

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

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## Pashinyan Admits Forcing The Armenian Genocide Museum Head To Resign

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on March 12 acknowledged that he forced the director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI) to resign because of what she told and gave US President JD Vance during his recent visit to Yerevan.

The director, Edita Gzoyan, gifted Vance a book about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict after he and his wife Usha laid flowers on February 10 at a memorial to the victims of the 1915 genocide, which is part of the AGMI. Gzoyan also escorted them to other parts of the complex, including cross-stones placed in memory of Armenians killed in 1988-1990 pogroms in Azerbaijan. According to an AGMI press release, she emphasized “the connection between those events and the Armenian Genocide” in Ottoman Turkey.

Gzoyan tendered her resignation earlier this month. Pashinyan confirmed that she did so “on my instructions.”

see GENOCIDE MUSEUM, page 3



US Vice President JD Vance accompanied by Edita Gzoyan director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute in Yerevan, as they visit it on February 10, 2026

## International Scholars Decry Firing Of Armenian Genocide Museum Head

By Susan Badalian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Twenty-five scholars based in the United States and Europe have deplored the resignation of the director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI) in Yerevan ordered by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Pashinyan admitted on March 12 forcing Edita Gzoyan to step down because of what she told and gave US President JD Vance during his February 10 visit to the genocide memorial in Armenia’s capital, which is part of the AGMI. Gzoyan presented Vance with books about the 1915 genocide in Ottoman Turkey and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

see FIRING, page 3



The Iranian Consulate in Kapan (Marut Vanyan photo)

## Armenia Feels Impact Of The War in Iran

By Marut Vanyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

KAPAN, Armenia — In Kapan, a collage of pictures of the bombed-out Iranian girls’ school and a portrait of Ayatollah Khamenei are attached to the gates of the Iranian consulate. People laid carnations and children’s toys and the country’s flag is lowered. “He targeted children... for what sin?” reads one such poster, featuring a portrait of Ayatollah Khamenei with inscription: “We express our sincere condolences over the deaths of innocent civilians and high-ranking military personnel.”

The receptionist at the Lernagorts Hotel in the city center says that they have been hosted Iranians who “tell terrible stories, children have died,” the receptionist said with emphasis.

In ordinary times, Kapan can be considered a parking lot for Iranian truck drivers. Usually, hundreds of



A sign on the Iran-Armenia border (Marut Vanyan photo)

their trucks are parked here along the highway passing via the city.

According to official data, 400-450 trucks cross the Armenian-Iranian Agarak-Norduz customs checkpoint daily. On February 28, when the war against Iran began, the checkpoint was announced to be closed, but today it seems to be open and operating normally. Iranians rarely enter Armenia, but trucks do enter and exit.

see WAR, page 4

## Armenia Rejects Russian Aid for Karabakh Refugees Ahead of Elections

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Armenia has refused Russian humanitarian aid intended for Nagorno-Karabakh refugees ahead of the June 7 parliamentary elections. The Eurasia organization, involved in delivering the aid, had previously been linked to interference in Moldova’s 2024 EU referendum.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova confirmed Yerevan’s rejection in her March 19 press briefing while also expressing Moscow’s puzzlement over the decision.

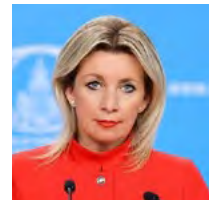
Two Russian non-profit organizations — Russian Humanitarian Mission and Eurasia — along with Russian House (Rossotrudnichestvo), were involved in the planned delivery of the aid.

According to its website, the “main mission” of the Russian House is “to strengthen Russia’s humanitarian influence in the world,” with a focus on countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The organization was sanctioned by the EU after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and has also been accused of being involved in espionage and other activities.

In July 2025, Russia sent more than 140 tons of humanitarian aid to displaced Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, intended to help about 30,000 people, organized by the same entities.

“The refusal by Yerevan to further assistance could in itself be understandable if there were no longer a need for aid,” Zakharova said, adding that Yerevan’s reasoning for the rejection “raises more questions than answers.”

see AID, page 6



Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova

## Turkish Airlines to Launch Flights to Armenia

By Emre Basaran

YEREVAN (Euronews) — Turkish Airlines is planning to start flights to the Armenian capital Yerevan amid a thaw in relations between the neighbors after decades of tension.

In a filing on Tuesday, March 10, the airline expressed its desire to launch the route as long as there was enough demand for the service.

The announcement from Turkey’s flag carrier followed a meeting between the

special envoys of both countries in Armenia on September 12.

Turkey’s special envoy for normalization with Armenia, Serdar Kılıç, arrived in the country’s eastern neighbor via the land border, which, more than three decades after being closed, remains shut to Turkish and Armenian civilians.

Following the meeting, the Armenian Foreign Ministry released a statement saying that the countries had agreed to “to carry out the necessary work for other interested companies to start flights to

various destinations starting in the summer of 2026.”

As part of the reconciliation process, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan visited Ankara in June for talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

If it launches flights to Yerevan, Turkish Airlines will not be the first carrier to resume air travel between the countries.

Pegasus Airlines of Turkey and FlyOne of Armenia started offering services between the countries in 2022.

### BEIRUT

World Central Kitchen Serves Over 200,000 Meals In Lebanon as Displacement

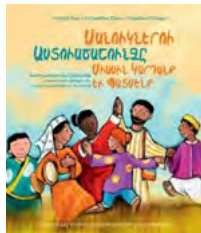
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### AUSTRALIA

Children’s Bible Book Launch in Sydney

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### HOLLYWOOD

Sev Ohanian’s ‘Sinners’ Wins Four Oscars at 2026 Academy Awards

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ARMENIA

**NEWS from ARMENIA**
**No Mass Exodus  
Of Iranian  
Armenians, Diaspora  
Commissioner Says**

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenian Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs Zareh Sinanyan has rejected claims that large numbers of Armenians are fleeing Iran for Armenia.

Speaking to reporters on March 17, Sinanyan said there was no sign of an unusual movement of people.

“We don’t have concrete figures on how many Iranian Armenians have traveled to Armenia. There is no extraordinary flow, no escape, no migration towards Armenia,” he stated.

The commissioner added that members of the community in Iran remain in their homes, trying to stay away from risky areas, and are hopeful that the tensions will calm down soon.

There have been unconfirmed reports of two minor injuries among Iranian Armenians, but Sinanyan cautioned that it is difficult to verify them.

The Armenian authorities say they are keeping in touch with the community and monitoring developments closely.

**Writers’ Union  
Disputes Government  
Claim over Ownership  
Of Historic Building**

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The head of the Writers’ Union of Armenia is defending the organization’s claim to its longtime headquarters as a legal dispute with prosecutors moves forward in court. “We are presenting our position and expect it will be understood,” Writers’ Union Chairman Eduard Militonyan told Panorama.am on March 17. The property, located at 3 Baghramyan Avenue in central Yerevan, has housed the Writers’ Union and served Armenia’s literary community for roughly 75 years, he said, questioning the basis for the state’s challenge. Three court hearings are scheduled for April, Militonyan added.

