for this year. Pashinyan's domestic critics say a US-led nuclear project is therefore too expensive for the country. Some of them claim that Pashinyan is using the issue for geopolitical purposes.

The Metsamor plant's sole functioning reactor produces around one-third of the country's electricity. It is due to be decommissioned in 2036.

## AUA Announces Plans to Mark 35th Anniversary

YEREVAN — In 2026, the American University of Armenia (AUA) proudly marks its 35th anniversary, celebrating the halfway point of its fourth decade of academic excellence, innovation, and service to society. This milestone is an opportunity to reflect on the years passed, and a moment to recognize the profound transformation the University has undergone since its founding in 1991, a pivotal moment in Armenia's history. AUA opened its doors on September 21, coincidentally the same day that the Armenian Parliament declared independence, marking the beginning of a new era in higher education. From its earliest days, AUA has served as a beacon of modern higher education, steadily evolving to meet the needs and aspirations of the country and its people.

Over the past 35 years, AUA has nurtured generations of critical thinkers, ethical leaders, and engaged citizens. From

our modest beginnings — a first cohort of just 53 graduates — to our most recent commencement ceremony in 2025, when over 500 bright minds crossed the stage, AUA's growth has been inextricably linked to the trajectory of modern Armenia.

Since the very start, our alumni have served as architects of the nation's progress. They have shaped policy from the highest levels of government, serving as ministers and ambassadors, and have redefined our economic landscape by founding impact-driven startups, including Armenia's first "unicorn" company. From the frontiers of public service to the hubs of tech innovation, the AUA community remains at the heart of some of Armenia's most significant milestones.

Today, the university continues to expand its academic programs, research capacity, and institutional partnerships, reaffirming its mission to prepare socially

aware, well-educated citizens equipped to lead and serve the Republic of Armenia.

Throughout the year, AUA will host a series of events and initiatives on and off campus under the theme "Paving the Way for Future Leaders," to showcase the University's academic achievements, vibrant community, global network, and strategic vision for growth. AUA alumni, students, faculty, staff, partners, and friends will be encouraged to participate in conversations and celebrations that reflect on AUA's legacy and look ahead to its future.

The festivities will include an event in Yerevan, as well as a gala dinner in Los Angeles, to be held on November 7, which will bring together AUA's extended community of friends and supporters. These gatherings will honor the University's journey and serve as an opportunity to invest in its continued development, ensuring that AUA remains a driving force in educating future leaders and innovators.

# Yerevan's Blue Mosque Is Gem of Persian Architecture

By Gayane Barseghyan

Yerevan is older than Rome — 2808 years old at present. The birth certificate of the ancient city is a cuneiform inscription, made in 782 BC by the king Argishti I, son of Menua. The city was first called Erebuni, built on top of a hill called Arin Berd, which overlooks the Arax (Aras) valley. The cuneiform inscription was discovered by an archeological expedition led by Armenian Constantine Hovhannisyán. Later, two other identical inscriptions were uncovered. Interestingly enough, following these discoveries, a shield was found in Teishebaini or Karmir Blur fortress with the same inscription imprinted on it.

Yerevan is not only an ancient city of scenic wonders that combines the ancient and modern architecture, but it is also home for the Blue Mosque, the gem of Persia in Armenia.

Situated in the center of the city on Mashtots Avenue in Yerevan, the Central Blue Mosque amazes with the complexity of miniature and delicate architectural solutions. According to the inscriptions on the walls of the Mosque, it was founded by Hussein Ali Khan, the governor of Yerevan in 1765.

The dome of the mosque is blue, thus its name. The miniature painting design on the walls is an outstanding sample of Iranian culture. The mosaic of the curving lines and decorative patterns on the background of the blue, yellow and grey colors complete the majestic architectural intricacies of the Mosque.

In the 1990s Iranians and Armenians together commenced the reconstruction of the magnificent Blue Mosque. The mosque was renovated by the Islamic Republic of Iran between 1996-1999, cooperating with “Mostazafan va Janbazan” fund. The reconstruction was supervised by the Islamic Republic of Iran Cultural Consultant in Yerevan.

The booklet titled “The Central Blue Mosque of Yerevan” (2004) informs the readers about the history, architecture of Central Blue Mosque and cultural activities held here. The Foreword of the booklet is written by Reza Atufi, the cultural consultant of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Armenia. Atufi writes, “The Blue Mosque of Yerevan, situated in the heart of the city like a priceless turquoise, is a long-lasting history symbol of peaceful coexistence and cooperation of Armenians and Muslims”

## Former President Kocharyan Set to Again Vie for Power

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Pashinyan has repeatedly expressed confidence that his Civil Contract party will win the upcoming elections. Visiting Gyumri on Saturday, March 7, he declared that he is aiming for as much as 65 percent of the vote. Opposition figures and other government critics claim that Pashinyan is actually afraid of losing the polls.

In recent weeks, senior Civil Contract members have exposed their apparent fears that opposition forces led by Kocharyan, Karapetian and another wealthy businessman, Gagik Tsarukyan, will collectively win a majority in the next Armenian parliament and be able to form a coalition government. Some of them have said that the Armenian authorities “will not allow” such an outcome, fueling opposition claims that they are planning electoral fraud or foul play.

(p.3)

According to the booklet, “Yerevan Central mosque is 7,000 square meters, including 28 cells in every side 14 cells” (p. 10). The mosque possesses a central pray-hall of 442 sq., main dome of 20m height and a minaret of 24m height, 26 small rooms and an “Housseineh.” The mosque also comprises a library, Conference Hall, photo gallery, exposition of hand-made prod-



The Blue Mosque in Yerevan

ucts, Shabestan, Mosque's administration and Imam's office, classrooms, etc. Persian language (Farsi) classes are held twice a week in the Mosque's classrooms.

The Blue Mosque library houses 8000 books and it is open weekdays for everyone to drop by and learn about Iranian history, culture, language, etc.

The permanent exhibition of Iranian handicraft works is another amazing place to see on visiting the Blue Mosque. The beautiful handicrafts complete the Iranian cultural atmosphere and impart new colors to the picturesque beauty of the mosque.

As the booklet “The Central Blue Mosque of Yerevan (2004) maintains, “This mosque that named Yerevan's central mosque (Masjed Jaamee) is one of the biggest mosques in the Caucasus that had been forgotten in communist's era and almost 70 years has been hidden under dust like a jewel. Independence of Armenia caused a relationship between Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Armenia and prepared necessities for committing, reviving and reconstruction of this beautiful building according to Iranian and Islamic architectural styles [...] In communist era this mosque has been used as the Yerevan's museum of history and Armenia's museum of national history and in that times the yard of mosque was used as a meeting place of Armenian writers and artists and that is why this mosque has not been completely destroyed.” (p.9)

The mosque was mentioned in the Armenian authors' works, namely Romanos Melikyan, Aksel Bakunts, Gourgen Maharri, Mkrtych Armen and Yeghishe Charents. The latter also translated *Shahnameh* (The Book of Kings) and *Rostam and Zohrab* by the world-famous Persian poet Ferdowsi.

The Blue Mosque was also pictured in Armenian Fine Arts works. The oil painting “Old Yerevan's Trade Series /Հին Երևանի առևտրաշարքը/ by Sedrak Arkelyan (1921) depicts a part of Old Yere-

van, and the Blue Dome of the Mosque is seen at a distance in the background:

After visiting the Blue Mosque accompanied by writer Khachatour Abovyan, the German traveler August von Haxthausen wrote a detailed account of the building, also describing it as the most magnificent building he had seen in Yerevan.

In addition to the Central Blue Mosque of Yerevan, there is also Persian Ab-

erational mosques inside the fortress.

Therefore, in the 19th century, when Armenia was under foreign rule, the mosques in Armenia had already been abandoned or pulled down as a result of earthquakes and government transitions.

Lastly, it should be mentioned, all in all, that there have been 9 mosques in Yerevan, including the Central Blue Mosque and the Kond Mosque – Abbas-Ghulukhani or

bas-Ghulukhani or Tapabash Mosque in Kond district. As the Mosque is situated in the Kond district, Armenians also call it Kond Mosque – a semi-preserved mosque that survived the ages. It is non-operational at present as it needs repairs.

This mosque is modest-sized and it is completely made of bricks. The outer walls were decorated with mosaic slabs. It is supposed to have been built in 1687.

The Tapabash Mosque was magnificently portrayed in an oil painting “Old Yerevan. Kond Mosque” by the Armenian painter Petros Bayburdyan (1961). The painting is stored in the National Gallery of Armenia.

Incidentally, a scholarly article headlined “The Mosques in Yerevan (Historical Approach)” by L. Petrosyan in the *Journal of Arabic Studies* (2018) provides an all-inclusive and thorough research on the mosques in Yerevan.

As the research by L. Petrosyan maintains, foreign travelers have also reported that some mosques in Armenia did not survive the 1679 destructive earthquake in Armenia. For example, the French traveler Jan Sharden reported about the partially pulled down Div Sultan Mosque, which had been named so in honour of Turkmen commander Div Sultan Rumlu (p.178). The mosque is supposed to have been situated in the place of the present Blue Mosque or near it.

Moreover, in the middle of the 19th century, historian Ivan Chopin, while discussing the mosques in Yerevan, mentioned about a few pulled down and abandoned Islamic pray-rooms. In the work entitled “Old Yerevan” (1931) by Armenian Yervand Shahaziz, six mosques were mentioned, excluding Tapabash or Kond Mosque.

Petrosyan's research also revealed that Chopin, in his work “Historical Monument of the State of the Armenian Region in the Era of its Annexation to the Russian Empire” (1852) states about six non-operational mosques in the city and two non-op-

erational mosques inside the fortress. Tapabash Mosque. The mosques that did not survive are Abbas Mirza or Sardari Mosque, Rajab Pasha Mosque, Zal Khan Mosque, Haji Novruz Ali Bey Mosque, Haji Imam Verdi Mosque, Muhammad Sardip Khan Mosque.

As Petrosyan states in his research, Abbas Mirza or Sardari and Rajab Pasha mosques had been inside Yerevan fortress. When Armenia fell under the rule of the Russian Empire, the majority of the existing mosques were operational. The non-operational mosques were either preserved or rebuilt, serving other purposes, or were left abandoned (Abbas Mirza). Later, the overwhelming majority of the mosques were torn down or turned into other buildings during the Soviet Union era.

Similarly, many Armenian churches met the same fate: St. Poghos-Petros church, St. Grigor Lusavorich church, Simeon Tseruni church (in Nork), Getsemani chapel, St. Nikoghayos Russian Orthodox church (in Shahumyan Square, Tiramor Hovanu church (inside the fortress) and Kozern cemetery were destroyed to the ground, and St. Zoravor church was closed and stopped operating. St. Astvatsatsin Katoghike church (in Sayat-Nova and Abovyan crossroads) was partially destroyed. The large church was destroyed, but the small one remained, until now the walls bear the holes of bullets.

Moreover, many Armenian churches had been turned into barns and weaponry storehouses. For instance, St. Astvatsatsin Church in Echmiadzin city was turned into a barn, St. Astvatsatsin Church in Vardablur village in Lori province was turned into a weaponry storehouse.

(Gayane Barseghyan is a lecturer at Brusov State University in Yerevan, Armenia. The scope of her research comprises studies in Linguistics and Romano-Germanic Philology. This article was first published in the *Weekly Election Times* in November 2021.)



ARMENIA

## INTERNATIONAL

## Soccer Star Drogba Continues Career in Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Isaac Drogba, the son of former Chelsea and Ivory Coast national team striker Didier Drogba, has continued his football career in Armenia.

The Ivorian forward has signed a contract with Armenian First League club Hayk, Factor.am reported.

The 25-year-old footballer, who holds French citizenship, is a graduate of Chelsea's academy.

During his career, Isaac Drogba has played for the youth team of French club Guingamp, as well as for Italian side Caratese, Portuguese club Academica B and Belgian team La Louvière.

Before moving to Armenia, the striker had been without a club for about a year and a half.

At Hayk, Isaac Drogba will wear the number 22 jersey.

## HRW Accuses Israel of Using White Phosphorus in Lebanon

PARIS (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The international human rights organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) has accused Israeli forces of unlawfully using white phosphorus shells against a village in southern Lebanon.

According to a report cited by France 24, the organization said the controversial incendiary munition was used in strikes on residential areas.

By geolocating and verifying seven photographs, HRW said Israeli artillery fired white phosphorus during attacks on residential neighborhoods in the southern Lebanese village of Yohmor.

The incident occurred several hours after Israeli forces ordered residents of the village and dozens of other communities in southern Lebanon to evacuate, Factor.am reported.

HRW said it could not independently confirm whether residents remained in the area or whether anyone was injured.

Human rights researchers emphasized that under international law the use of white phosphorus is illegal if deployed in populated areas. The chemical substance can ignite buildings and burn human flesh down to the bone.

Even in cases of relatively small burns, survivors may face severe infections and the risk of organ or respiratory failure.

"The Israeli military's unlawful use of white phosphorus in populated areas is extremely concerning and will have serious consequences for civilians," said Ramzi Kaiss, HRW's Lebanon researcher.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to requests for comment.



Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, second from left, with the WCC leaders, and Pope Leo XIV, in foreground

## Abp. Aykazian Among WCC Leaders Meeting with Pope

VATICAN CITY — The Eastern Diocese's Legate and Ecumenical Director, Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, was part of a delegation of leaders from the World Council of Churches (WCC) who met with Pope Leo XIV at the Vatican on February 28.

Archbishop Aykazian, who serves as a Vice Moderator of the WCC Central Committee, joined fellow WCC officials Rev. Jerry Pillay, Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, and Rev. Merlyn Hyde Riley in a wide-ranging conversation

with Pope Leo focused on strengthening Christian unity and deepening common witness.

The meeting marked a significant moment in the long-standing relationship between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church, underscoring a shared commitment to collaboration in the service of peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Reflecting on the encounter, Archbishop Aykazian emphasized both the warmth and the substance of the ex-

change. He noted that the delegation found a spirit of openness and attentiveness in Pope Leo, and expressed hope that the conversation would lead to concrete cooperation in addressing the pressing challenges facing the world and the churches today.

The visit also served as a visible reminder of the Armenian Church's active role within the global ecumenical movement, and of Archbishop Aykazian's longstanding leadership in fostering dialogue among Christian communions.

## Israel Advises Against Travel to Azerbaijan, Armenia And Georgia Over Iranian Terror Threat

By Ben Kroll

TEL AVIV (*Ha'aretz*) — Israel's National Security Council issued on Sunday, March 8, an updated travel advisory for the three largest countries in the Caucasus region — Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia — over fears that Iran will target Israelis amid the ongoing war.

In Sunday's update, which is identical for all three countries, the council warned that since the start of the war with Tehran, it has "identified an increasing and expanding motivation" in Iranian efforts to carry out terror attacks against Israeli targets across the world. The statement says that those efforts are focused on the countries surrounding Iran.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan share a border with Iran, while Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, is only 215 kilometers (roughly 130 miles) from the Iranian border.

"In light of the fear of various terror infrastructure, there is a potentially ongoing threat to harm Israelis and Jews staying in the country," the advisory for all three countries reads. The council recommends avoiding all non-essential travel at this time.

For those choosing to forgo the travel advisory, the council recommended, among other things, to "avoid revealing your [Israeli] identity to strangers." It stressed that travelers should "refrain from sharing their itinerary on social media or publishing pictures from their trip in real time."

In addition, the council advised "not to have conversations about serving in Israel's defense establishment." It also suggested taking measures to "remove content attesting to service in the defense establishment, including the IDF, from social media accounts."