The case is part of a broader initiative launched in 2024 by the Armenian Prosecutor General’s Office targeting properties held by creative unions, including the Writers’ Union and the Artists’ Union. Prosecutors argue that ownership rights to the buildings were registered in violation of legal requirements.

The authorities contend that the properties were improperly privatized in the 1990s and subsequently transferred to the unions, which are organized as public associations. Both unions have challenged the state’s position in court, while prosecutors have filed claims with the Administrative Court seeking to invalidate the ownership registrations and return the properties to state control. [See also Aram Arkun, “Armenia’s Writers Union Resists State Efforts to Take Possession of Its Properties, *Mirror-Spectator*, December 20, 2025]

# Pashinyan Calls for Constitutional Change Demanded by Azerbaijan

By Gayane Saribekian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan again pledged on Friday, March 13, to try to enact the kind of constitutional change that Azerbaijan has set as a necessary condition for ending the conflict with Armenia.

He said that a new Armenian constitution planned by him must carry no refer-

ence to a 1990 declaration of independence which in turn cites a 1989 unification act adopted by the legislative bodies of Soviet Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The declaration is referenced in a preamble to Armenia’s current constitution. Azerbaijan says that this amounts to a claim to Karabakh recaptured by Baku in 2023. It has made clear that it will not sign an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treat-

ty, initiated last August, unless Yerevan removes the reference. The only legal way to do that is to adopt a new constitution through a referendum.

While insisting that the current constitution contains no territorial claims, Pashinyan has pledged to try to change it. He again criticized the 1990 declaration on March 13, claiming that it could provoke another war with Azerbaijan.

“The [ruling] Civil Contract is the only political force that says there must be no reference to the Declaration of Independence in the new constitution,” he said in a video message posted on Facebook.

The new constitution is already being drafted by the Armenian Ministry of Justice. Pashinyan said earlier that it will be put on a referendum after Armenia’s parliamentary elections scheduled for June 7. This suggests that the referendum will not take place if Pashinyan and his party are voted out of office.

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



The Declaration of Independence adopted by Armenia’s first post-Communist parliament in August 1990.

## Ex-President Kocharyan Announces Bid for Prime Minister

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

The opposition Armenia Alliance has announced that it will take part in the parliamentary elections, with ex-President Robert Kocharyan as its candidate for prime minister. Kocharyan also ran as the bloc’s prime ministerial candidate in 2021.

Armenia is set to hold its parliamentary elections on June 7.

Kocharyan’s candidacy was announced in a major event organized by the bloc on Monday evening in Yerevan.

The Armenia Alliance will consist of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) and Araj (Forward) party, with the campaign slogan “Together we can.”

Formed in 2021, the alliance consisted of the ARF and the Reborn Armenia party. Led by Kocharyan, the bloc received 21 percent of the vote in the 2021 snap parliamentary elections held after Armenia’s defeat in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, as political tensions remained high in the country.

Later, the Reborn Armenia party announced it was leaving parliament in November 2022.

In his speech on Monday, March 16, Kocharyan expressed their determination to win elections, adding that he was confident that “the evil embodied by [Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s] government will be defeated.”

“I have been fighting against them since the very first day they came to power. I will not rest until they are removed. But that is not enough. Those responsible for the deaths of our thousands of heroes and for surrendering Artsakh [Nagorno-Karabakh] must also be held accountable”, Kocharyan said.

Kocharyan is originally from Nagorno-Karabakh, took part in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, and led the region until he moved to Armenia and led the country first as prime minister and then as a president from 1998-2008.

The end of his tenure was marked with

a deadly crackdown on a post-election protest on 1 March 2008, in which the opposition insisted that the election results were rigged. In the ensuing crackdown, 10 people were killed, including two police officers.

After Pashinyan came to power, Kocharyan and other former officials were placed on trial for their alleged role in the violent crackdown, which made headlines in Armenia. However, he and others were acquitted of the charges in March 2021 af-

without further elaboration.

On Armenia’s foreign policy, Kocharyan stated that it “must be predictable, understandable, and reject any attempt to exploit great powers’ rivalries.”

“Our goal is to make Armenia the most efficient and best-organized state in the South Caucasus.”

Aside from the Armenia Alliance, the ruling Civil Contract party’s main opponent in the upcoming election is expected to be the Russian-Armenian tycoon Sam-



Robert Kocharyan

ter the Constitutional Court declared that it was unconstitutional to charge the former officials with “overthrowing the constitutional order.”

The court’s decision was then overturned in September 2024 and sent to the Anti-Corruption Court for a new examination. Kocharyan was again charged two months later for abuse of power.

In his Monday speech, Kocharyan said that “security remains one of Armenia’s main challenges,” highlighting the need for “a capable army, strong leadership, and powerful allies so that together we can neutralize all threats.”

He added that his bloc “support[s] peace with Azerbaijan,” but stressed that it “must be based on genuine security guarantees,”

vel Karapetyan’s newly formed Strong Armenia party.

In addition, tycoon Gagik Tsarukyan, the leader of another opposition group — the Prosperous Armenia party — vowed to build a political “Noah’s Ark.”

The former ruling Republican Party and its leader, former president Serzh Sargsyan, ousted during the 2018 Velvet Revolution, have yet to declare whether they will participate in the elections.

Civil Contract, which vowed to secure a constitutional majority in the elections, also warned that the opposition intends to come to power through a coalition formed after the vote.

(This article originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on March 17.)



## ARMENIA

# New Organization Takes on Targeting of Political Opponents, Misuse of Judicial and Security Forces

YEREVAN — A deteriorating environment for political and civil rights in Armenia raises serious concerns about the democratic conditions necessary for a fair and free election, said the International Observatory for Democracy in Armenia (IODA) in a press conference here on March 12 to present its preliminary assessment following its initial fact-finding mission in the country this week. Evidence of the government's interference in the independence of the judiciary and religious establishment, as well as politicized prosecutions of perceived political opponents, including political leaders, media figures, lawyers, and members of the clergy, have undermined confidence in a level playing field for political competition.

"A small country surrounded by hostile neighbors, Armenia's most precious asset is its democracy. That rarity in the region makes it particularly troubling to see the government chipping away at democratic freedoms in the country ahead of the June 7 parliamentary election," said Kenneth Roth, IODA executive board member.

"The international community has unfortunately misfocused its attention on securing a partisan outcome, whether 'pro-West' or 'pro-Russian', rather than on preserving what's most important of all: a thriving democracy," said Philippe Kalfayan, IODA executive board member.

The IODA is an independent, non-par-

tisan organization formed to monitor democracy and human rights conditions in Armenia ahead of the June 2026 elections. IODA has no affiliation with any national or multinational government or agency, and is composed entirely of independent human rights experts.

A delegation of IODA representatives in Armenia from March 7 to 12 has consulted with a broad range of actors in the country to reach their preliminary assessment, including members of political parties, the clergy, non-governmental organizations, and national authorities responsible for ensuring human rights and election integrity. The justice and interior ministries, the Constitutional Court, and the political party associated with the government, Civil Contract, declined to meet with the delegation. The delegation participating in this initial mission includes Kenneth Roth, Philippe Kalfayan, Sarah Leah Whitson and Mark Jones.

Key concerns identified by the IODA delegation in its preliminary assessment include evidence of:

- Politically motivated arrests and detentions of political opposition figures, including Strong Armenia political party leader Samvel Karapetyan, Archbishops Bagrat Galstanyan, Mikayel Ajapahyan, Arshak Khachatryan and Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan, in some cases involving the excessive use of harsh and disproportionate police force and often involving pro-

longed and unnecessary pretrial detention;

- Efforts to interfere in the independence of the judiciary, including through the Supreme Judicial Council, resulting in the summary dismissal of judges on apparently politically motivated grounds, and suggestions of political bias in the appointment of judges to hear cases involving political opponents;

- Excessive misuse of vague penal code provisions that criminalize speech offenses including allegations of "hooliganism" and "calling for the overthrow of the government," to prosecute members of parliament, political opposition, and the media; and

- The apparent weaponization of the judiciary and security forces by the government against political opponents.

"It is hard for Armenian authorities to insist that the election will be fair and free when the country's leading opposition leader, Samvel Karapetyan, remains under house arrest on what appear to be baseless charges," said Sarah Leah Whitson, IODA executive board member. "The government seems to be weaponizing evidence-free claims of foreign interference to lull European officials into looking the other way as it exercises increasingly authoritarian powers. The government also seems so determined to secure another term in power that it is willing in the process to compromise Armenia's emerging democracy."

The upcoming elections will take place in a tense political environment following the controversial agreement negotiated by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev after Armenia's defeat in the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) War. The IODA delegation noted that European Union, American, Turkish, and Azerbaijani officials have sought to influence Armenia's election process by publicly expressing their endorsement of and support of the Pashinyan. The European Union has committed €12 million to Armenia largely for monitoring foreign interference in the election. While the government has charged several political opposition leaders, the religious establishment and political parties with being "pro-Russian," it has presented no evidence to date of any unlawful conduct by any of these groups.

"If European Union officials truly want to support Armenia, the best thing they can do is insist that the government respect the rights of Armenian citizens and ensure a truly fair and free election in the country," said Mark Jones, IODA executive board member. "Treating Armenia like nothing more than a space for geopolitical competition is a disservice to the people of Armenia, who have fought and struggled so hard for their independence, freedom and democracy. Europe should not stand for sacrificing democracy in the name of geopolitical competition."

## International Scholars Decry Firing of Armenian Genocide Museum Head

FIRING, from page 1

"Dr. Gzoyan's forced exit sends a chilling message to academics and historians everywhere: that rigorous inquiry and truthful remembrance can be displaced for diplomatic comfort," read a joint statement issued by the genocide scholars later on Thursday.

"We firmly demand that Dr. Gzoyan be reinstated immediately and allowed to continue the outstanding work she has been leading," it said.

The signatories, most of them ethnic Armenian scholars teaching at US and European universities, warned that failure to do so would "seriously jeopardize the Institute's future and undermine its standing within the international scholarly community." They described Gzoyan as "one of

the most outstanding and dedicated directors in the history of the Institute."

"She has been a tireless advocate for rigorous historical research on the Armenian Genocide and related atrocities against Armenians — work that has strengthened global understanding of past injustices and supported the cause of historical truth," added the statement.

Pashinyan said he was right to effectively fire Gzoyan because the AGMI director's "provocative action" ran counter to his policy towards Azerbaijan and Turkey. Armenian opposition leaders as well as many public figures rejected that explanation, saying that the prime minister is openly violating academic freedom in the country. The international scholars likewise saw a "silencing of independent academic voices

in favor of political convenience."

"There is every reason to believe that this is less about museum administration and more about repositioning the AGMI to align its work with geopolitical priorities — especially a desire to avoid honest discussion of atrocities related to Azerbaijan amid ongoing normalization efforts," they said.

Gzoyan has still not publicly commented on her resignation, which upset the AGMI staff. While the AGMI is subordinate to the Armenian Ministry of Education, Culture and Youth Affairs, its directors are supposed to be appointed by its board of trustees.

The board's chairman, French-Armenian genocide scholar Raymond Kevorkian, and several members also resigned last week. Pashinyan was quick to replace them.

He also installed one of his former aides, Hrachya Tashchyan, as AGMI's acting director. The latter officially began performing his duties on Friday, March 13.

Tashchyan is a former career diplomat who is not known to have major scholarly experience. Speaking to RFE/RL's Armenian Service on March 12, he denied that Pashinyan is exerting pressure on the AGMI and its scholars. But Tashchyan also made it clear that he will be guided by the prime minister's foreign policy.

Meanwhile, there were signs of continuing discontent among the AGMI employees. All 74 people working for the institute protested against Gzoyan's resignation in a joint letter to Pashinyan last week. Arman Khachatryan, an AGMI fellow, denounced the premier in a social media post on Friday.

"By punishing Gzoyan, who is not a member of his political team, for an innocent and non-provocative act, the prime minister is ... showing that anyone — be they a scholar, a state official, a sympathizer, an opponent — who continues to speak on the subject of Artsakh will be severely punished," wrote Khachatryan.

Pashinyan, he said, has no legal authority to censor scholarly activities. Ashot Melkonyan, the former longtime head of the History Institute of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences, echoed the criticism.

"In Soviet times, due to political constraints, many historical events were falsified, bypassed and not talked about, or if they were talked about, they were turned upside down," Melkonyan told RFE/RL's Armenian Service. "Now if we are going to be guided by political expediency, it will mean returning to the political constraints of the Soviet era."

## Pashinyan Admits Forcing the Armenian Genocide Museum Head to Resign

GENOCIDE MUSEUM, from page 1

"Yes, I considered [the gift to Vance] an action contrary to the foreign policy pursued by the government, I considered it a provocative action and asked her to write a resignation letter," he told journalists.

"When the country's prime minister says there is no Karabakh movement, what does it mean to present a book on the Artsakh issue to a foreign guest? ... Foreign policy in Armenia is conducted by the government of Armenia, and any Armenian government official who says anything that contradicts the government's foreign policy should be fired," said Pashinyan.

Gzoyan has still not publicly commented on her resignation, which upset the AGMI staff. The director of the genocide memorial and its research wing is appointed by

its board of trustees, rather than the prime minister or even the Armenian Ministry of Education, Culture and Youth Affairs. Pashinyan's intervention may therefore be portrayed by his critics as an abuse of power.