Despite the warnings, the council's travel advisory was updated to level three, which is not the highest level possible. While level three signifies a "medium-level threat,"

it only calls to avoid non-essential travel. Level four, on the other hand, is a sweeping ban on entering the country that also calls on Israelis already in the country to leave it immediately.

On Thursday, following several missile and drone strikes in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the council updated its travel advisory for the United Arab Emirates to level three as

well. In that advisory, the council recommended that Israelis avoid booking connecting flights through the country as well.

On the Saturday the war started, the council issued a general advisory due to the threat of Iranian terror attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets abroad.

## Dagestani Man with 'Donald Trump' Handle On Telegram Fined for Anti-Armenian Posts

By Elizaveta Chukharova

A man from Dagestan posting under the handle "Donald Trump" has been fined the equivalent of \$125 for making comments on Telegram containing insults and calls for violence against Armenians.

Tofik Ismailov, 33, was fined by the Lenin District Court in Dagestan on March 4.

Ismailov was found guilty of inciting hatred or enmity, as well as "humiliating the dignity of a person or group of persons on the basis of nationality." These charges only apply if such actions were committed publicly, including online, but do not constitute a criminal offence.

According to the case materials, the administrative proceedings were initiated over comments the Telegram user left under the nickname "Donald Trump." The authorities have concluded that the posts encouraged "actions involving violence, danger, and causing harm" towards Armenians.

The comments were discovered as early as August 2025. The administrative case was opened on February 24, 2026 by the deputy prosecutor of the Lenin District of Makhachkala following the results of the investigation. In early March, the case ma-

terials were submitted to the court. They were initially returned to correct procedural deficiencies, after which, on 4 March, the case was resubmitted to court and considered for consideration.

According to the ruling, during the court session Ismailov did not deny that he had used the account under the name 'Donald Trump' nor that he had posted anti-Armenian comments. He admitted his guilt and confirmed that he personally published the posts.

When determining his punishment, the court took into account that Ismailov had admitted his guilt and had not previously been held administratively liable under the same article. These circumstances were considered mitigating. No aggravating circumstances were identified.

As a result, the court imposed the minimum fine provided by law.

The fine must be paid no later than 60 days from the date the decision comes into effect. If the fine is not paid, the offender may face additional liability for evading administrative punishment. This can include a double fine, administrative detention, or community service.

(This article originally ran on www.oc-media.org on March 10.)



## INTERNATIONAL

# AGBU President Sam Simonian Visits Communities in Cyprus and Greece as Part of Global Tour

NEW YORK — AGBU President Sam Simonian, accompanied by his wife Sylva, led an official delegation to Cyprus and Greece from February 19 to 23 as part of his ongoing global tour of Armenian diaspora communities.

The delegation included Vasken Yacoubian, Central Board member and President of AGBU Armenia, and Nazareth Festekjian, Treasurer of AGBU, as well as Chief Financial Officer Mark Gitlen and Middle East Regional Director Arine Ghazarian.

In Cyprus, the delegation met with members of both the former and interim committees of the AGBU Nicosia Chapter, as well as representatives of the broader Armenian community. Discussions centered

with Vartkes Mahdessian, Member of the House of Representatives of Cyprus; Archbishop Gomidas Ohanian, Prelate of the Armenian Prelature of Cyprus; and H.E. Inna Torgomyan, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to Cyprus. Conversations focused on the sustained vitality of the Armenian community in Cyprus and the value of closer collaboration between community, church, and state institutions.

The delegation also met with Davit Karapetyan, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia (MFA), in the presence of Inna Torgomyan at the Armenian Embassy in Nicosia.

A dinner in honor of the delegation, hosted by Benon Sevan, former AGBU Central Board Member and AGBU Representative in Cyprus, brought together approximately attendees from across the island's Armenian organizations and institutions.

In his remarks, Simonian described how he grew up believing in the ideals of AGBU — an organization that supports Armenians regardless of background or persuasion and works with whichever Armenian government is in place: “Those principles became part of my foundation early in life. Now, we are thinking about how to revitalize this community — how to create something that will make Armenians here proud,” he added.

In a separate meeting, the Interim Committee of the AGBU Nicosia Chapter presented its vision for revitalizing the chapter amid recent challenges. Priorities included preserving Armenian identity in Cyprus, deepening youth engagement through cultural, professional, and sports programs, and strengthening ties with AGBU's global network. Participants reaffirmed their shared commitment to institutional stability and a dynamic and productive future for AGBU Cyprus.

To close the delegation's visit, the AGBU Larnaca Chapter — under the chairmanship of Roupen Kalayjian — hosted a farewell lunch and arranged a tour of the AGBU Armenian Cultural Center in Larnaca.

Simonian and the delegation continued their tour to Greece with an official visit to Athens, where they met with the local Armenian community and held discussions on strategic plans for the future of AGBU's



The AGBU delegation with members of the AGBU Central Committee of Greece in front of the AGBU Artaki Kalpakian School in Athens

presence in Greece.

A cocktail reception hosted by AGBU Greece welcomed the delegation, bringing together community members and organizational representatives. The delegation met with the AGBU Greece committee, chaired by Aris Chatzaturian, and held

an official meeting with Bishop Khoren Arakelyan, Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Greece. The delegation also visited the AGBU Artaki Kalpakian Elementary School, reaffirming AGBU's commitment to Armenian education and community life in Greece.



AGBU Central Board Member and Treasurer Nazareth Festekjian, AGBU Central Board Representative in Cyprus Benon Sevan, AGBU Central Board Member and AGBU Armenia President Vasken Yacoubian, and AGBU President Sam Simonian.

on assessing current needs, identifying opportunities, and charting a strategic path for AGBU's continued presence and growth in Cyprus. President Simonian also paid a visit to the campus of the Melkonian Educational Institute (MEI), his father's alma mater.

Official meetings included discussions



AGBU President Sam Simonian and Central Board Members Nazareth Festekjian and Vasken Yacoubian with Archbishop Gomidas Ohanian, Pontifical Vicar to the Armenian Prelacy in Cyprus



AGBU Larnaca Chair Roupen Kalayjian and AGBU Cyprus staff member Karekin Costanian guide AGBU President Sam Simonian and Central Board members on a tour of the AGBU Armenian Cultural Center's recently renovated library in Larnaca



AGBU President Sam Simonian with the AGBU delegation and members of the AGBU Central Committee of Greece during their visit with Bishop Khoren Arakelyan, Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Greece

# Program Pays Tribute to St. Gregory of Narek, Unveils Documentary

VATICAN CITY — Under the great dome of St. Peter's Basilica, Armenian Church prayers and hymns once again resonated on February 27, as the Vatican marked the feast of the remembrance of St. Gregory of Narek according to the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar.

The service recalled the historic commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide held at St. Peter's Basilica on April 12, 2015, presided over by Pope Francis of blessed memory. During that liturgy, Pope Francis declared St. Gregory of Narek, the 10th-century Armenian monk, theologian and poet, a "Doctor of the Universal Church". Three years later, on April 5, 2018, together with Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia Aram I, Pope Francis blessed a statue of St. Gregory of Narek in the Vatican Gardens, further sealing his place in the spiritual heritage of the Catholic Church.

This year's commemoration was organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, and the Representative of the Catholicosate of All Armenians to the Holy See, with the participation of the Levonian Armenian College in Rome and the Mkhitarist Fathers.

A special Vespers service was celebrated in the late afternoon of February 27 in St. Peter's Basilica. Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Representative of the Catholicosate of All Armenians to the Holy See, presided, with Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti at his side. Among those present were Archbishop Flavio Pace, Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity; Bishop Anthony Ball, representing the Archbishop of Canterbury; Archbishop Levon Zekian; several bishops and priests from the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches; ecumenical leaders; Armenian Apostolic and Armenian Catholic clergy; as well as the Ambassadors of Armenia to the Holy See and to the Italian Republic, together with many Armenian and Italian faithful.

In his sermon, Gugerotti offered a profound reflection on St. Gregory of



Archbishop Khajag Barsamian at the Narekatsi service

Narek. "Today we celebrate the feast of Gregory of Narek, the one who lived the Gospel. There are countless reasons why the Catholic Church proclaimed him a Doctor of the Church," he said. Describing St. Gregory as an "enamored singer of salvation" through his prayers and hymns, the Cardinal underlined the enduring power of his spiritual legacy.

Gugerotti also turned his thoughts to the Armenian people. "Today we pray to St. Gregory of Narek for the Armenian people, who have endured hardships but also celebrated beauty," he said. "A people today wounded by a web of miserable oppositions that seek to dissolve the

paradox and reduce it to propaganda." His words highlighted both the suffering and the resilience that have marked Armenian history, and the continuing relevance of St. Gregory's message of hope, faith and interior renewal.

Following the Vespers service, the documentary "The Narekatsi" was

cal prayers, his reflections on faith and freedom, and his insights into the human soul's inner journey toward God. It also examines his impact on Christian theology and Armenian culture across the centuries.

Several theologians and Armenologists contribute their expertise in the



From left, Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, second from left, and Archbishop Levon Zekian, right



Armenian seminarians at the Vatican event

screened in a special auditorium at the Vatican. The producer, Ruzanna Ghazaryan, and the director, Lilit Mkhitarian, both from Armenia, were present for the occasion.

"The Narekatsi" explores the life, thought and literary legacy of St. Gregory of Narek, presenting him as a towering spiritual figure whose works bridge theology, philosophy and literature. The film delves into the depth of his mysti-

documentary, including Gugerotti, Zekian, Abraham Terian, Shahe Ananyan, Arusyak Tamrazyan and Haik Utigian, each offering a distinctive perspective on the saint's writings and enduring influence.

The day's events in the Vatican — prayer, reflection and film — formed a unified tribute to St. Gregory of Narek and a renewed expression of spiritual solidarity with the Armenian people.



## INTERNATIONAL

# Landmark Trial Begins in Turkey Against Jailed Erdoğan Rival İmamoğlu

ISTANBUL ( SCF) — İstanbul's jailed mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu went on trial Monday, March 9, in a sweeping corruption case critics say is a politically motivated attempt to derail his chances of challenging President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Agence France-Presse reported.

But the hearing — which began around 11:00 am (0800 GMT), got off to a bumpy start, with the judge suspending proceedings after barely 15 minutes.

Detained on March 19 of last year and jailed ever since, İmamoğlu appeared before the Silivri court for the opening of a sweeping graft case in which prosecutors want him jailed for 2,430 years.

Cheers of “We are proud of you!” erupted from the gallery as he and scores of other defendants entered the courtroom for a trial involving more than 400 people, the mayor's team and journalists in the room wrote on X.

When the trial opened, the judge said İmamoğlu would be one of the last to testify, prompting the mayor, who is the principle accused, to ask to speak sooner.

But the judge refused, drawing cries of “Shame, shame!” from the gallery.

Then when a defense lawyer asked why the order of witnesses had been leaked to a pro-government newspaper but not supplied to the defense team, the judge cleared the court and suspended the session.

It was due to resume in the early afternoon.

İmamoğlu was jailed on the day he was named the presidential candidate of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP).

He is widely seen as one of the only politicians capable of defeating Erdoğan at the ballot box in national elections due before mid-2028.

‘A Conspiracy Case’

Among those at the hearing was CHP leader Özgür Özel and İmamoğlu's wife Dilek, as well as other party officials, many of whom had refused to leave the courtroom, pro-opposition Halk TV said.

“This trial is a conspiratorial case. It is an attempted coup by Tayyip Erdoğan against the next president and the next govern-

ment,” Özel said as the trial began.

Prosecutors have charged 54-year-old İmamoğlu with 142 offences, ranging from graft to embezzlement and espionage, alongside more than 400 other defendants, in an indictment that runs nearly 4,000 pages.



Ekrem İmamoğlu in court

They accuse him of running a sprawling criminal network over which he exerted influence “like an octopus.”

With all protests banned within a one-kilometer (0.6-mile) radius of the courthouse, supporters gathered at a distance at a CHP encampment by a mockup of İmamoğlu's jail cell, an Agence France-Presse correspondent at the scene said.

“The day will come when the tables are turned and the AKP will be held accountable,” they shouted, referring to Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party, waving pictures of İmamoğlu and 15 other CHP mayors who are also behind bars.

“If he had not announced his presidential candidacy, he would still be in office as mayor,” said Kadim Taşbilek, a 58-year-old retiree, who denounced the trial as “a political coup.”

“This case is political. I don't believe there's any corruption,” agreed Hülya Öztürk, a 74-year-old pensioner.

‘Weaponized’ Justice System

The trial has been widely denounced by

rights groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, which both condemned the “weaponization” of Turkey's justice system to remove political opponents.

“This prosecution bears the hallmarks of an attempt to intimidate political opponents of the government and silence wider dissent in the country,” said a statement from Dinushika Dissanayake, Amnesty's deputy director for Europe.

“This mass trial is the most extreme example of the disturbing weaponization of Turkey's justice system, whose independence has now been almost entirely hollowed out.”

With the trial involving such a large number of defendants, the court authorities had started construction of a new courtroom especially for the trial, but it had not been completed on time, CHP officials said on Sunday.

The court has limited the number of journalists covering the trial to 25, of which five were international media representatives.

Among those present in court were CHP leader Özgür Özel and İmamoğlu's wife Dilek, who told reporters at the scene their request for the trial to be broadcast live had been ignored.

“We're nervous and excited before the hearing. I visited him last week and his morale is quite good,” she said.

Legal Crackdown

Since the CHP won a resounding victory in the March 2024 local elections against Erdoğan's AKP, it has faced a sweeping legal crackdown. Fifteen of its mayors are now behind bars.

Analysts say İmamoğlu almost certainly will not be able to run in the next presidential race.

Even if he were to be cleared of the graft charges, he is facing an even more significant legal obstacle: a lawsuit challenging the validity of his university degree, a constitutional requirement for presidential candidates.

Should he be barred, political observers expect CHP leader Özel or Ankara Mayor Mansur Yavaş to emerge as the likely candidates for the presidential race.

## Azerbaijan Quietly Mobilizes Military Following Iranian Drone Incident

MOBILIZATION, from page 1  
diplomats from Tehran, citing safety concerns.

Moving forward, a big concern for Azerbaijan appears to be keeping the Armenian-Azerbaijani provisional peace agreement on track, in particular the deal's centerpiece, the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity, or TRIPP, which is envisioned as a pivotal link in the emerging Middle Corridor trade network. The drone attacks highlighted TRIPP's vulnerability to potential Iranian interference once it becomes fully operational.

Late on March 5, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov consulted by phone with his Armenian counterpart, Ararat Mirzoyan, to discuss the ramifications of the drone attack on TRIPP's development. The two stressed “the importance of ensuring sustainable peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan,” according to an Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry statement.

Azerbaijani officials have stated that any effort to stabilize Baku's relations with Iran must begin with an Iranian admission of responsibility for the drone incident and punishment of those responsible. Iranian military officials have so far denied any responsibility.

(This article originally appeared on Eurasianet.org on March 6.)

## Armenia Congratulates Iran's New Supreme Leader

CONGRATULATIONS, from page 1

Pashinyan last week paid tribute to Ali Khamenei, who was killed by US and Israeli forces at the start of their air strikes against the Islamic Republic on February 28. The Armenian premier praised his contribution to “the development of Armenia-Iran relations” in a letter of condolences sent to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Yerevan has reacted cautiously to the ongoing war that could have far-reaching ramifications for the South Caucasus nation's security. It has called for a diplomatic solution to the conflict but refrained from criticizing the US-Israeli military campaign.

Pashinyan has been accused by his domestic critics of ignoring potential security fallout from the war and focusing on his reelection campaign instead. Pashinyan and senior members of his Civil Contract party toured the southern Armavir and Ararat provinces right after the outbreak of hostilities. Videos posed on Facebook showed them happily chatting and eating pies on a bus carrying them.