The board's chairman, French-Armenian genocide scholar Raymond Kevorkian, and several members resigned last week. Pashinyan promptly replaced them on March 6. He is reportedly planning to install one of his former aides as the new AGMI director.

Pashinyan has repeatedly declared that the Karabakh issue is closed for his administration. He recognized Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh even before Baku restored control over the region following the September 2023 military offensive that forced its entire population to flee to Arme-

nia. In a speech at the European Parliament on Wednesday, Pashinyan again stated that the Karabakh Armenians should forget about returning to their homeland.

Pashinyan has also offered far-reaching concessions to Turkey, which provided Azerbaijan with decisive military support during the 2020 war with Armenia. In particular, he declared last year that Armenians should "understand what happened" in 1915 and what prompted the subsequent campaign for international recognition of the Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey. Armenian historians, opposition figures and retired diplomats expressed outrage at the remarks, saying that Pashinyan cast doubt on the fact of the genocide officially recognized by over three dozen countries, including the United States.



INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

EU Plans to Send Rapid Response Team

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The European Union will send a “hybrid rapid response team” to Armenia to assist in addressing potential threats ahead of the upcoming elections, EU High Representative Kaja Kallas announced on March 17.

Speaking in Brussels following a meeting of EU foreign ministers, Kallas said that “supporting the resilience of democracy in the region remains of paramount importance.”

“We will not leave Armenia alone in the fight against external interference. Democracies under pressure can rely on Europe,” the diplomat assured, recalling that Yerevan had requested assistance.

She also noted that during the meeting, a “wide range of issues” was discussed, including the continued deterioration of the democratic situation in Georgia.

Azerbaijan Exports \$4.2 Million in Goods to Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — In January–February 2026, Azerbaijan exported more than \$4.2 million worth of goods to Armenia, according to data from the State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan.

The total volume of exports amounted to \$4.2 million, the Azerbaijani outlet Haqqin.az reported.

According to the data, this accounted for about 0.12 percent of Azerbaijan’s total exports.

At the same time, no supplies of goods from Armenia to Azerbaijan were recorded.

On December 19, a train carrying 22 wagons of gasoline from Azerbaijan’s SOCAR company entered Armenia, followed by two additional shipments.

Vardanyan Not Permitted to Address Azerbaijan’s Ombudsperson

YEREVAN — The website www.freearmenianprisoners.com, run by the family on Ruben Vardanyan, issued a press release on March 13 about the humanitarian’s plight during his illegal incarceration in Baku:

According to the statement, during a phone call with his family, Vardanyan attempted to deliver a public address to Azerbaijan’s Ombudsperson, Sabina Aliyeva. The call was forcibly terminated.

This address was an act of last resort: over the preceding ten days, Ruben had repeatedly and unsuccessfully attempted to reach her through his lawyer, written requests, and phone calls.

The trials took place a month ago. To date, neither Ruben nor the other Armenian prisoners have received the official texts of their verdicts – neither in Russian, nor in Armenian, nor in Azerbaijani. They do not know under which charges they were convicted, or when and where they will be transferred.



The Iranian Consulate in Kapan (Marut Vanyan photo)

Armenia Feels Impact of War in Iran

WAR, from page 1

Standing at the Agarak checkpoint, ahead are the Iranian mountains, behind one which something that has shocked the whole world is happening.

“Mostly those with dual citizenship are able to leave,” says an Iranian woman who has just arrived entered the Armenian territory. “I know what war is; I witnessed the Iran-Iraq war, adults are not afraid, but I have a little child, she was very scared, that’s why we came to Armenia, to leave for a third country,” she said. Her 10-year-old daughter adds, “We were very scared, we didn’t go to school, there were pieces of glass scattered on the street, we heard terrible explosions.”

Explosions were also heard on the morning of Thursday, March 12, in Meghri, but those were not from the war. Instead, they are the work of builders digging tunnels. Iranian construction companies are involved in this mega project in Syunik, and they, like truck drivers, continue their work despite the war. Construction activity is not the same as before the war, but in any case it continues. All this cannot but negatively affect the Armenian economy.

According to data from 2025, Armenia exported goods worth \$88 million to Iran and imported goods worth \$680 million. According to the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, compared to 2024, exports from Armenia to Iran decreased by 18.3%. Instead, imports increased by 8.1%.

A TRIPP Too Far

TRIPP, or the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity, is immediately associated with the Meghri railway station (at least in Armenia), although details are sparse. How many meters wide will it be? What infrastructure will be built? Who will control the highway, railway or electric power lines? And what will its name be? Zangezur Corridor, part of the Middle Corridor, Peace crossroads, or TRIPP?

While all this was being discussed, a war broke out in Iran and this topic again was relegated to the sidelines.

No matter how important it is for the future of Armenia and the region in general, it still seems today that the rusty wagons

stubbornly do not want to move from their place. The crumbs of Stepan Shahumyan’s bust continue to lie scattered on the ground at this railway station, while another statue of a young lady with one arm outstretched continues to stand on her pedestal.

In general, everything in Armenia becomes reality at a snail’s pace, or does not

Months ago, the only plane at the Syunik airport was taken for repairs and regular flights from Yerevan to Kapan, the government promised, would soon be restored. However, today the runway is empty and this airport is reminiscent of the “international” airport of Nagorno-Karabakh, where there was everything, from the air



The Syunik airport (Marut Vanyan photo)

become reality at all. A vivid proof of this is the construction of endless apparent blocks in Yerevan, which is almost unaffordable for the population (it is needless to mention the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh), taking into account the price per square meter. And when it comes to large projects, everything becomes even more difficult.

Ambassador Kvien’s Remarks

Ambassador Kristina Kvien, the outgoing US ambassador to Armenia, announced in 2025 that the US will give \$145 million in new assistance to Armenia. The bulk of these funds will go toward advancing the TRIPP project and enhancing border security and management.

She said, “We are now working with the Armenian government to establish the structures that will develop and implement the TRIPP vision.”

traffic control tower to the runway, but the most important thing was missing: planes. As a result, Russian “peacekeeper” helicopters landed there, and everything ended for Armenians there.

In Armenia, though it is very small, getting from Yerevan to Kapan is a challenge due to the lack of transport and air communication. To get from Kapan to Yerevan, one needs to travel 6-7 hours on winding roads.

As a positive aspect of TRIPP, it was mentioned that time will be reduced for traveling and people will be able to reach Yerevan from Kapan and back in just two hours. However, when we witness how this region is getting to the boiling point, you think that it is better to be filled with the patience of like the Meghri rusty wagons and wait in silence.



## INTERNATIONAL

# World Central Kitchen Serves Over 200,000 Meals In Lebanon as Displacement Crisis Deepens

BEIRUT — As families continue to arrive in Beirut and surrounding areas following the recent escalation of conflict, World Central Kitchen (WCK) is expanding food relief operations to support people displaced from their homes.

Over the past ten days, WCK has served over 200,000 meals across shelters and communities hosting displaced families. Working with local restaurant partners and volunteers, WCK teams are preparing and delivering tens of thousands of meals each day, ensuring people have access to hot, nourishing food while also supporting small businesses that have seen customers disappear as the crisis deepens.

To reach families who are living outdoors or inside their cars, WCK teams are also distributing thousands of freshly baked croissants with cheese each day, providing



Aline Kamakian

food that is easy to eat and can be saved for later. During Ramadan, meals have included soup, salads, and dates so families can break their fast with dignity.

On the streets of Beirut, the humanitarian situation is visible everywhere. Areas that once welcomed visitors and families out for evening walks are now lined with cars and makeshift shelters. Along several kilo-

meters of the city's waterfront, families are sleeping in their vehicles or beside them, improvising small living spaces with blankets and belongings they managed to carry with them. Public spaces and parking lots that usually serve restaurants, hotels, and businesses are now filled with displaced people.

The scale of displacement is significant. This week, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that nearly 700,000 people in Lebanon have now registered on the government's online displacement platform. WCK teams on the ground are seeing a steady flow of families arriving in Beirut every day, many after long journeys from southern communities.

Chef Aline Kamakian, a WCK Chef Corps member who is leading the WCK response in Lebanon, says: "The official figures likely don't capture the full scale of displacement. Many families are staying with relatives or friends rather than in shelters, while others face barriers to registration—they may not have internet access or a mobile phone, which makes it difficult to complete the online process."

"My biggest concern now is how long this conflict will last. Every day more families arrive in Beirut, but there is already a shortage of housing and basic infrastructure to support so many people. Many have lost their homes and don't know where they will go next. At the same time, the economy is collapsing—restaurants are empty, businesses are struggling, and next week is normally a period when tourists arrive and the city comes alive."

"Amid the uncertainty, moments of humanity still emerge. We were distributing meals when a car arrived with a woman who had been traveling for hours trying to reach safety. Before she could get to a



Aline Kamakian and her team in Beirut

hospital, she had given birth in the car. In the middle of everything happening, you suddenly see a new life being born. It's a

moment that stays with you. It reminds you that even in the hardest moments, there is still humanity and hope."

## Filmmaker on Trial in Turkey for Screening Armenian Genocide Film

ISTANBUL (SCF) — Kurdish filmmaker Rojhilat Aksoy has gone on trial on charges of "publicly insulting the Turkish nation and state institutions" for screening an animated film about the Armenian genocide in Diyarbakır province, Turkish media reported.

The Diyarbakır Chief Public Prosecutor's Office drafted the indictment, citing scenes and dialogue from the film "Aurora's Sunrise," which was screened on December 17, 2024. The case is being heard at the Diyarbakır 22nd Criminal Court of First Instance.

The indictment cited the animation's depiction of the 1915 events as genocide, its portrayal of Armenian resistance as a "legitimate struggle of freedom fighters" and scenes showing Armenians being forced to change their names and religion as evidence.

It also alleged that references to Armenian men conscripted into the Ottoman army who never returned, as well as scenes showing bodies floating in a river and Ottoman soldiers separating children from their mothers, contradicted historical facts.

During the hearing Aksoy denied the accusations, saying the film falls within the scope of freedom of expression.

The court adjourned the hearing and scheduled the next session for April 6.

The animated documentary, directed by Armenian filmmaker Inna Sahakyan, tells the story through the eyes of Aurora (Ar-



A still from "Aurora's Sunrise"

shaluys) Mardigyan, who witnessed the events as a teenager before eventually settling in the United States.

The animation also incorporates surviving fragments of the 1919 film "Auction of Souls," in which Mardigyan portrayed herself shortly after arriving in the United States.

The documentary also draws on archival

footage from the 1910s and 1920s as well as Mardigyan's recorded testimony from the 1980s.

It premiered in London in November 2023 and was submitted by Armenia as its official entry for Best International Feature Film at the 2023 Academy Awards. It has since received numerous awards at festivals across Europe and the United States.

Turkish courts have previously ruled that using the term "Armenian genocide" falls within the scope of free expression. On July 2, 2024, journalists Haluk Kalafat and Elif Akgül were acquitted of similar charges of "publicly insulting the Turkish nation" over six articles published on the Bianet news website between 2015 and 2019.

## INTERNATIONAL

# Children's Bible Book Launch in Sydney

By Vahe Artinian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

SYDNEY, Australia — Every now and then in life, a moment arrives that leaves a lasting inspiration. Such was the event organized at the Armenian Apostolic Church of the Holy Resurrection of Sydney (in Chatswood) on February 19 for the launch of the book titled Children's Bible: Read and Tell.



Dr. Hrayr Jebejian speaking

The authors were present. Spouses Dr. Hrayr and Dr. Arda Jebejian are scholars with distinguished academic backgrounds. Born in Lebanon and now residing in Kuwait, the couple work in harmony as authors, linguists, and devoted Christians. Hrayr has been General Secretary of the Bible Society in the Gulf from 1990.

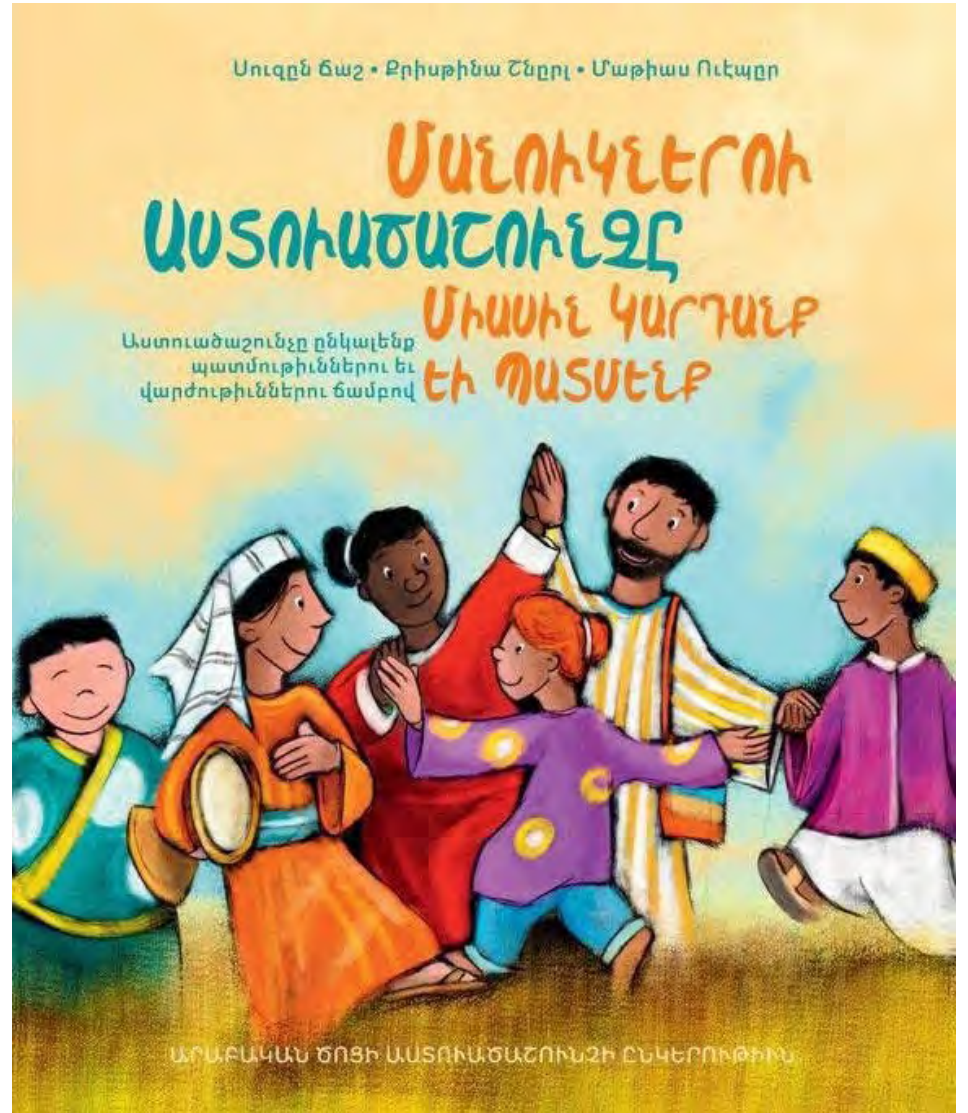
Their book, written in Armenian, is a first of its kind and is beautifully illustrated with colourful scenes depicting the works and interactions of Christ. It also includes games and workshop-style activities, making it engaging, interactive, and enjoyable for children.