Pashinyan released on Saturday similar images of his and his entourage's campaign trip to other parts of the country. One of the videos showed them dancing on the bus on their way back to Yerevan. The prime minister insisted on Thursday that he has not been careless in the face of the war's growing impact on the wider region.

Iran is a major trading partner of Armenia and one of the landlocked country's two commercial conduits to the outside world. Citing technical problems, Tehran has twice briefly closed the Iranian-Armenian border since February 28.

## Pezeshkian Calls Aliyev, Denies Involvement In Drone Strike on Azerbaijan

DRONES, from page 1

Corps (IRGC) against the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline and several Jewish sites in Azerbaijan. While the DTX released a video detailing the investigation on 6 March, accompanying information shared by the state-run media outlet Azertac said that several of the suspects had already been tried, convicted, and sentenced to prison, meaning the actual plot had been organized earlier, likely long before the drone strikes.

The terrorist plot was not mentioned in the readout of the phone call between Aliyev and Pezeshkian.

Instead, it said that Pezeshkian “expressed his gratitude to President Ilham Aliyev for his visit to the Iranian Embassy in Azerbaijan to offer condolences over the passing of the Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Khamenei], and numerous civilians, as well as for his intention to provide humanitarian aid to Iran.”

“Noting that the incident involving [the] airstrike on Nakhichevan had no connection with Iran, President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized that the incident would be investigated.”

There was no mention of who Pezeshkian may have claimed did carry out the drone strikes.

For his part, Aliyev “once again expressed his condolences over the death of numerous civilians in the recent events in Iran” and “underlined the importance of investigating the incident that occurred in Nakhichevan.”

The conversation was immediately seen as a sign that both sides sought de-escalation, a sentiment that was further boosted by events on the ground on Monday, when the flow of cargo between Iran and Azerbaijan reopened and flights from Baku to Nakhichevan resumed.

Uncertainty Remains

Even as these signs of rapprochement appeared to cool the tensions between Azerbaijan and Iran, there were still reasons to believe the period of escalation had not ended.

Perhaps most notably, there have been growing indications that Pezeshkian's more conciliatory tone is at odds with the hardliners in Iran's government.

On Saturday, Pezeshkian issued an apology for Iran's strikes on its neighbors —

that did not mention Azerbaijan — and said there would be no further attacks “unless those countries launch an attack on us.”

Nonetheless, his statement was shortly followed by further strikes against Gulf countries.

On the same day as Pezeshkian's statement, a spokesperson for Iran's military demanded that Azerbaijan “expel the Zionists” from the country “in order to prevent the spread of insecurity in the region and not to endanger the security of its people and Islamic Iran.”

Pezeshkian's conciliatory message also received some backlash within Iran, with other lawmakers describing it as “humiliating” and a sign of weakness.

The selection of Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of the late Ayatollah, as the new Supreme Leader, was yet another sign that the hardliners remain in charge.

Meanwhile, as of Monday, the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry has continued to explicitly state that Iran had carried out the drone strikes against Nakhichevan.

(This article originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on March

# Community News

## New Armenia Country Director, PR and Digital Engagement Manager Joint Armenian Assembly of America

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) announced that Armen V. Sahakyan will serve as its Armenia Country Director and Sophia Badalian as its Public Relations and Digital Engagement Manager.

The Assembly continues to strengthen its presence both in Yerevan and Washington to advance U.S.-Armenia relations and community advocacy.

An international political economy specialist with more than a decade of experience, Armen V. Sahakyan has worked extensively to advance democratic development, community advocacy, and institutional reform across the United States, Armenia, and the wider region.

In his role as Country Director, Sahakyan will oversee the Assembly's in-country initiatives and communicate the Assembly's advocacy and



Armen V. Sahakyan and Sophia Badalian

policy priorities in Washington to officials and civil society partners.

"I am honored to join the Armenian Assembly of America," said Sahakyan. "I look forward to advancing U.S.-Armenia relations based on shared values."

Having moved back to Armenia in 2021, Sahakyan has served in various capacities, including as the Country Director for both the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, where he led high-level engagement with political stakeholders, public institutions, and civil society actors.

His professional portfolio in Armenia has spanned sectors such as energy security, water management, youth empowerment, participatory policymaking, and advancing the Armenia-U.S. strategic partnership.

Sahakyan holds a master's degree in international relations and international economics from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

Badalian, who will be based in Washington, DC, brings experience in nonprofit communications and public affairs, most recently serving as Communications Officer at The HALO Trust (USA), where she supported advocacy, donor engagement, and communications for humanitarian demining programs, including in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In this role, Badalian will oversee the Assembly's public-facing communications, strengthening its digita  
see ASSEMBLY, page 9



Panels at the USC Western Armenian conference

## Diocesan Primate Visits Dallas' St. Sarkis Church

DALLAS — From February 27 to March 1, Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan made a pastoral visit to St. Sarkis Church in Dallas, sharing in the parish's vibrant spiritual and community life.

The visit began Friday evening with the parish ACYOA's youth game night, where the Primate joined young people for lively rounds of ping pong and backgammon, taking time to speak with them about faith, fellowship, and their role in the church's future.

On Saturday morning, Bishop Mesrop attended the parish's "Little Saints" program, which gently guides young children from baptism toward church school. Reflecting on the experience, he observed: "These young souls are not simply learning about faith; they are living it. In the sanctuary, they see the altar, hear the prayers, smell the incense — and know they belong."

The Bishop rolled up his sleeves alongside the bright-eyed children to make Lenten pretzels, recalling the ancient custom of a simple bread shaped like folded arms in prayer: "What a beautiful symbol for our Little Saints," he said: "praying hands, humble hearts, and caring for others."



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan with young children from the church

On Sunday, Bishop Mesrop celebrated the Divine Liturgy assisted by parish pastor Fr. Ghevond Ajamian, and delivered a heartfelt homily. To conclude the service, he blessed the Sunday School students, presenting them with Bibles. He also prayed over the new parish council as they were installed to begin their service.

A festive gala was held on Saturday evening, gathering parishioners in celebration and fellowship. During the weekend's activities, the parish also honored Deacon Njteh Keleshian as its "Steward of the Year," in gratitude for his devoted leadership.

"My sincere gratitude goes to Der Ghevond, Yn. Hasmig, the parish council, and all the parish organizations," Bishop Mesrop said. "Your leadership strengthens this parish and supports the mission of our Diocese."

Concluding his visit, he offered a prayerful wish: "May God bless St. Sarkis Church with growing faith and unity, and fill this parish with His grace and joy for many years to come."



A meeting at St. Sarkis Church in Dallas with parents and young children

## Armenian Friends Of America to Host Benefit for Artsakh Refugees on May 30

ANDOVER, Mass. — For more than 60 years, New England has produced a remarkable lineup of accomplished Armenian musicians, and this spring, several of the very best will unite for a special cause. On Saturday, May 30, 2026, the Armenian Friends of America will host Helping Our Homeland, an evening of live music, dinner, and dancing to raise funds in support of Artsakh refugees. The event will take place from 6 to 11:30 p.m. at the DoubleTree by Hilton, 123 Old River Road in Andover.

In previous years, the Armenian Friends of America have traditionally hosted this dinner dance in October. This year, the shift to a spring date reflects the hope that warmer weather and longer days will encourage even greater attendance for a cause that remains close to the hearts of Armenian communities everywhere.

The night's musical program brings together an extraordinary ensemble.



Mal Barsamian

Mal Barsamian will be joined by renowned New England musicians Leon Janikian, Bobby Raphalian, Ken Kalajian, and Jason Naroian, each

celebrated for their mastery and decades of contribution to Armenian music. Janikian's smooth clarinet and the expressive quarter-tones of Barsamian's oud will blend seamlessly with the vibrant violin of Raphalian. Kalajian and Naroian will provide the rhythmic heartbeat of the ensemble. Vocal performances by Jason Naroian and John Arzigian will further enrich what promises to be a memorable musical experience.

The event is organized to directly benefit those displaced from Artsakh, with 100% of proceeds dedicated to refugee support efforts. Tickets are available by advance purchase only.

Admission is \$100 per person or \$950 for a table of ten, with a single check required for table purchases. Tickets may be purchased online at [www.ArmenianFriendsOfAmerica.org](http://www.ArmenianFriendsOfAmerica.org), or by contacting any of the event organizers: Linda Doherty (603-760-8328), Mary Ann Janigian (603-770-3375), Kathy Geyer (978-902-3198), John Arzigian (603-560-3826), Lisa Apovian (508-662-8395), or Lu Sirmaian (978-314-1956). A discounted hotel room rate is available through April 30, 2026, by calling 978-975-3600 and requesting the Armenian Friends of America Room Block.

With exceptional music, food, community spirit, and an urgent humanitarian cause at its heart, Helping Our Homeland is poised to be a meaningful and inspiring evening. The Armenian Friends of America invite the public to participate in a night that celebrates cultural heritage while extending hope and tangible aid to those in need.

## Burbank Man Allegedly Rams Vehicles and Attacks Officers

By Matthew Rodriguez

BURBANK, Calif. (CBS LA) — Burbank police arrested a 32-year-old man for a midday crime spree that included allegedly ramming vehicles and assaulting officers on Monday, March 2.

The alleged crime spree happened at about 2 p.m. on March 2, when multiple people reported a vehicle intentionally colliding with other drivers near the 1600 block of North San Fernando Boulevard, according to the Burbank Police Department. When officers arrived, they found several damaged cars, and witnesses told them that 32-year-old Christopher Ghazarian had tried to carjack at least two people.

Officers said Ghazarian ran about a block away before he threw a chair at a local business' window and assaulted two elderly men at another store. The two victims sustained minor injuries and were treated at the scene.

Burbank PD found Ghazarian in a strip mall's parking lot along the 1500 block of North San Fernando Boulevard. Police said he struck several officers, with one officer sustaining abrasions and a bite injury to the face.

Once they were able to subdue Ghazarian, officers booked him for multiple felonies, including assault with a deadly weapon.

The Burbank PD said the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office charged Ghazarian with 13 felonies, including assault with a deadly weapon, attempted carjacking and assault on a peace officer.

Investigators urged anyone with additional information to contact detectives.

## New Armenia Country Director, PR and Digital Engagement Manager Joint Armenian Assembly of America

ASSEMBLY, from page 8

presence and advancing its mission through clear, compelling storytelling.

Badalian holds a degree from George Washington University, where she studied international affairs and cross-cultural communication. She has worked closely with Armenian-American community organizations and initiatives in Washington, D.C., and also previously served as an Armenian Assembly intern.

"I am thrilled to join the Armenian Assembly," said Badalian, "This organization has played a formative role in helping me grow into a confident advocate. I look forward to supporting and strengthening the Assembly's communications as we continue advancing our mission."

Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny added, "Armen and Sophia each bring valuable expertise and dedication to our mission. The Assembly is expanding our team both in Armenia and in Washington, and together, we will continue to increase our advocacy and engagement efforts."

## Society for Armenian Studies Winter 2025 Graduate Research and Conference Grants Recipient

FRESNO — The Society for Armenian Studies announced the recipients of its Winter 2025 Graduate Research and Conference Grants. The four recipients are: Astghik Hakobyan, for her research on "Production, Circulation, and Reception of Spurious (Non-Canonical) Religious Texts among Armenian Communities in the Ottoman and Safavid Worlds (17th–18th Centuries)"; Arthur Ipek, for his research and translation work, "Workshopping Chahan Chahnour's Komitas, Unbound as Case Study for Western Armenian"; Sahika Karatepe, for travel to the ARF and Project SAVE archives in Massachusetts, to complete her dissertation on "Labor, Gender, Nature and the Politics of Expropriation: Armenian Peasantry in the Bardizag Region of the Ottoman Empire (1790-1924)"; and Orhun Yalçın, for travel to archives in Turkey for his project, "History of Artvin and Kars in the mid-nineteenth century, during the Tanzimat period (1839–1876)."

Each of the winning recipients will receive a \$1,000 grant awarded by the Society.

SAS President Barlow Der Mugrdechian congratulated all of the awardees. "SAS is pleased to support such promising young scholars achieve their goals. The nature and the depth of their research demonstrates the multi-disciplinary aspect of Armenian Studies as a field of inquiry," said Der Mugrdechian. "We encourage other young scholars to join SAS and to share their research."

Recipients expressed their thoughts on their awards.

"I am profoundly grateful to the Society for Armenian Studies for this grant, which directly supports my doctoral research on

non-canonical texts in early modern Armenian communities. The award enables essential archival research, including work at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and contributes both to the preservation of Armenian written heritage and to new insights into Armenian religious and intellectual history, for which I am sincerely thankful," said Astghik Hakobyan.

"Receiving a grant from the Society for Armenian Studies is meaningful to me as a junior researcher because it reaffirms the value of translation as a scholarly practice. Through my translation of Shahan Shahnour's essay on the genius of Komitas, I hope to bring voices of Armenian literature into wider circulation and to make the model of artistic creation explained in the essay and my annotations accessible to contemporary scholars and creators alike," stated Arthur Ipek.

"I am honored to have received this grant, which I will use to conduct archival research in Boston, working with the ARF Archive, Project SAVE, and other collections essential to completing my dissertation. My research examines the transformation of the Armenian peasantry in the Bardizag region of the Ottoman Empire between 1790 and 1924, focusing on the intersections of labor regimes, environmental extraction, gender, and imperial violence. I am deeply proud of this support, as it recognizes the importance of my research on Armenian labor, gender, and violence and allows me to bring this project to fruition," said Sahika Karatepe.

"The Society for Armenian Studies Graduate Research Grant supported the final stage of my doctoral research in Turkey. This

stage significantly strengthened the depth of my work on nineteenth-century Armenian provincial life," stated Orhun Yalçın.

The Society of Armenian Studies is an international body, composed of scholars and students, whose aims are to promote the study of Armenian culture and society, including history, language, literature, and social, political, and economic questions; to facilitate the exchange of scholarly information pertaining to Armenian studies around the world; and to sponsor panels and conferences on Armenian studies.

The Society for Armenian Studies website can be found at: <https://societyforarmenianstudies.com/>

The SAS Graduate Research and Conference Grants were made possible through the institutional support of the Robert Aram and Marianne Kaloosdian and Stephen and Marian Mugar Chair of Armenian Genocide Studies, Clark University; the Armenian Studies Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; the Armenian Research Center, University of Michigan, Dearborn; the Meghrouni Family Presidential Chair in Armenian Studies, University of California, Irvine; the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR); the AGBU Nubar Library, Paris, France; the Armenian Studies Program, California State University, Fresno; the Institute of Armenian Studies, University of Southern California; the Armenian Studies Program, University of California, Berkeley; the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center, New York; the Mashtots Chair in Armenian Studies, Harvard University; and through a generous donation from Dean Shahinian.

## Riverdale Mills CEO Deb Krikorian Honored with Leadership Award

NORTHBRIDGE, Mass. — The Manufacturing Institute, in partnership with the National Association of Manufacturers, announced recently that Deb Krikorian, Chief Financial Officer of Riverdale Mills, is a recipient of the 2026 STEP Ahead Award, a national award recognizing leadership in the manufacturing industry.

"Deb's leadership has been instrumental



Debra Krikorian, CFO, Riverdale Mills Corporation

in guiding Riverdale through some of the most challenging economic conditions in our company's history," said Jim Knott, Jr., CEO of Riverdale Mills. "From navigating the steel tariffs to managing their recent escalation, she has shown exceptional financial expertise and steady resolve. Her ability to align our teams and protect our long-term sustainability represents the very best of manufacturing leadership, and we're incredibly proud to see Deb recognized with this well-deserved honor."