During their visit, the authors had the opportunity to distribute the books to children in schools and interact with them directly. They expressed how impressed they were by the students' energy and enthusiasm, noting how proactive they were in asking thoughtful and interesting questions.

As someone who was closely involved in the formative years of the Alexander Primary School here, when we started from zero and established a bilingual curriculum in the 1990s, I firmly believe that the most paramount influence on students comes from their teachers. These students are truly



Tekeyan Cultural Association Sydney Chapter hosts Hrayr and Dr. Arda Jebejian (first two seated on the right) for lunch



blesed to be guided by the very best.

The authors also visited churches and community organizations. Tekeyan Cultural Association Sydney Chapter directors, accompanied by their wives, enjoyed a lunch with the couple where extensive conversations and exchanges about Armenian culture, heritage, and future projects took place.

It is worth mentioning that the book, though written in Western Armenian, has been presented in Armenia and very well

received by students there.

The authors expressed their gratitude to the German Bible Society, which funded the project and provided photographs used for the colourful illustrations that greatly enhance the book's aesthetic appeal.

Bishop Vardan Navasardyan, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand, emphasized the book's positive impact and gave his blessing for it to be used as an educational tool during religious studies.

## Armenia Rejects Russian Aid for Karabakh Refugees Ahead of Elections

AID, from page 1

According to her, Armenian authorities cited legal norms restricting donations and charity during the pre-election period.

In turn, Zakharova pointed to regulations in Armenia's electoral code restricting charitable organizations — “the names of which may resemble (be associated with) the names of political parties running in elections” — from carrying out charity during the election campaign.

Zakharova further asked, “what does that have to do with the situation under discussion?”

She suggested that the Armenian position was tied to the authorities' political stance.

“It is obvious that Yerevan's refusal of exclusively charitable humanitarian assistance that has no political undertone is driven by the authorities' pre-election desire to “clean out” mentions of Russia,” Zakharova said, adding that Yerevan's actions would only harm its own citizens who are “in need.”

Swiftly after Zakharova's statement, the Armenian fact-checking platform FIP reported that Eurasia, founded in Russia in April 2024, was involved in meddling in election processes in Moldova.

“In this backdrop, the organization's ‘humanitarian’ initiatives in various countries, including Armenia, are often viewed as a

tool of political influence,” FIP noted.

Eurasia positions itself implementing ‘humanitarian projects’ and enjoys close ties to and receives direct support from Russian state institutions and agencies.

The members of the organization's board of trustees included high-ranking Russian officials and Kremlin propagandists, including Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of RT, FIP also reported.

Members of the organization's executive bodies also include Russian-based blogger of Armenian descent Mika Badalyan, who, as FIP reports, was ‘actively involved in various opposition actions’ in Armenia since the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020.

The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) revealed in 2024 that the organization interfered in Moldova's EU referendum by ‘paying Moldovans to vote against the EU’. One of the applied schemes was ‘humanitarian assistance’, with ‘tens of thousands of Moldovan pensioners and state workers in three regions receiving monthly payments’ from Eurasia.

Prior to the news of Armenia's rejection, Armenia's Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS) reported that Armenians living abroad have reportedly been pressured to back certain political parties ahead of the

elections, without specifying the country behind the alleged interference.

Shortly after, a prominent election observation group in Armenia, Independent Observer, warned that an unnamed political opposition party had reportedly booked a large number of buses to transport voters, primarily from Russia, for the parliamentary elections.

Critics accuse Pashinyan's government of pre-election ploy

While Armenia has been confronting possible Russian interference in its elections, it also adopted decisions to increase salaries and provide bonuses to state servants ahead of the vote, which critics say is tied to winning their support ahead of the elections.

On Thursday, March 19, the Armenian government approved the allocation of 4.6 billion drams (\$12 million) for additional remuneration of state officials for their performance in the second half of 2025. Previously, 3.6 billion drams (\$9.5 million) had been allocated for bonus payments their performance in the first half of 2025.

The allocation, which reportedly includes □12 million (\$32,000) in additional payment for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and □6–7 million (\$16,000–\$19,000) for his cabinet members, has sparked widespread criticism. The government, how-

ever, says the payments were part of an evaluation program aimed at continuously improving the efficiency of the public administration system.

The fund will be allocated from the state reserve fund, and state employees will receive the bonuses before the elections, RFE/RL reported.

Varuzhan Hokhtanyan, from the anticorruption organization Transparency International, warned of ‘political corruption’ through such acts.

“This all happens on the eve of elections [...] naturally, having received that much money, they are expected to be grateful for it,” he told RFE/RL.

Separately, again on the same day, the Yerevan Municipality adopted a decision to increase the salaries of employees of kindergartens under its jurisdiction by 15–20 percent starting in May.

Opposition city council members have also criticized the raises as a pre-election ploy.

“Elections are ahead, and in order to please these people, you were directed to raise [their salaries], and it was raised in May. This means they will receive the high salary of May on 3, 4, or 5 June and will go to the polls on 7 June,” Armenak Danielyan from the opposition Mother Armenia faction stated, according to RFE/RL.



# Community News

## NAASR NextGen Armenian Studies Program Accepts Applications for Summer Institute For High School Students

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association of Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) announces the launch of its NextGen Armenian Studies Program, an interactive summer institute for high school students and recent graduates. Applications to join the inaugural Summer 2026 cohort are open now and close on April 20. Interested students are encouraged to visit the program webpage and apply early, as space is limited.

The three-week program, taking place July 13–31, was developed with innovative pedagogical methods that engage and inspire young students. “This is not a lecture series, and it’s not a camp. This is a project-driven intellectual lab where students inves-



Dr. Lisa Gulesserian

tigate urgent questions about Armenian history, identity, memory, justice, and representation — and build something with real-world impact,” said Ara Araz, Chairperson of the Board at NAASR.

Students will be introduced to Armenian topics by world-class faculty from leading universities including Harvard, MIT, Cornell and Columbia. In groups, students will develop a strategic digital campaign that responds to contemporary Armenian concerns. The program concludes with public presentations of student campaigns to a live audience at NAASR headquarters.

Each week builds on the last, starting with deep historical roots and ending with urgent contemporary questions.

Week One: Civilization & Culture, explores ancient origins, early Christianity, medieval manuscripts, and the cultural traditions that have inspired Armenian people through the centuries.

Week Two: Diaspora & Identity, examines centuries of Armenian life under various empires and within global trade networks, emphasizing the connections maintained through the press and other forms of media.

Week Three: Justice & the Present, engages directly with genocide testimony, post-genocide rebuilding, the loss of Artsakh, denial and disinformation, and ongoing advocacy efforts.

see NEXTGEN, page 9



The Ararat-Eskijian Museum

## Ararat-Eskijian Museum and AGRP to Host Exhibition and Lecture on Visual Culture of Genocide Commemoration

LOS ANGELES — The Ararat-Eskijian Museum (AEM) and the Armenian Genocide Research Program (AGRP) of the Promise Armenian Institute (PAI) at UCLA announce a collaborative exhibition and lecture will take place on Sunday, April 12, at 4 p.m. (PT) at the AEM Sheen Chapel.

The program, titled, “We Will Raise Monuments in Our Hearts’: The Making of Armenian Genocide Commemoration,” and organized through the joint efforts of AGRP Director Taner Akçam and AEM Director Marguerite Mangasarian Goschin, will explore the visual culture of remembrance surrounding the Armenian Genocide.

Armenians have long sustained a deeply rooted tradition of remembering collective loss, cultivating a distinct and evolving culture of memory in response to persecution and violence. Yet this commemorative culture — expressed through monuments, posters, ceremonies, and artistic production — has not been sufficiently documented in its full breadth. Beginning with the Hamidian period, this exhibition highlights the dimensions of Armenian commemorative practice and traces how memory has been visually articulated across generations and across the diaspora.

The exhibition will feature a recently acquired collection of commemorative posters from around the world, representing various years and perspectives of remembrance. These rare materials offer valuable insight into how Armenian communities have memorialized the Armenian Genocide across time and geography.

Dr. Gevorg Vardanyan, a Postdoctoral Fellow at UCLA, will deliver a lecture on the history of Armenian Genocide commemoration. Drawing on original research, the talk reexamines the emergence and evolution of commemorative practices from the Hamidian Massacres to the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide and offers a new interpretation of the development of Armenian commemorative culture.

The exhibition will be open to the public at the Ararat Home Deukmejian Community Center (15105 Mission Hills Rd., Mission Hills, CA 91345) on the following dates and times: April 14–19: Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; April 21–25: Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For additional information, contact Goschin at eskijian@ararat-eskijian-museum.com or AGRP Program Coordinator Nanor Hartounian at nhartounian@international.ucla.edu.



Gevorg Vardanyan



Taner Akçam

## Pegasus Development Expands to Sacramento to Develop Republic FC Stadium, Downtown District

LAS VEGAS — Pegasus Development, a Las Vegas-based boutique project management firm that oversees experiential corporate and entertainment ventures for various clients such as Universal Creative, Netflix, Meow Wolf, Goldman Sachs, Museum of Ice Cream, Aquarian, and the Neon Museum, has expanded its operations to Sacramento, Calif., as a key member of the stadium development team for Republic FC. Pegasus owner and CEO Art Zargaryan will oversee the club’s development projects, including its soccer stadium and the surrounding 31-acre neighborhood that will become a new downtown district in the years to come.

The 31-acre project has advanced past the groundwork phase, and stadium construction will begin later this year.



Pegasus CEO Art Zargaryan

In addition to building a new outdoor downtown home for sports and entertainment, the project will help double the size of downtown, revive a

plot of land that has sat vacant for a half-century and restore vitality to the Railyards area, the ancestral home of Wilton Rancheria.

Pegasus Development has emerged as a national leader in complex, experience-driven real estate projects. In just eight years, the firm has managed more than \$7.2 billion in development totaling 8.1 million square feet, spanning luxury resorts, themed attractions, museums, multi-use retail destinations, and multifamily communities.

“I am immensely proud of the projects we have done in Las Vegas and am excited to expand to work on this monumental project in Sacramento,” said Zargaryan, who recently opened a second office in Sacramento to support the company’s business activities there. “Our projects in Las Vegas, such as Universal Horror Unleashed and the Museum of Ice Cream, are unique immersive experiences that have prepared our team to design and develop not only Republic FC’s soccer stadium but the entire downtown entertainment district that it will anchor.”

“Our Republic FC stadium is the catalyst for transforming the Railyards into a thriving new district for Sacramento,” said Chris Franklin, Chief Operating Officer of Wilton Rancheria and Republic FC board member. “Pegasus brings the experience needed to help turn this long-awaited project into reality, and we’re excited to continue building momentum toward the permanent home for Republic FC that the community deserves.”

Republic FC is an American professional soccer team based in Sacramento that competes in the Western Conference of the USL Championship.



COMMUNITY NEWS

# International Partnerships Recognized at Meeting

By **Tristan Longwell**

GLENDALE (*Glendale News Press*) — It was a very special moment at the Glendale City Council meeting on Tuesday, March 10, Mayor Ara Najarian said, while presenting commendations to the consuls general of Armenia, Dominican Republic, Japan, Korea, Mexico and the Philippines.

“Glendale, as you know, has long been a place where the world comes together. Our residents represent cultures and traditions from across the globe, and through our sister city program, we built friendships that connect our local community to cities and people thousands of miles away,” Najarian said.

Through the Glendale Sister Cities Program, Najarian said the city has developed strong bonds with cities around the world.

According to the city’s website, Glendale currently has 11 sister cities and 4 friendship cities that participate in the program, designed to promote cultural exchange, encourage educational collaboration, and build economic development partnership.

In August 2024, the City Council directed staff to establish a committee to revitalize the sister cities program, according to a staff report.