As CFO, Krikorian has led Riverdale through two of its most turbulent economic challenges: the US steel tariffs of 2018

and their escalation in 2024 and 2025. With steel rod accounting for nearly two-thirds of production costs and thousands of tons purchased annually, the financial impact was substantial. Leveraging deep expertise in finance and risk management, she stabilized costs, strengthened supplier partnerships, and guided complex pricing decisions while maintaining operational excellence. A trusted strategic partner to the CEO, Deb fosters cross-functional alignment, resilience, and continuous improvement through transparent, collaborative leadership.

Krikorian will be honored at the annual STEP Ahead Awards Gala in Washington, DC, on April 23.

The STEP Ahead Awards are a cornerstone of the Manufacturing Institute's STEP Ahead initiative, recognizing leaders nationwide whose expertise, mentorship, and commitment strengthen and advance the manufacturing workforce. By elevating role models across the industry, the Award showcases excellence and leadership at every level of manufacturing, and supports efforts to attract, retain, and develop talent.

"Manufacturing's future depends on leaders who develop talent, strengthen teams and drive results by building strong workplace cultures," said Lexi Champion, National Director of STEP Ahead. "The STEP Ahead Awards recognize and celebrate those making that impact every day in their workplaces and communities, and whose leadership helps the next generation see a place for themselves in manufacturing."

Founded more than 45 years ago, Riverdale Mills is a leading American manufacturer of premium welded wire mesh solutions for the marine, security, con-

struction, agriculture, and aquaculture industries. From its 400,000-square-foot Massachusetts campus, Riverdale produces over 3,500 mesh configurations, exporting nearly 40% worldwide. Renowned for its galvanized-after-welding (GAW) and PVC-coated technologies, the company revolutionized lobster fishing with its invention of Aquamesh® the first welded wire mesh engineered specifically for marine traps.



### Sponsor a Teacher Program

Any inquiries for information about the Sponsor a Teacher Program or donations should be henceforth directed to the central office of the Tekeyan Cultural Association at 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown MA 02472, or emailed to Aram Arkun at [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com).

# USC Hosts ‘It Takes a Diaspora to Raise a Language’ Conference

LOS ANGELES — The conference *It Takes a Diaspora to Raise a Language: Future Directions for Western Armenian*, organized by the University of Southern California (USC) Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies with the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, on February 27 through March 1 brought together scholars, educators, researchers, and community leaders to explore practical strategies for strengthening and revitalizing Western Armenian in diaspora communities. At its core, the conference addressed an urgent question: how can an endangered language be sustained and transmitted across generations when its speakers live primarily outside a nation-state where it functions as the dominant language?

The conference opened with welcoming remarks by Shushan Karapetian, who emphasized the importance of collaboration among scholars, educators, and community organizations in sustaining Armenian language and culture throughout the diaspora.

The keynote address was delivered by Razmig Panossian, Chair of the Armenian Communities Department at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Dr. Panossian introduced the broad range of initiatives the Foundation currently sponsors, develops, and mentors in support of Armenian language education and cultural sustainability. These include online Armenian teaching tools, publications for youth and emerging writers, professional development programs for educators, children’s hands-on cultural creativity programs that promote language acquisition, Armenian digital tools such as spell-check systems and dictionaries, digitization of historical Armenian documents and publications, and

scholarships and educational support.

Panossian also introduced an important strategic shift in thinking about Armenian cultural sustainability. He argued that revitalization efforts must prioritize the Armenian language itself rather than focusing first on a broader concept of Armenian identity. His central point was that language acquisition should come first, as language naturally becomes the gateway through which cultural identity develops. He summarized this principle with the expression: “Հայերէնը, ոչ թէ Հայեցիւն” (Hayeren, not Hayetsi).

A major theme that followed from his remarks was the urgent need for improved pedagogy and teacher preparation in Western Armenian instruction. Panossian stressed the importance of linking academic research with practical classroom strategies and ensuring that adequate resources and institutional support are directed toward language education. Participants highlighted the lack of teacher-training institutions for Western Armenian in many diaspora communities, the shortage of qualified teachers, and the need for sustained investment in teacher training and professional development. Language teaching, they emphasized, must prioritize communication and acquisition rather than linguistic perfection, especially in the case of heritage learners.

## Historical Lessons for Language Expansion

A panel moderated by Manuk Avedikian examined historical precedents for the expansion of literacy in Western Armenian between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Daniel Ohanian presented research on the role of Armenian Catholic missionar-

ies in expanding Armenian literacy in the Ottoman Empire. He explained that Armenian communities of that period faced conditions similar to those of diaspora communities today: few schools, limited financial access to formal education, and multilingual social environments. Literacy existed along a spectrum, often including semi-literacy, where learners could recognize letters and sounds, read words, or even read texts without fully understanding them, relying instead on memorization and interpretation.

Missionaries responded with flexible teaching methods centered on speech and memorization, especially through devotional texts. One pioneer associated with this approach was Madtevos Yevtogjatsi. To make literacy more accessible, educators simplified texts and teaching methods. During the nineteenth century, printing expanded, glossaries were added to books, and schools increased their use of Armenian-language materials. In some cases, Eastern and Western Armenian were blended in educational texts, and teachers minimized strict grammar and spelling requirements in order to encourage broader participation. Dr. Ohanian suggested that this historical experience offers a valuable lesson today: language acquisition should not be hindered by excessive criticism from highly proficient speakers; the priority should be enabling learners to engage actively with the language.

Astghik Soghoyan then presented “Early Western Armenian Children’s Periodicals: Language, Education, and Literary Identity.” Her research examined some of the earliest Armenian publications created specifically for young readers, including

*Pourasdan*, *Yergrakound* and *Yerkaser*. These often included both Eastern and Western Armenian features, reflecting tension but also experimentation between linguistic traditions. This experimentation helped shape modern vernacular Armenian and moved the language away from older classical forms.

Soghoyan also discussed the entrance of Armenian Protestant missionaries into children’s publishing beginning in 1872, including periodicals such as *Avedaper Dghayots Hamar*, which continued until 1915. During this era, Armenian education was closely linked to religious institutions: teachers were often clergy, schools were church-based, instruction centered on Biblical texts, and both students and editors were predominantly male. Other children’s publications included *Avedaper Mangants* and *Paregam Mangants*. In 1876, Hagop Baronian humorously criticized some of these publications as “Aghedpaer Mangants,” while producing his own children’s periodical, *Meghu*, in which he published works such as Garmir Vartoug, an Armenian adaptation of Little Red Riding Hood. His aim was to help young Armenians develop language skills while also understanding their place within the Armenian community.

The panel concluded with a video presentation by Liza Mardoyan, titled “Print Culture: Armenian Language Publishing and Cultural Resilience in Lebanon’s Armenian Community (1915–2015).” Her presentation underscored the vital role of Armenian publishing in sustaining the language in Lebanon after the Armenian Genocide. Mardoyan argued that print culture played a decisive role in saving the language and making Armenian teachable.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian language vitality, she suggested, thrived through innovation, creativity, practical educational tools, and technological adaptation.

Independent Armenian publishers did more than print books; they created an entire educational ecosystem. One important example was Sevan Printing in Lebanon, which played a central role in producing and coordinating textbooks for Armenian schools and supporting the broader project of Azkashen — the strengthening of Armenian nationhood in diaspora through education and culture. A key figure in this effort was the publisher and editor Simon Simonian, whose technical expertise and collaboration with educators, writers, and editors helped produce materials tailored to the needs of students and teachers. Mardoyan concluded that the Armenian experience shows how a diaspora can successfully build institutions to sustain a language outside its homeland, and that this success depended on a strong print ecosystem connected closely to Armenian schools.

#### Measuring Language Competency

Another important panel, moderated by Gegham Mughnrtayan, addressed language competency assessment and the development of standardized proficiency frameworks for Armenian.

Via video, Siranush Dvovyan, Chairperson of the Language Committee of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of the Republic of Armenia and lecturer at the American University of Armenia, explained that the Republic of Armenia is currently developing policy and technological frameworks for national Armenian language proficiency standards. This includes building the necessary assessment infrastructure, evaluation criteria, and technological tools for a structured and standardized language assessment system.

Aldo Rodriguez, director of Language Policies for the National Administration of Public Education of Uruguay, emphasized the need for a universal Armenian assessment infrastructure that could be used internationally. He presented Uruguay's national certification model, where learners can receive A1-level certification based mainly on speaking and listening skills. His approach favors user-friendly grammar explanations, transliteration when needed, and communicative teaching based on lexical chunks rather than strict grammar. This model is already in use at the AGBU Uruguay Armenian School, where students receive certificates after completing each level.

Javier Poladian, director of International Affairs at AGBU Uruguay, stressed that a universal Armenian assessment framework must be developed in collaboration with the Republic of Armenia, which should play the leading role in setting standards. Irshad Madyarov, Associate Professor at the American University of Armenia, discussed the importance of measuring receptive written vocabulary and grammar in Eastern Armenian and the urgent need for a validated and technologically supported Armenian language assessment framework. Together, the speakers highlighted the need for a shared global Armenian assessment infrastructure.

#### Language, Identity, and Diaspora Experience

The conference program also included a live podcast recording, Language Therapy with Dr. K, featuring Vahe Berberian. His conversation offered a lighter but deeply insightful reflection on multilingualism, identity, and diaspora life. Berberian spoke about growing up in Lebanon, traveling through Europe, and eventually settling in the United States. Although Lebanon is an Arabic-speaking country, he explained that Arabic was not his strongest second language; French and English played a stronger role in his development. Blending humor, subtle commentary, and anecdote, the

session showed how multilingual diaspora Armenians navigate complex linguistic worlds and how language preservation remains a deeply personal and cultural experience.

#### Immersion and New Learners

A panel on “Immersion Models for Language Vitality,” moderated by Razmig Panossian, featured Nancy Hong and Michael Hornsby. Hong, director of Dual Language Immersion Programs and English Learner Services at the Glendale Unified School District, described Glendale's Eastern Armenian dual immersion program and announced that Western Armenian will be introduced into the district's dual immersion program in the 2026–2027 academic year. Hornsby, associate professor at Adam Mickiewicz University, discussed minority language communities' responses to modernization and globalization and emphasized the power of immersion programs to sustain linguistic continuity. The discussion also touched on identity, guilt, and the phenomenon of third-generation diaspora Armenians returning to the language in an effort to reconnect with their roots.

The roundtable “Non-Standard Adult Learners Beyond Traditional Community Ties,” moderated by Talar Chahinian, explored Armenian language learning outside traditional heritage-school or family frameworks. Jennifer Manoukian described teaching Western Armenian to adults using translation as a key pedagogical tool, particularly for learners working on research projects. Anahit Ghazaryan spoke on the relationship between Eastern and Western Armenian through memory and dialogue, emphasizing mutual respect rather than division. Anatolii Tokmantsev examined language use among Russian-Armenian repatriates, discussing how social pressures, identity, and monolingualism affect heritage language use and intergenerational transmission.

#### Keynote on Family and Multilingualism

A keynote lecture by Ruth Kircher, titled “Parental Language Attitudes and Heritage Language Transmission Across Generations and Geographies,” examined how family language attitudes shape the survival of heritage languages. Drawing on research in Canada, the United States and Germany, Kircher showed that parental beliefs about status, economic opportunity, emotional connection and identity strongly affect language transmission. At the same time, she emphasized the benefits of childhood multilingualism, including cognitive development, stronger family bonds, and deeper ties to cultural communities. She encouraged Armenian-speaking parents in the diaspora to view multilingualism positively and to support Armenian alongside dominant languages.

The first day concluded with a stand-up comedy performance by members of the DEMQ Show, whose humor and satire offered a lively close to the day while still engaging with themes of language, identity and community.

#### Second Day: Practice, Play, and Ecosystems

The second day opened with remarks from both organizing institutions, followed by a panel chaired by Lilit Keshishian on language learning, pedagogy, and classroom practice.

Lilit Ghazaryan presented “Language as a Toy: Play, Peer Socialization, and Teacher-Child Interaction” in an Armenian-English Bilingual Daycare in Los Angeles, showing how young children acquire language organically through play and interaction. Natalie Karimian addressed the challenge of bridging pedagogy and practice in Armenian-language materials. Nora Sarafian-Tachjian and Sarin Akbas presented their experience using the digital visual program *The Sun, Moon, and Ribbon* in bi-

lingual classrooms in France. Their session ended with a live demonstration, *Handful of Games from the Wheat Sack*, showing how movement, repetition, play, and memory can support language acquisition.

The conference also featured showcases such as “Krots Prots,” a university-centered literature and literacy initiative; *Word-Bite Play Slay Meet*, presented by Hrayr Varaz, Isabelle Kouyoumjian, Jenny Kouyoumjian, Hayk Makhmuryan and Hovig Artinian; and “Before Language Was the Body: Theatre in Armenian” by Vache Hoveyan. Together, these showcases reflected the conference's emphasis on diverse and innovative modes of language engagement.

A roundtable titled “The Gulbenkian Approach: Building a Sustainable Language Ecosystem in the Diaspora” brought together Tamar Tufenkjian, Haiganoush Minasian, Nora Sarafian-Tachjian, Meline Barseghin, Sarin Akbas and Ani Garmiry-an. Their testimonies highlighted the importance of immersive preschool environments, play-based learning, hands-on cultural activities, out-of-classroom language experiences, and digital tools such as Zendoog, Zartis, Yertik, Zartsants, Oos Hartag, Gadag Madag, Agul Dugul and Alnis Balnis. A recurring message was that the Armenian language must live naturally and joyfully, not imposed through anxiety or negativity.

A panel on “Armenian Language in the Era of Artificial Intelligence,” chaired by Maral Tavitian, explored the role of technology in language preservation. Artur Ishkhanyan addressed ethical questions in “Beyond Extractive AI.” Vicken Assadourian introduced Arshalouys, a digital platform for Armenian language revitalization. Victoria Khurshudyan discussed annotation models for multivariational Armenian, and Chahan Vidale-Gorene examined how AI can support Armenian language transmission. The panel showed that although technology cannot replace community transmission, it can significantly expand access and resources.

#### Creative Spaces, Universities, Media, and Teachers

The final day opened with a panel chaired by Margarita Baghdasaryan, “Living Language through Creative Spaces and Artistic Practices.” Nairi Khachadourian explored how contemporary art can support language vitality beyond school systems. Nelly Achken Sarkissian presented her short film “Beyond Fear: Western Armenian as a Living, Evolving Language in the Digital Diaspora.” Garine Boghossian demonstrated how map-making and geography can be used to teach Armenian vocabulary through *Armenian Atlas* (Աշխարհագրյ). Hovig Artinian examined how comedy and social media activate diasporic Armenian linguistic repertoires across generations.

The panel “University-Level Armenian Language Programs: Paris and Los Angeles,” chaired by Artineh Samkian, focused on higher education. Anaïd Donabédian presented “Revitalizing Western Armenian from Above: IMAS – Content, Vision, and Milestones,” describing INALCO's unique BA and MA programs in Western Armenian and their wide-ranging curriculum. Hagop Gulludjian spoke on “Policies and Politics of Language as the Post-Yeghern Diaspora Enters its Second Century,” emphasizing creativity, literary production, and meaningful engagement for contemporary diasporic students.

Additional showcases included “Building the Language Activist's Toolkit: Insights from Ejanish,” presented by Lia Soorenian and Alexia Hatum, and “Beyond Basics: Cultivating the Joy of Discovery in Literacy,” presented by Sarin Akbas and Nora Sarafian-Tachjian.

A keynote by Maria Polinsky, “From Periphery to Parity: The Value of Arme-

nian Varieties in the Pluricentric World,” reframed Armenian as a quintessential pluricentric language. She argued that Eastern and Western Armenian are equally valid outcomes of linguistic change and that the ideology of correction often acts as a barrier to language vitality. Instead of emphasizing purity, she urged communities to prioritize vitality, intelligibility, and inclusivity, documenting local norms and supporting heritage learners while treating multiple varieties as resources rather than problems.

The panel “Reach and Resilience of Independent and Local Community Journalism,” moderated by Myrna Douzjian, focused on Armenian-language media. Jirair Jolakian discussed the history and challenges of *Nor Haratch* in Paris, while Rupen Janbazian described how *Torontohye* adapted through surveys, local community reporting, accessible language, visual appeal, and bilingual publication in Armenian and English to better serve younger generations and families.

The panel “What About Teachers? Institutions, Narratives, and Insights,” moderated by Hrag Papazian, brought attention to the voices of teachers. Arus Movsesyan presented “Western Armenian Teachers' Narratives: Between Myth and Mission,” arguing that teachers are too rarely treated as knowledge-holders capable of theorizing their own work. She explored how teachers' metaphors shape professional identity and noted the recurring image of the teacher as a “soldier” defending an endangered language. Myrna Douzjian and Talar Chahinian then presented “In Tandem: Teaching Eastern and Western Armenian Standards for Diasporic Fluency,” describing classroom approaches that allow students to speak in their preferred dialect while reading texts from both standards.

#### Closing Session

The conference concluded with a closing session that combined scholarly reflection and broader assessment.

In “License to Spell: When Vanity Plates Speak Armenian in Los Angeles,” Shushan Karapetian examined Armenian vanity license plates as diasporic inscriptions — forms of public belonging, linguistic negotiation and mobile biography. Drawing on cultural geography, sociology, communication studies, sociolinguistics, popular culture studies, and semiotics, she showed how Armenian vanity plates make minority-language identity visible in a regulated public space, turning vehicles into platforms of self-expression and diaspora presence.

Closing reflections were offered by Ani Garmiry-an of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Looking back at the decade since the 2015 conference “Innovation in Education: Teaching Western Armenian in the 21st Century,” she noted a clear shift away from narratives of language loss and toward approaches centered on language vitality in multilingual diasporic realities. She pointed to the development of pedagogical tools, digital platforms, teacher training, Zarmanazan, audiovisual resources, and the International MA in Armenian Studies (IMAS) as examples of sustained collaborative work. Her remarks emphasized that revitalization requires long-term vision, local and diasporic networks, patience and collaboration.

Ten years after that first gathering, participants met again—this time at the University of Southern California—from eleven countries to reflect on the theme *It Takes a Diaspora to Raise a Language: Future Directions for Armenian*. The conference made clear that Armenian in the diaspora should not be understood simply as a language at risk, but as a diasporic language capable of evolving and thriving through collective effort, creativity, and institutional collaboration.

—Sevan Boghos-Deirbadrossian



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# City Council Unanimously Greenlights Measures to Boost Production in L.A.

By Katie Kilkenny

LOS ANGELES (*Hollywood Reporter*) — The Los Angeles City Council on March 4, voted to greenlight proposals aimed at improving filming conditions in the city as a room packed with Hollywood workers and union representatives erupted in applause.

All eligible councilmembers voted to approve colleague Adrin Nazarian's seven initial motions to "keep Hollywood home." Those include measures to speed up soundstage certification and to require city departments to report compliance with Mayor Karen Bass' 2025 executive order on filming. They also comprise motions to launch an independent audit of L.A.'s permitting system and to usher in free "microshoots" (involving 10 or fewer people).

Additional motions from Nazarian that were passed will facilitate an agreement with L.A. counties and local cities to coordinate their permit regulations, will require the city's tourism department to present a

"Made in L.A." branding campaign idea to the Council and will work to unify filming conditions across the city.

"Together, we are sending the world a message: Los Angeles is not standing still. Los Angeles is not clinging to outdated systems and we are not surrendering our signature industry without a fight," Nazarian said at a press conference following the vote.

The measures are needed, some industry workers emphasized during the public comment period. The voice of one self-proclaimed member of IATSE cracked as she said, "I've worked in entertainment for the last 25 years, I don't have any other skills ... and I don't want any other skills." She said she needed work, and "we all need work."

Carlo Perez, the business manager for Local 755 of the plasterers, sculptors and shop hands union, recalled shooting a "Fast and Furious" movie in Georgia and swapping the cars' Georgia plates for California plates. "We need to stop this, we need to cut it off while there's still something to save," he said.

"We have generational talent you're not going to find in any other city," added one producer.

But there were also hints of dissent when it came to the details of the motions. While generally expressing support for the efforts to boost production in the city, several industry union representatives asked in their public comments to be included in discussions around future motions.

Advocates for downtown L.A., including DTLA Alliance president Suzanne Holley and Councilmember Ysabel Jurado, expressed concern for how proposed reforms might impact residents and businesses.

In response, Nazarian promised to come to an "amicable solution" on filming processes downtown. He added that he was listening to other concerns.

Still, during the press conference that followed the vote, the councilmember spoke in the foreground of a crowd including union leaders, the head of the city's film office and members of the grassroots local

group Stay in L.A. — a show of unity despite the behind-the-scenes debates.

"For far too long, the conversation has been about what we are losing. today, the conversation becomes about what we are building," he told the assembled.

Nazarian isn't done yet. He introduced proposals earlier aimed at incentivizing local postproduction vendors and other businesses auxiliary to the entertainment industry, instituting a fund to boost small and mid-sized productions and creating production and postproduction retention programs.

Also, he launched proposals calling for amendments to the city's contract with FilmLA to introduce new transparency and accountability measures and a pilot program to waive fees for small productions.

Said Nazarian, "We will continue working with labor, we will continue engaging with studios and independents, we will continue reviewing data, we will continue removing unnecessary barriers while protecting worker safety standards."

## OBITUARY

### Grace Araxie Manoogian Mother, Dedicated Nurse

WATERTOWN — Grace Manoogian, a woman of remarkable spirit, bravery, and heart, passed away peacefully at the age of 100. Born on January 4, 1926, to Movses and Armenouhi Manoogian, Grace's century of life was defined by her devotion to her family, her career in service of others, and her pride in her long Armenian heritage. She died on February 19.

A trailblazer of her time, Grace balanced the challenges of motherhood with a tenacious professional ambition. She dedicated decades to nursing and surgical care, thriving in the hustle of places like Mt. Auburn Hospital or throughout a private practice. Her patients and colleagues were the beneficiaries of her sharp skill and natural warmth.

Grace's zest for life was infectious. She was a world traveler who explored the Mediterranean, Alaska, France, and China with a curious mind and an open heart. Closer to home, she was the life of every wedding, never missing a chance to get out there and dance. Whether she was hand-rolling dolma with her mother, "taking the T" to Downtown Crossing, or finding any excuse to enjoy a dessert, Grace moved through the world with a playful boldness.

Family was her true north. She lived surrounded by their love in South Boston, Watertown, Belmont, Cambridge, and Brookline. She was the devoted mother of the late Richard Flaherty (d. 2022), daughter-in-law Marilyn, the proudest "Gram" to her grandchildren, Kyle and Maggie, and

the best "Gigi" to six great-grandchildren. She was a beloved "Auntie Roxie" to many nieces and nephews.

Grace taught those who loved her to worry less about the opinions of others and more about the joy of the next adventure. She leaves behind a legacy of resilience, laughter, and a reminder that it is never too late to learn, to grow, or to dance.

The family wishes to express their sincere gratitude to the staff at Goddard House and Harbor Health Elder Services for their compassionate care and support for Grace.

Visitations were held at Giragosian Funeral Home, 576 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown on March 4. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made in Grace's memory to Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472.



### Albert L. Julian Jr. Master Barber, Joyous Spirit

NEW SEABURY, Mass. — Albert L. Julian Jr., of New Seabury and Westwood, passed away on March 2, 2026. He was the husband of Douglas G. Nahigian, son of the late Albert and Helene Julian, brother of Lisa Julian and Lori Condon and uncle to many nieces and nephews. He is also survived by his sisters- and brothers-in-law and a far-reaching network of close family and friends.

A master barber, Al owned his own shop for six years before moving to the New York area, where he cut hair in Manhattan for ten years at notable salons including Warren Tricomi at the Plaza Hotel and Barba Men's Grooming on 19th Street. He served a wide range of clientele, including celebrities and television personalities, most notably the husbands of BRAVO's "The Real Housewives of New Jersey."

Al brought immense joy, laughter and light to everyone he met. Unapologetically himself, he had a remarkable way of making everyone feel special. He cared deeply for those around him—always checking in, sending thoughtful gifts, and bringing joy. Full of life, endlessly fun, and truly one of a kind, Al leaves behind memories that will forever be cherished. The love he shared with his husband of 33 years was one of true devotion—a love lost but never forgot-



ten. His spirit will continue to live on in all who knew and loved him.

A funeral service was held at First Armenian Church, 380 Concord Avenue, Belmont, on Thursday, March 12. In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to the First Armenian Church of Belmont.

At the request of the family, cemetery services were private.

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# Arts & Culture

## Arshile Gorky Exhibit at Armenian Museum Of America Continues to Draw Crowds in Watertown

WATERTOWN — “Arshile Gorky: Redrawing Community and Connections” continues to be a popular exhibit at the Armenian Museum of America in Watertown. Curated by Dr. Kim Theriault, the show features 26 works on loan from galleries and private collections including the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern).

Arts critic Jared Bowen named the show as one of his top picks on WG-BH’s The Culture Show. The Gorky exhibit and extension of Serj Tankian’s art show have continued to bring visitors to the galleries from Greater



Author Chris Bohjalian with Armenian Museum of America Executive Director Jason Sohigian

Boston to the West Coast. This past weekend, Chris Bohjalian, best-selling author and long-time member of the museum, visited the galleries to view the Gorky and Tankian exhibits.

“I am never prouder of my Armenian heritage than when surrounded by brilliant Armenian artists and thinkers. Today I was at the Armenian Museum of America for two shows: magnificent paintings by Serj Tankian of System Of A Down (yes, he paints, too) and hypnotic (and surprising!) newly presented works by the 20th century master Arshile Gorky,” wrote Bohjalian after the tour. “System Of A Down and Gorky have cameos in one of my novels, a testimony to my love of their work. These shows run two more months. Get thee to Watertown. You’ll thank me!”

The Armenian Museum of America is located at 65 Main St., Watertown. For more information, visit ([www.armenianmuseum.org](http://www.armenianmuseum.org)).



Arshile Gorky Exhibit at the Armenian Museum of America



Performers at rehearsal of “Anahid” in New York City

## Musical ‘Anahid’ Tells True Story of Genocide Survivors

NEW YORK — “Anahid,” a musical written by Gabriel Elizabeth Kadian (book, music, lyrics) and Stephanie Wu (music) based on the novel *Anahid Played Soorp: The Finding of Aran Pirian*, had a private industry presentation at Judson Memorial Church (55 Washington Square S, New York, NY 10012) in September.

The evening’s performers included Kadian, Sam Seferian (“Wicked,” “Pretty Woman”), John El-Jor (“We Live in Cairo”), Shirleyann Kaladjian, Sofie Nesanelis (“Les Miserables”) Otto Alam Khan, and Julia Bedeian.

Now, Kadian and Wu want to turn the musical into an animated feature which can be used as an educational tool in schools.

“Anahid” is a story of an Armenian family’s escape from the Ottoman Empire during the Armenian Genocide of 1915. The Pirian family lives a life full of music in 1915 Constantinople. But, as World War I brews, peril is imminent.

It starts with murmurings passed feverishly in marketplaces, alleyways, and notes scribbled in fear. Aran’s father meets with other Armenians in a panic: the Turks have devised a scheme to remove the Armenian intellectuals, ministers, and politicians. Plans are drawn up for escape.

But, when Aran’s father is suddenly taken away by Turkish soldiers, his wife Maren and two children Aran and Anahid must begin a long journey toward what they hope will be safety.

After several escapes and a heart-wrenching goodbye, Aran makes his way alone toward the caravan of Armenians walking through the Syrian desert, bound for safety.

As Aran searches for family at the Armenian Relief Agency in Egypt, he finds a distant cousin who’s willing to house him in New York. Aran journeys across the sea only to meet a cold, detached woman and begins to spiral as he processes the enormity of his loss.

But, an uncomfortable encounter prompts Aran to recover an important piece of himself that he thought he’d lost along the way. And, in redeeming it, Aran reclaims himself.

see ANAHID, page 15



Performers at rehearsal of “Anahid” in New York City

## Joel Veldkamp

*‘Truth-telling is Our Mission and Our Duty’*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/ZURICH — Joel Veldkamp (born in 1988 in Iowa) is the director for Public Advocacy at Christian Solidarity International (CSI), a Switzerland-based human rights organization advocating for religious freedom and the protection of persecuted communities worldwide. He holds a PhD in international history from the Geneva Graduate Institute, an MA in Middle Eastern studies from the University of Chicago, and a BA from Dordt University (Iowa). Veldkamp’s academic research has focused on the modern history of the Middle East, including the experience of Christian communities in Syria. Through his work with CSI, he has traveled extensively across the broader Middle East and North Africa, documenting humanitarian conditions and engaging in international advocacy. He has addressed forums such as the United Nations Human Rights Council on issues including religious persecution, economic sanctions, and the protection of vulnerable minorities.



**Joel, as an Armenian living in Armenia my first question is: in your opinion, how do geopolitical dynamics shape humanitarian policies in our region?**

Unfortunately, the South Caucasus is at the center of a new “great game” for influence being played between Russia and the United States. In such a situation, humanitarian and human rights considerations will always take a back seat to the hard interests of the great powers. Nearly 30 years ago, the influential American statesman Zbigniew Brzezinski described Azerbaijan as a “geopolitical pivot” that would be crucial for the U.S.’s efforts to contain Russian power. This is essentially how the U.S. still sees the region. Russia has also clearly decided that it needs the goodwill of Turkey and Azerbaijan to preserve its influence in its near abroad. Both sides need Azerbaijan, and so Azerbaijan is mostly allowed to do what it wants – including ethnic cleansing.

**What role does international advocacy play in protecting human dignity and religious freedom?**

see VELDKAMP, page 14

# Joel Veldkamp: ‘Truth-telling Is Our Mission and Our Duty’

VELDKAMP, from page 13

The realities of hard power severely limit what international advocacy can accomplish, of course. But we should not give in to despair. Even when the great powers are not responsive, advocacy can shape public opinion in ways that exert pressure over the long-term.

One good example is that only 20 years ago, there was still considerable reluctance in academia and among governments to speak the words “Armenian Genocide.” Now it is broadly accepted as historical reality, and only marginal scholars and states contest it. There was no political calculus behind this shift. This victory is owed completely to the thankless labor of thousands of Armenians over the past century.

Advocacy can also help us prepare for the day when the geopolitical situation in the region changes — as it must. I personally believe that the U.S. and Russia have both miscalculated. It is not in either of their interests for Armenia to be complete-

Christian solidarity is certainly not a geopolitical reality in today’s world. Christians facing persecution or deprivation count for almost nothing in the foreign policies of Western states. It is a far cry from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the suffering of Christians in the Ottoman Empire was a central theme in American and European politics. We do not expect this to change anytime soon.

For CSI, Christian solidarity is rather a spiritual calling. Our mission is to unite Christians across the world to support persecuted Christians and other persecuted peoples, like Yazidis in Iraq or Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Very few of our supporters are rich or politically powerful, but together, we can help persecuted communities survive, and sometimes even change their situation completely. We may live in a world dominated by empires, superpowers and nation-states, but in Jesus Christ, God has united us, through baptism and through the Holy Spirit, with billions

attacks from religious extremists and Turkish and Arab nationalists alike, while efforts to promote Christians as equal citizens were largely rejected by the societies they lived in. Today, after nearly a quarter-century of continuous warfare in the Middle East, Turkey seems poised to become the dominant power in the region. This is very bad news for Christians — for 103 years, wherever the Republic of Turkey has extended its influence, from Antioch to Cyprus, historic Christian communities have disappeared.

Christianity certainly may vanish from the Middle East. We should not accept this as an inevitability however. If any place in the Middle East could be called hopeless for Christians, it is Syria — ravaged by 15 years of civil war and economic sanctions and ruled by a regime composed of jihadists. But what we see in Syria is that a great many Christians, including Armenians, remain devoted to their homeland and their countrymen and determined to remain and

an increasingly hostile part of the world. The West is on the verge of bartering all of this away for a bowl of stew. If Armenia is lost, all of our future battles will be much harder.

Every time I come to Armenia, I leave inspired. Not by the dismal political situation, of course, but by the bravery of our many Armenian colleagues who continue to fight the good fight under very difficult conditions. The human rights activists who keep speaking the truth in the face of gathering authoritarianism; the refugees from Artsakh who have lost everything and still work every day to help their countrymen and keep hope alive. When you meet people like that, how can you not want to work even harder to help them?

**Let’s talk about the most recent developments in Armenia. Many people welcome TRIPP, while others see it as a trap. What’s your perspective on this?**

I am probably not the most qualified person to speak about this; I look up to experts like Philippe [Kalfayan](#) and Tigran Grigoryan, whose analysis of these developments I find helpful. In principle, it could be a very good thing for Armenia to become a node for commerce between Europe and Asia, and to work closely with the U.S. on that, so long as it maintains sovereignty over its own territory and borders.

What I find troubling is when I hear other advocates for Armenia speaking as though TRIPP will, on its own, act as a deterrent against an Azerbaijani invasion. The theory seems to be that, if the U.S. is highly invested in this project, Azerbaijan will be reluctant to attack southern Armenia. I do not find this convincing at all. American politics is chaotic and fickle. The one constant in U.S. policy in the South Caucasus since the 1990s has been to prioritize cooperation with Azerbaijan above all else. Baku believes that so long as it helps Washington meet its energy and security objectives, all of its attacks on Armenians will be forgiven and quickly forgotten. That is the lesson it has learned from 2016, 2020, 2022 and 2023.

If the U.S. wishes to deter future Azerbaijani aggression, it should hold Azerbaijan accountable for its past aggressions, and demand remedies. Armenians should not be reassured by anything less than that.

**You said you learned Armenian. How was your experience in studying our rather difficult language?**

Humbling! I have studied French, German, and Arabic and Armenian was harder than any of them. I eventually learned enough to read Armenian sources from the 1920s, and I can speak (poorly) about basic topics, but it is still not a language I am comfortable in. Thankfully, my Armenian friends and teachers are always very patient with me. I still take online lessons from a teacher who lives in Armenia every week (Hi Gevorg!), and I want to improve, but I think this will be a lifelong challenge.

**Finally, thank you for all your work — especially your advocacy for Armenians. Raising the voice of truth is rare these days, and your efforts are particularly meaningful in our world today**

Thank you for your encouragement. My colleagues and I have been commissioned to do this by thousands of ordinary Christians across Europe and the United States who donate to make our work possible. Our thanks is due to them. For CSI, this truth-telling is our mission and our duty. If we did not speak out about persecution in ways that dissent from the prevailing narrative, we would have no reason for existing.



ly deprived of its sovereignty, and for Turkey and Azerbaijan to call all the shots in the region. Yet that is precisely where U.S. and Russian policy have brought us. Eventually, Azerbaijan — which, despite all its PR efforts, remains a paranoid, ultra nationalistic, aggressive dictatorship — will become too difficult to manage, and both superpowers will be looking for ways to restrain it. When that day comes, we want the right of return of Artsakh Armenians to be squarely on the agenda.

We have seen this happen before. CSI was raising the alarm about genocide and slavery in Sudan for seven years before the U.S. finally decided to intervene to negotiate an end of Sudan’s civil war in 2002. We could not control the geopolitical changes that led to this policy initiative, but when those changes came, our advocacy helped to shape the policy.

**Do you really believe that, in today’s globalized world, we can still talk about Christian solidarity? Even in Europe — what the Swiss-Israeli author Bat Ye’or calls “Eurabia”—authentic Christian values seem to be fading.**

of people across the world, transcending divisions of race, language, gender, and class. Together, we are the Body of Christ in the world. Christian solidarity is a tool He has given to us to withstand oppression and persecution. We should use it.

**I guess that you first became acquainted with Armenians while studying Christian communities in Syria. The 21st century has been especially difficult for Armenian communities in the Middle East, with their numbers declining rapidly. What would you say are the biggest challenges facing Christian communities in the Middle East today? Do you see a future for Christians there, or do you share the more pessimistic view that they may vanish?**

The Middle East’s transition from the world of empires to a world of nation-states has been deeply traumatic for Middle East Christians. Traditionally, Christians were held in a protected second-class status, as *dhimmi*, in the Islamic empires. Ironically, the abolition of the *dhimmi* system ended up being a lose-lose for Christians — it left them exposed to

live as fellow citizens with their Muslim neighbors. They deserve our full support.

**You are one of the few non-Armenians who writes consistently about the ethnic cleansing in Artsakh. How important is Armenia to your research and public work?**

It has been an enormous privilege for me to spend so much time in Armenia. I first traveled to Armenia in 2017 to study the Armenian language during my PhD program. I wanted to write about the Christians of Aleppo, and I belatedly realized how many of them were Armenians! It was a good lesson for me to learn — Armenians are an essential part of the story of Christianity, not just in Syria but in the Middle East and the whole world.

That is why CSI devotes so much energy to this cause. Armenia is the first Christian nation. Its culture, theological tradition and collective memory is an indispensable part of the common heritage of the global body of Christ. The Armenian people have survived war, statelessness, genocide, communist totalitarianism, and more, and are still holding the light of the gospel in

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



## Uncle Noric's Kitchen Armenian Choreg

The Uncle Noric's website writes, "This is a treasured family recipe. Our granny made choreg most of my life. She was 25 years old when she went to her friend's house (Oski Ornadzian) to learn how to make this recipe from her friend's mother. Oski's mom lived in Providence, Rhode Island. Her name was 'Vadvava' (we think)."

The neighbor, Oski Ornadzian's obituary reads, "Age 89, Oski passed away peacefully with her family by her side at her home on February 18, 2013 in Allen Park, MI. She was the beloved wife of the late Vahan. Loving mother of Marguerite Bagdasarian, Carol Bagdasarian and Greg Ornadzian. Loving grandmother of Vartan (Alissa), Soseh, Monieg (Jason), Vahan (Natasha), Richard (Samantha), Sara, Maggie, Lauren, Kristina (Brant) and Gregory. Loving great grandmother of Aram, Sosi, Sophia, Gavin, Maximus and Aiden. Dear sister of Anne Kachigian. Oski will also be dearly missed by her brother-in-law Sahag Dardarian, sister-in-law Rose-Marie Krikorian and her many nephews and nieces."



Oaski Ornadzia

(This recipe is courtesy of THE ART OF ARMENIAN & MIDDLE EASTERN COOKING.)

From Serious Eats Magazine: "Choreg — sometimes spelled choreog, cheoreg, or chorek in English — is an Armenian sweet bread that has a distinctive, intoxicating aroma thanks to inclusion of nigella and mahlab. It's traditionally served around Easter, since it's meant to be an indulgence after winter and Lent, but many Armenians eat it year-round as well. It can be formed into individual round or knotted rolls, and — more commonly — into long braided loaves, and the braids are often made with three strands of dough, to represent the Holy Trinity. Choreg is also made and eaten in Greece (where it's known as tsourekli and is usually flavored with mastic), Turkey (paskalya çöreği), and elsewhere, though its flavors and shapes vary from country to country."

"Choreg is often called 'Armenian brioche,' because of the large amount of butter and eggs in the dough; it also draws comparisons to challah, because of the eggs, and the fact that it's formed into braids. But unlike brioche or challah, choreg dough also contains a high percentage of sugar, often exceeding 20%. (Armenians are not known for doing things in half-measures, particularly when it comes to celebrations and celebratory foods.) And, unlike challah and brioche, choreg contains nigella seed and mahlab."

From Dining in Diaspora: "Perhaps the most enduring and symbolic of food traditions centers around a sweet bread called 'choreg' made during Easter, which emits a fragrance while baking that is so potent, so intoxicating, it is permanently embedded in the olfactory memories of the adults who once grew up with it. For many, choreg is an all-out obsession, inhaled in copious amounts at the first opportunity. No matter how much you eat, it never seems to be enough. No matter how much time has passed since you've eaten it, you will never forget the taste. For the descendants of survivors who settled in cities like Boston, Detroit, Racine, Chicago, Fresno and Philadelphia and so many other pockets in the U.S., choreg is the cornerstone of their identity, made generation after generation during Easter in the houses they grew up in, intertwined with the most significant childhood memories they had."

### INGREDIENTS:

- 8 eggs
- 2 cups sugar
- 3 cups butter or margarine
- 5 lbs. flour
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 tablespoon mahleb (optional)
- 2 packages dry yeast
- 1 can of evaporated milk, 12 oz. (plus add one can of water)
- 3/4 cup regular milk

### PREPARATION:

All ingredients should be at room temperature.

To start, slowly melt the butter in a saucepan, and then add the canned milk, regular milk and water — set aside.

Proof yeast: place yeast in 1/4 cup of warm water with 1/2 teaspoon of sugar (it will rise). In a large mixing bowl, beat the eggs, add the melted butter mixture, sugar, yeast, salt, and baking powder.

Gradually add the flour.

Add a thin layer of oil to ensure dough does not dry out, and then cover and let rise 2 to 3 hours. Punch dough down and shape, place on greased trays (cover) and let rise again approximately 2 to 3 hours.

Top choreg with an egg wash top, and sprinkle with sesame seeds (optional). Preheat oven to 350°F. Bake for about 25 minutes (or less), or until the loaves are golden brown.

## Musical 'Anahid' Tells True Story of Genocide Survivors

ANAHID, from page 13

Gabriel Elizabeth Kadian is a writer, AEA actor, singer, and graduate of NYU Tisch, where she earned her B.F.A. in Acting and English/American literature. As an actor, Kadian has appeared in "The Wolves" at Actors Theatre of Louisville and Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center (playing the role of #14, an Armenian-American), "The Golem of Havana," "Romance in Hard Times" and "Kiss Me, Kate" at Barrington Stage Company. Gabriel originated the role of Georgia in Max Posner's "Sisters on the Ground," published by Dramatists Play Service. She has appeared in labs at Encores! Off-Center, Playwrights Horizons and LaMaMa, among others.

Recently, Gabriel starred in "Ranch Water," a feature film that debuted at the 2021 Austin Film Festival and premiered in 20+ festivals to date.

A descendent of Armenian Genocide survivors and Jewish immigrants, Gabriel aims to honor her family with her work.

Pianist and composer Stephanie Wu de-



Performers at "Anahid" performance in New York City

buted with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at age twelve and has since appeared as soloist with the Sioux City Symphony Or-

chestra, Wheaton Symphony Orchestra, Kishwaukee Symphony Orchestra, DuPage Symphony Orchestra, Southwest Sym-

phony Orchestra, among others.

As a C.V. Starr Fellow, Dr. Wu earned her Doctorate of Musical Arts from the Juilliard School. Dr. Wu holds her Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees in Piano Performance also from The Juilliard School, where she was awarded the Adele Marcus Piano Scholarship, Jerome L. Greene Fellowship, Richard S. Becker Scholarship, and the Jack Katzen Scholarship.

As a recitalist, Dr. Wu has performed across North America, Europe, and Asia, appearing in New York's Steinway Hall and Yamaha Piano Salon, Chicago's Preston Bradley Hall, France's Palais de Fontainebleau, and in China's Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Her performances have been broadcast on Performance Today, New York's WQXR,

Those interested in viewing the musical performance of "Anahid," or to help fund the animated feature is encouraged to reach out to Kadian at <https://www.gabrielkadian.com/>

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### CONNECTICUT

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

### MASSACHUSETTS

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

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

**MARCH 15** — Armenian Sisters Academy Alumni Lenten Reunion, Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church. Memorial Holy Mass in loving memory of the Deceased Armenian Sisters Academy Nuns (ASA) on Sunday, at 10:30 a.m., celebrated in the presence of the Armenian Sisters. Following the Mass, brunch with Alumni, and a cultural program at Nishan & Margrit Atinizian Hall, 200 Lexington St., Belmont. Tickets \$30 per person, Payment: Venmo @HCACMA. For more information, Ingrid: 617-312-0805 or Parish Office: 617-489-2280.

**MARCH 20** — City of Smile fundraiser, Jinalov Hatz Masterclass, Holy Trinity Armenian Church, Cambridge. Friday, 7 p.m. A hands-on culinary experience where tradition meets the taste! Cook, Learn, and Taste. Seating is limited. Tickets \$100, which includes lovely take home gift. <https://www.ticketsource.com/null/t-zozvml0>

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

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

**MARCH 28** — "Music in Color" concert series featuring cellist Ani Aznavoorian and pianist Marta Aznavoorian in their Boston debut performing together. The program includes works by Komitas, Brahms, Paganini, and the Boston premiere of Peter Boyer's "Mount Ararat," written for the Aznavoorian sisters. "Music in Color" is generously sponsored by Nancy R. Kolligian. 7pm at the Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown, MA. Please RSVP at [www.armenianmuseum.org/rsvp](http://www.armenianmuseum.org/rsvp).

**MARCH 29** — Easter Bake Sale 2026 – A Taste of Authentic Armenian Flavors, Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, Nishan & Margrit Atinizian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont. Palm Sunday. Join us for our beloved annual Easter tradition featuring homemade Armenian specialties: Cheese Borek (10 pcs) – \$20; Chogreg (10 pcs) – \$15; Cream Khadaif (1 Tray) – \$30; Nazoug (5 pcs) – \$10; Michougov Keofte (8 pcs) – \$15; Tahini Bread (2 pcs) – \$8; Manti (1 lb) – \$25; Order by: March 26. Also on the same day, sale of Easter Lilies and Tulips, \$10 to \$20. Order deadline also March 26. Ingrid – 617-312-0805 or Parish Office: [holycrossbostonma@gmail.com](mailto:holycrossbostonma@gmail.com). Venmo: @HCACMA

**APRIL 9** — LET'S GET TOGETHER! Thursday, 7-9pm JOIA BOSTON AT THE HARBORSIDE INN, BOSTON Young Leaders' Friends Benefit for Armenian Heritage Park Donation: \$30/person. Advance Reservations. [ArmeniaHeritagePark.org/Support](http://ArmeniaHeritagePark.org/Support)

**APRIL 11** — The Tekeyan Cultural Association of Boston and AGBU New England District present HyeVibe. All Armenian students' Association clubs and university students are invited for an evening of music and dancing. Live music provided by Berklee School of Music ASA. Snacks and other refreshments. Armenian and American pop and dance music. 8-11 p.m., 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. Tickets \$10. Buy through venmo: @Tekeyan\_Boston.

**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.

**MAY 3** — The Tekeyan Cultural Association, Boston's Holy Trinity Armenian Church, and UCLA's Armenian Music Program present a concert by the UCLA Vem Ensemble, led by Prof. Movses Pogossian, as part of its 2026 Tekeyan tour, including works of Komitas, Toumajan, Suni, Gazarossian, and Saryan. Sunday, 2 p.m., Holy Trinity Armenian Church, 145 Brattle St., Cambridge. Free admission, freewill donations appreciated. For more info, email [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com)

**MAY 30** — The Armenian Friends of America will host a special spring Dinner Dance on Saturday, with 100% of proceeds benefiting Artsakh refugees. The evening will feature Mal Barsamian, Leon Janikian, Bobby Raphaelian, Ken Kalajian, and Jason Naroian, with vocals by Jason Naroian and John Arzigian. Their extraordinary talent and devotion to Armenian music promise an unforgettable night of culture, community, and celebration. Concert titled Helping Our Homeland – AFA Benefit for Artsakh Refugees, 6:00 PM – 11:30 PM, DoubleTree by Hilton, 123 Old River Road, Andover. Ticket Information (Advance Purchase Only) • \$100 per person, \$950 for a table of 10 (single check required). Tickets may be purchased online at [www.ArmenianFriendsofAmerica.org](http://www.ArmenianFriendsofAmerica.org), or by contacting any of the event organizers: Linda Doherty (603-760-8328), Mary Ann Janigian (603-770-3375), Kathy Geyer (978-902-3198), John Arzigian (603-560-3826), Lisa Apovian (508-662-8395), or Lu Sirmaian (978-314-1956)

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

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

### MICHIGAN

**MAY 9** — The Tekeyan Cultural Association, UCLA Armenian Music Program, Saint John Armenian Church and Music Guild of St. John Armenian Church present a concert by UCLA's Vem Ensemble as part of the latter's 2026 Tekeyan Tour, including works of Komitas, Toumajan, Suni, Gazarossian, and Saryan. Vem members, led by founder Prof. Movses Pogossian on violin, include Ally Cho on violin, Damon Zavala on viola/violin, Niall Tarō Ferguson on cello. There will be several guest speakers. Saturday, 7:30 p.m. St. John Armenian Church, 2001 Northwestern Hwy, Southfield. Free admission, freewill donations appreciated. For info, email [agop45@sbcglobal.net](mailto:agop45@sbcglobal.net)

**MAY 10** — The Tekeyan Cultural Association, UCLA Armenian Music Program, and University of Michigan Center for Armenian Studies present a concert by UCLA's Vem Ensemble as part of Vem's 2026 Tekeyan Tour, including works of Komitas, Toumajan, Suni, Gazarossian, and Saryan. Vem includes founder Prof. Movses Pogossian on violin, Ally Cho on violin, Damon Zavala on viola/violin, Niall Tarō Ferguson cello. Guest speakers Melissa Bilal, Ronald Suny, Anoush Suny. Sunday, 3 to 5 p.m. Helmut Stern Auditorium at the University of Michigan Museum of Art, 525 S. State St., Ann Arbor. Free admission. For info, email [armenianstudies@umich.edu](mailto:armenianstudies@umich.edu)



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Reading Symphony Orchestra Spring Concert To Feature Pianist Vartan Arakelian

READING, Mass. — The Spring concert of the Reading Symphony Orchestra will feature pianist Vartan Arakelian, making his orchestral debut under the direction of music director and conductor George Ogata.

The Saturday, March 21 concert program, titled “Rhythm and Fire,” will feature the passionate *Ritual Fire Dance* from the ballet “El amor brujo” by Manuel de Falla, followed by the youthful and energetic *Piano Concerto No. 1* by Sergei Prokofiev with Vartan Arakelian, 18, as soloist. This first half blazes with fiery energy and virtuosity. The concert concludes with *Symphony No. 2* by American composer Paul Creston, a work that spotlights rhythm itself — an element so central to his musical voice that he devoted an entire treatise to it.

Arakelian is a senior at Buckingham Browne and Nichols High School in Cambridge. He began his piano studies at the age of four under the guidance of Lilit Karapetian-Shougarian, and he has had masterclasses with Alexander Korsantia, Krystian

Tkaczewski, Renana Gutman, Christopher Hinterhuber and Avedis Kouyoumdjian.

Vartan is an award winner of the 2025 YoungArts National Arts Competition. His other achievements include second place at the 2024-2025 Boston Symphony Orchestra Concerto Competition, second prize at the 2023 Chopin International Piano Competition in Hartford, CT, and first prize at the 2022 New England Piano Teachers’



Vartan Arakelian

Association (NEPTA) Mildred Freiberg Competition.

As an active chamber musician, Vartan performs with friends at senior living centers around Boston and has appeared annually at NEPTA’s student recitals as well as the association’s Scholarships for Hope Charitable Recital. He was invited to perform in the 2025 Musical Armenia Concert at Carnegie’s Weill Recital Hall in New York City, and last summer, he was the orchestral pianist for the US premiere of Jonathan Dove’s *Gaia Theory* with the MIT Summer Philharmonic Orchestra.

Founded in 1931, the Reading Symphony Orchestra has an old and cherished tradition of providing quality music to the Greater Reading Community. Under the leadership of Ogata, who currently serves as the seventh music director, the ensemble has attracted players from over 30 communities and four states and played to an increasingly wider audience in a variety of venues. With a mission to provide a performance outlet for talented musicians of



Reading Symphony Conductor George Ogata

all ages and occupations, the orchestra especially focuses on reaching out to young people to learn and appreciate music.

The concert will take place at Reading Memorial High School at 8 p.m. on March 21. Tickets are available at [ReadingSymphonyOrchestra.org](http://ReadingSymphonyOrchestra.org).



Reading Symphony Orchestra

## CALENDAR

OF EVENTS &amp; PROGRAMS

### MONTREAL

**MAY 8** — The Tekeyan Cultural Association and the UCLA Armenian Music Program present a concert by UCLA’s Vem Ensemble as part of its 2026 Tekeyan Tour, including works of Komitas, Toumajan, Suni, Gazarossian, and Saryan. Vem, led by founder Prof. Movses Pogossian on violin, includes Ally Cho on violin, Damon Zavala on viola/violin, Niall Tarō Ferguson on cello. 8 p.m. Tekeyan Armenian Community Center, 825 Manoo-gian St., Ville Saint-Laurent, Québec. Ticket \$35, contact Tekeyan Center at 514 747-6680.

### NEW YORK

**MARCH 20** — Pegasus: The Orchestra will make its debut at St. Vartan Cathedral on Friday, at 7 p.m., in a program titled “Armenian Voices, American Rhapsody.” The concert is presented by the Cultural Committee of St. Vartan Cathedral, under the auspices of Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate. The program opens with selections from Komitas’s Armenian Dances, performed by guest pianist Kiron Atom Tellian, alongside orchestral arrangements of Komitas by Pegasus founder and conductor Karen Hakobyan. Cellist Sergey Antonov will perform Saint-Saëns’s Cello Concerto No. 1 and Arutunian’s Impromptu, followed by Rachmaninoff’s Vocalise. 300 East 34th Street, New York. Tickets: \$40, with ages 12 and under free. For more information or tickets, visit <https://givebutter.com/pegasus-concert>

### PENNSYLVANIA

**APRIL 24** — Intercommunal Church Service, 7:00 PM Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, Philadelphia. This historic Service of Gratitude, Unity, and Commemoration, remembering the Holy Martyrs of the Armenian

Genocide and honoring America250, will unite the Armenian community in faith. The service will be presided over by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Archbishop Anoushavan, and Bishop Mikael Mouradian, with clergy from all five Armenian churches in the Greater Philadelphia area and an Armenian community choir. A special additional ceremony will follow in an adjacent garden. Transportation available.

**APRIL 25** — Saturday, 11 a.m., Philadelphia Museum of Art. After eight years of dedicated work, the Armenian Heritage Walk is ready for dedication and the revitalized Young Meher statue is set to be unveiled. This event marks the completion of Phase One, highlighted by the installation of a nearly 15,000 square foot garden and walkway. Philadelphia Museum of Art, North Entrance. The event will be followed by the Armenian Heritage Walk Gala at the National Constitution Center. This black-tie event will honor the completion of Phase One. \$515 per Ticket (includes credit card processing fee. Please note a ticket processing fee will be added at check out.) 6:00 PM Cocktail Reception, 7:30 PM Dinner and Program, 9:30 PM Post Reception. National Constitution Center, 525 Arch St, Philadelphia.

**MAY 1** — The Tekeyan Cultural Association, UCLA Armenian Music Program, and Villanova Armenian Students’ Organization present as part of the UCLA Vem Ensemble 2026 tour, a concert with works of Komitas, Toumajan, Suni, Gazarossian, and Saryan. Vem members, led by Prof. Movses Pogossian on violin, include Ally Cho on violin, Damon Zavala on viola/violin, and Niall Tarō Ferguson on cello. Friday, 7:30 p.m. Cinema at Connelly Center, Villanova University. Tickets \$20. For more info/tickets call Vahe at 215-908-9502 or Sira at 267-902-0700

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., Waretown, MA 02472. All calendar entries must be received by noon on Monday before publication.

THE ARMENIAN  
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**EDITOR**

Alin K. Gregorian

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Aram Arkun

**ART DIRECTOR**

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Christopher Atamian, Artsvi Bakhchinyan, Florence Avakian, Christine Vartanian Datian, Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, Ken Martin, Gerald Papasian, Benjamin Poghosyan, Suren Sargsyan, Harut Sassounian, Hagop Vartivarian

**REGIONAL**

**CORRESPONDENTS**

LOS ANGELES: Ani Duzdabanyan-Manoukian, Kevork Keushkerian, Michelle Mkhlian  
YEREVAN: Raffi Elliott  
BERLIN: Muriel Mirak-Weissbach  
PARIS: Jean Eckian  
SAN FRANCISCO: Kim Bardakian Demirjian  
CAIRO: Maydaa Nadar

**PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Jirair Hovsepiyan, Ken Martin

**VIDEO CORRESPONDENT**

Haykaram Nahapetyan

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# What Role Can Azerbaijan Play Against Iran?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In light of the developments around Iran during the past week, it is extremely important to also examine Azerbaijan's role and its potential significance in a possible Iran-US/Israel conflict, as it could become an important factor in a broader global confrontation.

The alleged launch of drones by Iran in the direction of Azerbaijan has become a serious issue in bilateral relations. Iran has denied carrying out any action against Azerbaijan. As for Baku, President Aliyev has described the incident as a hostile act by Iran against Azerbaijan. In other words, Azerbaijan either does not believe — or does not wish to believe — Iran's denial.

These developments have prompted Azerbaijan to place its armed forces on a higher level of readiness. This creates additional tension not only around Iran but also throughout the South Caucasus, a region that, until now, had largely managed to avoid becoming directly involved in such confrontations.

Regarding Azerbaijan, it appears that Baku is currently attempting to increase its strategic value both for Iran and for the US-Israel alliance. Azerbaijan is positioning itself as an important regional actor in ongoing geopolitical developments, pursuing its own strategic calculations. Baku presents itself as the strongest player in the South Caucasus and emphasizes that it is a state sharing a land border with Iran. Under these circumstances, it is clear that Iran should work with Baku to ensure that Azerbaijan does not become a potential staging ground for actions against Iran. Conversely, Israel and the United States will likely seek closer cooperation with Azerbaijan in order to potentially utilize its infrastructure and territory in their confrontation with Iran.

The tightening of the strategic ring around Iran has been a priority of American policy for decades, and Iranian leaders naturally understand this, including the possibility that Baku could be drawn into an anti-Iran coalition. Tehran has neither fully denied nor apologized for the drone incident. This could suggest that the incident was not necessarily intended as a message directed at Baku, and that Tehran may indeed have had no involvement in it.

In any case, it appears that such developments may primarily serve Baku's interests, especially considering the factors mentioned above and the recent intensification of US military activity in various directions, including efforts to involve new actors in the conflict, as has been seen in the case of the Kurds.

It appears that not all states are willing to formally become involved in a war against Iran. The reason is that once the United States eventually reduces its presence or withdraws from the



Middle East, many of these countries will be left face to face with Iran. This creates a rather complicated and risky situation for a number of Arab states.

A possible involvement of Azerbaijan could also lead to the indirect involvement of Turkey, given that Ankara is Azerbaijan's senior partner and strategic ally. From this perspective, President Aliyev's position is not an easy one. He owes a certain political debt to Israel, which supported Azerbaijan during the war over Artsakh. In this sense, some may argue that the time has come for Azerbaijan to return that support, and Israel could place expectations on Baku in this regard.

The United States may also attempt to draw Azerbaijan into the conflict, believing that its involvement could influence the final outcome of the confrontation.

For now, the sides are largely limited to political statements and demonstrations of strength. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that Azerbaijan could become involved in the conflict in one way or another — not only under pressure from Israel and the United States, but also due to its own strategic ambitions.

It should not be forgotten that millions of ethnic Azerbaijanis live in Iran, and some political circles in Baku believe that, under certain geopolitical circumstances, these populations could potentially be united under a single political framework. Such a development, in their view, could significantly increase Azerbaijan's regional influence and potentially transform it into a major power in the region.

Even if Baku is eventually forced to become involved in the war, it will likely try to delay its participation for as long as possible. There are two

main reasons for this. First, Azerbaijan would need time to prepare itself militarily and politically. Second, delaying involvement would allow Iran to become significantly weakened as a result of Israeli-American strikes, reducing its ability to respond with full force against Azerbaijan.

The risks for Baku are extremely high. A failure in such a confrontation could be total, while the chances of defeating Iran at the present moment remain relatively low. For this reason, Azerbaijan is currently trying to resist both external pressure and its own ambitions, carefully managing the situation, observing developments, and waiting for a more favorable moment.

(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.)

## Parallels Between the 'Real Armenia Ideology' and Soviet And Turkish Approaches to the Armenian Diaspora

By Vahan Zanoian

A new controversy has emerged in the inter-Armenian political discourse: A group of eight prominent diasporan Armenians issued a [statement](#) calling for an end to the conflict between the Armenian government and the Armenian Apostolic Church. The statement was widely distributed. Soon thereafter, another prominent diasporan Armenian, Dr. Garo Armen, issued a statement [criticizing](#) the group's statement.

I will not dwell on the relative merits of the two statements. That is not the intention of this commentary. But I would like to focus on just one sentence in the statement of the group which appears to have offended certain readers.

The controversial statement in question is: "Even if unintentional, the Armenian

government's approach is risking severing its relations with the Diaspora—something not even the Ottoman Empire or the Soviet Union were able to do."

The statement has been severely criticized for all kinds of reasons, including its alleged historical "inaccuracy" and the inappropriateness of comparing the current government's policies with those of the Soviet Union and the Ottoman Empire.

But the off-hand dismissal of the statement as "false" risks missing a very important point in the current national crisis facing Armenia and the Armenian nation, which is the destructive degree to which the state agenda and interests have been distanced from the broader national agenda and interests.

The fact is, that both Turkey (granted, not the Ottoman Empire, since there was no diaspora as we know it today during the

Ottoman Empire) and the Soviet Union have indeed tried to drive a wedge between the Armenian diaspora and Armenia. The evidence is overwhelming. The Soviet Union was wary of nationalistic ideas entering Soviet Armenia through diasporan thought leaders. People with ties in the diaspora, including even relatives, were looked upon with great suspicion and often persecuted. Diasporan literature was prohibited to enter Soviet Armenia. It was nonetheless smuggled in and secretly devoured by such intellectual giants as Raphael Ishkhanian, Babken Chugaszyan, Silva Kaputikyan, Hamo Sahyan, Hrand Matevosyan, Razmik Davoyan, Sos Sargsyan, Abraham Alikyan (who lived in Moscow at the time) and countless others, who secretly passed the prohibited periodicals to each other, often risking their

*continued on next page*

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## By Attacking the ANCA, UK PR Firm Damages Its Own Reputation

After successfully recruiting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Azerbaijan and Turkey are trying to neutralize the Armenian Diaspora, the final step for their conquest of Armenia. Both Aliyev and Erdogan are very pleased with the compliant regime in Armenia and do not wish to see the Diaspora stand in the way of their anti-Armenian plots.

On March 2, 2026, Apollo Strategic Communications (ASC), a London-based public relations firm, attacked the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) by sending a covert memo to the U.S. media titled “Armenian Diaspora Voices Russian Interests on Capitol Hill.” ASC has ties to Azerbaijan and its Caspian Sea petroleum partners. The firm is listed in the UK Companies House registry as being involved in “public relations and communication activities.” It has undergone several name changes in recent years: “Apollo Public Relations Limited” (August 13, 2009 – August 29, 2014), and “Red Public Relations Limited” (April 14, 2008 – August 13, 2009).

The ASC memo spreads lies and disinformation by claiming that “U.S. administration efforts [in Armenia]...face resistance and opposition from the influential Armenian National Committee of America, the largest Armenian organization in the U.S., which, it is feared by some on Capitol Hill, is seeking to undermine the ongoing peace process in Congress. ANCA is accused of aligning with pro-Moscow forces, while working against Armenian national interests by endorsing Russian positions and misinformation narratives, often verbatim, at the heart of American institutions.” The memo goes on to condemn “senior ANCA officials” for issuing “an impassioned defense of the Armenian Apostolic Church.” The ANCA and the diaspora oppose a fake peace, not genuine peace, and are not against Armenia’s national interests. On the contrary, they want to protect Armenia from Pashinyan’s endless concessions to Aliyev, which could lead to the demise of the homeland.

I would like to point out several questionable aspects of ASC’s memo:

**1. Election Timing:** The memo makes a direct reference to the “crucial general election in Armenia,” indicating that Azerbaijan and Turkey are doing everything possible to ensure that Prime Minister Pashinyan remains in power after the parliamentary election of June 7.

**2. Unusual Choice of PR Channel:** Azerbaijan is paying millions of dollars to public relations and lobbying firms in Washington. Yet, strangely, this hit piece is being circulated to the U.S. media by a London-based firm rather than the

ones in Washington to which Azerbaijan pays large sums each year to lobby and do PR. This appears to be a waste of money and a slap in the face to the PR firms hired by Azerbaijan in Washington.

**3. Sources ASC offered to journalists:** ASC offered the names of four individuals who would “be happy to share further materials and information”:

. An unnamed “senior staffer at the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe — a congressional commission.” The ANCA should determine if this individual is receiving payment from a foreign firm with Azeri ties, while working for Congress. If so, he should be fired.

. “Maria Karapetyan, Member of Parliament for Armenia’s Ruling Civil Contract party and a member of the Standing Committee on Foreign Relations.” Maria should be questioned about her collaboration with a foreign lobbying firm against an Armenian organization, and possibly being compensated for it.

. “Nzhdeh Hovsepyan, a respected academic and historian, who can speak to the fraternity between ANCA and the pro-Moscow Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) party in Armenia, as well as links between the ARF and Russia itself.” He has listed several positions in the Pashinyan government on his LinkedIn page.

. “Garo Paylan, visiting scholar with the Europe Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is available to speak off the record on Armenian politics, Russian interference operations, as well as ANCA’s affiliation with pro-Moscow actors.” Paylan, a former member of the Turkish Parliament, contradicted the ASC when he posted on X: “It has come to my attention that messages were sent to journalists on my behalf regarding Armenia that I did not authorize. I speak publicly and with reporters, and my views are well known.”

**4. Possible FARA violation:** The ASC memo was sent to the American media by a UK, not US, PR firm, possibly intending to circumvent the US Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), which requires U.S. firms working on behalf of foreign entities to register with the Dept. of Justice. This may constitute a violation of American law.

**5. ASC’s lack of response:** I sent several emails to ASC last week asking the firm to provide, as it had promised in its memo, additional information on the ANCA. ASC did not respond. Such unprofessional behavior can only result in a PR firm doing negative PR against itself.

**6. Commercial ties to Azerbaijan:** Apollo’s parent company, RSK Group, has a wholly owned company, “Azerbaijan Environment and Technology Centre Ltd (AETC),” with an in country office and project work in the Caspian region, demonstrating long standing commercial activity in Azerbaijan.

The ANCA should consider filing a lawsuit against ASC for making false and defamatory statements about the organization.

## Parallels Between the ‘Real Armenia Ideology’ and Soviet And Turkish Approaches to the Armenian Diaspora

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safety and even their lives. This applied not only to certain periodicals published by the Dashnak Party (such as *Pakine* and *Aztag Weekly*). Almost all diaspora publications were subjected to strict censorship and scrutiny.

Thus, it is not only true that the Soviet Union actively tried to drive a wedge between the diaspora and Soviet Armenia, but it is also true that it ultimately failed, at least *it failed to achieve the extent of separation that it wanted*, largely because of the patriotism of Soviet Armenian intellectuals.

As for Turkey, it has had an open and declared dislike of what it calls the “external” and “diasporan” influences and constraints on the policies of the Armenian Republic, especially since Armenia’s independence. Both the former foreign minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu, and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have made several public statements bemoaning the “negative influence” of the diaspora on the policies of the Armenian Republic. As recently as 2024, Erdogan [announced](#) that “Armenia would be closer to peace with Azerbaijan if it rids itself of external influences and dependence on the Diaspora.” The Turkish government has repeatedly tried to encourage the Armenian government to separate and exclude the Diaspora from policy decisions of the State.

The attempts of the Soviet Union became a serious hurdle in diaspora-Armenia relations, but as mentioned earlier, they could not kill it. As for Turkey’s policy of aiming to exclude diasporan influence, it too did not succeed. The fact that these two policies failed is evident in the

enormous flow of resources — material, human and cultural — from the diaspora into the newly independent Armenia.

It was not until the emergence of the “Real Armenia Ideology” propagated by the current government that the separation between national and state agendas not only widened to alarming levels but was also formalized as Armenian state policy. The “Real Armenia Ideology” has many highly questionable and debatable tenets, but most of those fall out of the scope of this article and require separate discus-

sion. Here, I will focus on only one central tenet because it pertains to this issue, namely, equating the motherland with, and restricting it to, the current internationally recognized Armenian state — i.e., the 29,743 sq kms, a map of which the prime minister likes to wave while expounding on the new “ideology.” Everything that falls outside that area is officially excluded from the concerns and responsibilities of the state and is not considered to be part of the motherland.

No Armenian government has ever formalized the separation of state and national agendas to this extent. When patriotism was not as discredited as it is by today’s Armenian government, it kept the link between the two agendas alive. This was true during the darkest days of Soviet Armenia,

it was true during the first Republic, in the Declaration of Independence, during the Third Republic, and even during the first two years of the current government—until the military defeats of the 2020 44-day war. It was after that war that the current government came up with “Real Armenia Ideology” out of the political necessity to justify or explain the losses. The final loss of Artsakh in September 2023 was the fait-accompli that fully formalized the “ideology” on practical grounds.

Let me hasten to add that statehood is,

have led to intellectually honest reflection rather than infuriation.

Today’s Armenia is in fact different from Soviet Armenia, and different from the first Republic. But the fact remains that patriotic and nationalistic ideas prevalent in the diaspora were regarded as dangerous by both the Soviet Union and by Turkey, and today, they are regarded as dangerous by the government of the Republic of Armenia. So not only is the syndrome comparable, but also the driving impetus behind the syndrome is comparable.

Thus, the key message of that “offending sentence” happens to be true — namely, that the Armenian government, through its “Real Armenia Ideology,” has succeeded to formalize a clear and absolute distinction between Armenian national and state interests, while both the Soviet Union and Turkey had tried to do the same and failed to achieve the same degree of separation as we have now.

Probably the worst kind of misinformation is that which comes from people who are supposed to know better, such as historians, professors, scholars. When they start distorting historical facts, and misinterpreting policies and what truly lies behind them, they do more damage to the overall national historical and political discourse than ordinary laymen acting or speaking out of ignorance.

The controversial statement cited above was proclaimed to be not only “infuriating” and false but also reflecting the “extreme ignorance” of the authors about history. I would argue that people making such statements are themselves either ignorant about history, or much worse, are prepared to knowingly distort the historical facts in pursuit of political objectives.

and should be, the ultimate and absolute value for the Armenian nation, which has been deprived of it for far too long. But the exclusion of all national interests, history, heritage, causes, indicators of historical identity and symbols of Armenian spirituality that fall outside the internationally recognized borders of today’s Republic of Armenia from the notion of the Armenian “motherland” is not “ideology,” it is extreme minimalistic denialism. And it certainly is not, nor has it ever been, part of the legitimate aspirations of the Armenian nation.

The critics of the controversial statement in question have also often labeled it “infuriating.” But if we replace the words “Ottoman Empire” with “Turkey,” the statement is largely correct, and should



# Armenia's Demographic Curve Is Not a 'Decline Story': It's a Regime Change Story

By Edward Tashjian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

If you place Armenia's population line (1950-2026) on a wall and step back, the temptation is to narrate it as a simple rise and fall: growth to a peak, then a long slide. But that framing misses what the curve is really showing. The line does not tell one story. It tells at least three, separated by a sharp transition in the early 1990s. The graph does indeed record demographic change. More importantly, it records a change in the mechanisms that produce population.

From 1950 to 1991, Armenia grows from 1.35 million to 3.60 million, an average compound increase of roughly +2.4 percent per year. After 1991, the direction flips. As of 2026, the population sits near 2.93 million, about 19 percent below the peak: a long-run average of roughly -0.6 percent per year. The most dramatic single-year drop came in 1993, nearly -4 percent year-over-year. That "break" matters more than the gradual decline afterward, because it marks a shift from one demographic regime to another.

Seen this way, the curve invites a different question. "Why did Armenians stop having children?" or "why did the population collapse?" are questions that tend to smuggle in moral judgments. The more scientific question is: what combination of forces could reverse a forty-year pattern of growth, produce a rapid downward shock, and then lock in a lower, persistent equilibrium for decades?

A population changes by only three channels: births, deaths, and migration. Those are the basic accounting terms. The politics and sociology begin when we ask what moves those channels, and why the early 1990s moved them so abruptly.

Armenia's post-World War II expansion reflects a familiar pattern. Mortality falls with modernization and public health. Urbanization concentrates services and employment. The state's economic and welfare systems stabilize household expectations. Families plan children in an environment where the future feels legible.

But the data suggests something subtler inside that rise. Even before independence, the engine is already losing torque. If you approximate the trend in three broad segments, the population line increases rapidly from 1950-1979 at roughly +62,000 people per year, then slows from 1980-1992 to about +42,000 per year. While this is not a collapse, it is a deceleration, consistent with a society moving into the later stages of demographic transition, where fertility gradually declines as education rises, urban living expands, and family size norms shrink. The point is not to romanticize the Soviet period. It is to notice that by the late Soviet era, Armenia's growth increasingly depended on a set of structural supports and expectations that would soon be shaken.

The early 1990s are where the curve changes character. In a narrow window, Armenia moves from peak to steep decline. The sharpest drop is in 1993. By 1995, the country is roughly 9-10 percent below its 1991 peak. A fall that fast is hard to explain by fertility alone. Even if births drop significantly, population does not usually plunge in a couple of years unless migration surges or mortality spikes, or both.

Here we enter the social science of "exit." When systems break (jobs, wages, energy supply, security), households make rational decisions under uncertainty. Migration is not merely an economic act. It is a risk-management strategy. Families diversify: one member leaves, sends money back, and creates an insurance policy for the rest. In that sense, migration operates like social technology, especially when kinship and diaspora networks already exist to lower the cost of leaving.

This is where Armenia's history gives the population curve its distinctive shape. Independence arrived alongside a shock cocktail: post-Soviet economic dislocation, war and insecurity, and the fraying of state capacity. These are not separate "factors" to list; they interact. Security risk discourages investment. Economic contraction compresses wages and opportunity. Weak institutional credibility makes tomorrow feel less predictable than today. And unpredictability is a fertility suppressant: people postpone marriage, delay first births, and avoid larger families when they cannot forecast housing, employment, or safety. In demographic terms, uncertainty is not a mood but a measurable driver of postponement.

At the same time, the "exit option" became unusually powerful for Armenians because it was socially scaffolded. Diaspora networks in Russia, Europe and North America did what networks always do. They made migration easier, safer and more self-reinforcing. Once a community is established abroad, later migrants face lower informational and logistical barriers. The first departures are always the hardest. After that, leaving becomes normal rather than exceptional. And when leaving becomes normal, it does not require ongoing catastrophe to continue. It requires only a persistent gap between domestic opportunity and external

opportunity, plus a social infrastructure that keeps the pathway open.

The graph's early 1990s break is therefore a pivot point at which demography becomes political economy. Institutions, security, and labor markets begin shaping population outcomes as strongly as births and deaths.

What is most instructive about Armenia's curve is not just the plunge. It is what followed this plunge. After the initial shock, the decline becomes slower and more stubborn. From 1993-2026, the trend line is a steady negative slope, about -12,000 people per year on a simple fit. This became the "new normal."

This is where path dependence matters. Once the early 1990s set up a pattern of out-migration and lowered fertility expectations, the system develops inertia. Migration networks deepen. Remittances become a stabilizer for households and, paradoxically, can also entrench the exit model: families organize life around external income streams, and younger generations grow up with migration as an assumed life stage. Meanwhile, declining fertility and an aging age structure change the base of the population pyramid, making rebound harder even if conditions improve. When the cohort of women in prime childbearing years shrinks, a return to higher birth rates produces less absolute growth than it would have decades earlier.

Put differently: once you cross into a lower demographic regime, you cannot simply "will" your way back. Population recovery is not a speech you make in front of the public. It is a structural project. That is why slogans about raising birth rates are often disappointing. They treat a complex equilibrium (economy, trust, housing, institutions, and security) as if it were only a cultural preference.

Small states in contested regions live under an added demographic burden. Uncertainty is not occasional; it is structural. Border closures and geopolitical risk raise the cost of doing business, depress investment horizons, and keep the future "expensive" in psychological terms. That has demographic consequences. People do not plan three children in

a world where housing is precarious, wages are thin, and the security environment can shift suddenly. Fertility decisions are among the most intimate choices people make, yet they remain sensitive to macro-level credibility and stability.

There is also a second layer. When "voice" feels ineffective, when citizens doubt that political participation can change outcomes, migration becomes not only an economic choice but a political one. Leaving becomes a form of adaptation when institutions cannot reliably deliver opportunity or security. In that sense, the curve is also a record of perceived state capacity: not simply what governments do, but what people believe governments can do.

The most honest diagnosis the graph permits is this: Armenia's demographic shift is the afterlife of a historical rupture. The early 1990s were not just a difficult decade. They reorganized the country's demographic logic. They produced a generation for whom migration became a standard strategy and for whom postponement became rational. They accelerated a fertility decline already underway in the late Soviet period and attached it to a new institutional and geopolitical landscape.

If this diagnosis is right, then the "solution" cannot be reduced to a single lever. Countries reverse demographic drag by making the future credible. Stable and dignified work, housing that does not punish young families, governance that reduces the payoff of cynicism, and security arrangements that lower the everyday premium of uncertainty all shape demographic behavior. None of these are easy. Together they rebuild the conditions under which families believe that staying is not merely patriotic or emotional, but sensible and strategic.

The curve on the above graph is therefore a historical document. A record of how a society moved from predictable growth into a long era where "exit" became ordinary and the future became harder to plan. To read it well is not to despair. It is to name the mechanisms clearly, so that any conversation about Armenia's future begins not with blame, but with structure.



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