The program launched initiatives to raise visibility and community participation, including the ‘Under One Sky’ kickoff event, presence at multiple citywide festivals, and strengthened partnerships with cultural organizations. Delegations from South Korea, Mexico, Armenia, and Artsakh visited Glendale, while the city supported youth cultural exchanges with Boeun-gun and Kapan.

Najarian further advanced diplomatic ties

through international visits to Japan, South Korea, and Armenia, the report states.

Glendale has sister and friendship city relationships with the cities of Gyumri and Kapan in Armenia, Rosarito and Tlaquepaque in Mexico, Santiago De Los Caballeros in the Dominican Republic, Higashiosaka in Japan and Gimpo, Boeun-gun and Goseong in the Republic of Korea. Most recently, Najarian said Glendale welcomed Santa Rosa in the Philippines as its newest sister city.

“Our community includes residents whose heritage is traced back to Armenia, Mexico, Korea, Japan, the Philippines and

the Caribbean and so many other parts of the world as well, and this diversity is one of our greatest strengths, and our sister city program celebrates that reality,” Najarian said.

Consul General of Armenia Anna Avetisyan, outgoing Consul General of the Dominican Republic Alfonso Rodriguez, Consul General of Japan Kosei Murota, Consul General of the Republic of Korea Kim Youngwan, the Consulate General of Mexico Chief of Staff Luis Ángel Castañeda, Edith Fuentes, president of the Filipino-American Business Association of Glendale, and Lucille Floresta, president

of the United Architects of the Philippines Southern California Chapter, accepted the commendations, on behalf the nations they represent, from the mayor at the meeting.

“Thank you ... for your strong commitment to and profound interest in promoting international exchanges and partnership with foreign cities, ideally to believe building a relationship, building a partnership among local cities, municipalities enriches, strengthens our bilateral relationship among nations, mutually reinforcing the relations,” Youngwan said, adding that Korea has benefitted from its sister and friendship city relationships with Glendale.



Mayor Ara Najarian presented commendations to the consuls general of Armenia, the Dominican Republic, Japan, Mexico, Korea and the Philippines at the Glendale City Council meeting on Tuesday.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Detroit Mayor Moves Into Manoogian Mansion

DETROIT (Axios) — As Detroit's first female mayor, Mary Sheffield has become the first female officeholder to reside at the mayoral Manoogian Mansion.

State of play: Sheffield has officially moved into the iconic home along the east riverfront in the Berry subdivision, a city spokesperson confirmed to Axios.

The spokesperson said they weren't aware of any renovations planned to the century-old home given a new occupant, but they didn't answer a question asking when Sheffield moved into it.

Flashback: The seven-bedroom, nine-bath mansion was built in 1927 for \$65,000, per Detroit Historical Society archives.

Industrialist and philanthropist Alex Manoogian donated the home to the city in 1965 to be used as a mayor's residence.

The first mayor to live there was Jerry Cavanagh, according to the Michigan Chronicle.

Historically, per the archives, the mansion's study was used as the mayor's second office, and dignitary receptions and conferences were often held there.

Between the lines: The nonprofit Mayors Residence Society is responsible for the mansion's upkeep and furnishing, per the Free Press, which reported last year on \$347,000 in privately funded upgrades under former Mayor Mike Duggan.



## NAASR NextGen Studies Accepts Applications for Summer Institute For High School Students

NEXTGEN, from page 7

"The program invites intellectually curious students ready to engage critically with complex historical and contemporary issues," said Lisa Gulesserian, program di-

rector and award-winning instructor. "Specifically, we seek to enroll learners who want to develop their reading, analysis, and communication skills in a dynamic, collaborative, and immersive learning environ-

ment. To help us fill our learning lab with promising students, we are seeking nominations from leaders in our community. If you work with a student—in a classroom, a church, a community organization, or other spaces — who is inquisitive, ready for a challenge, and would benefit from this experience, we want to hear from you by filling out our nomination form."

### Program Details

The program will take place at the NAASR Vartan Gregorian Building in Belmont. The program is open to rising high school juniors, rising high school seniors, and 2026 high school graduates.

The cost is \$2,500 with need-based financial aid available.

At the end of the seminar, students should gain a portfolio-ready digital campaign, reading, writing, collaboration, and analysis skills, experience with presenta-

tions, a cross-disciplinary understandings of Armenian topics and issue, familiarity with uses and limitations of AI tools and a meaningful addition to college applications.

"Our new summer program helps students gain skills to shape the future in an informed and engaged way," added Henry Theriault, vice-chairperson of the Board at NAASR.

Brian Ansbikian, a member of NAASR's Executive Committee, agreed: "We're equipping students with the tools to navigate complex narratives and make a real difference."

To learn more and apply, visit [naasr.org/pages/summerprograms](https://naasr.org/pages/summerprograms).

Nominations for promising students can be submitted by community leaders at <https://airtable.com/appukDCT2i6HBP-9mp/pagp0SqQonVvJ9ixo/form>.

## OBITUARY

### Harry Kazanjian

#### Longtime Pastry Chef Dies in Hit and Run

By Patrick Herron

ROCKVILLE, Md. — The beloved pastry chef and owner of Les Délices French Bakery Harry Kazanjian died after being struck by a vehicle earlier this month, according to a statement shared by the bakery with customers.

Family members said he was killed Sunday, March 1, 2026, after being struck by a car while at the intersection of Norbeck Road and Avery Road in Rockville. The bakery said he died at the scene.

Harry spent nearly four decades serving the community through his work at Les Délices, the family owned bakery that opened in 1987 and became known for its French pastries, cakes and specialty desserts. According to the bakery, he dedicated 38 years to crafting desserts for customers across the Washington region, often creating signature cakes and experimenting with unique flavor combinations.

Before becoming a pastry chef, Harry studied horticulture in college and had a deep interest in plants and nature. He later pursued baking, traveling to New York on weekends early in his career to observe and learn from professional kitchens, including time spent working alongside chefs at the restaurant Tavern on the Green. Over time he developed a reputation for meticulous techniques and high standards for ingredients and presentation.

The bakery described Harry as a master pâtissier who took pride in creating desserts such as Hazelnut Crunch, Mango Passion

Pistachio and Lychee Guava cakes, as well as a wide range of gluten free pastries. His final creation, according to the bakery, was a batch of Grand Marnier Charlotte cakes prepared by hand shortly before his death.

Les Délices has long operated as a family business. Harry's wife helped support the bakery since its early days, and his sister in law Maria worked alongside him in the kitchen for many years helping manage production and preserve recipes. Other family members, including his daughter,



âA collage of family photos with Cheff Harry Kazanjian

son in law and son, have also helped operate the shop over the years.

A funeral service was held Wednesday, March 11 at St Mary Armenian Apostolic Church in Washington, D.C., followed by burial at Gate of Heaven Cemetery.

Family members are also asking anyone who may have been traveling on Norbeck Road near Avery Rd between approximately 6:10 pm and 6:35 pm on March 1, or who may have dash camera footage from the area, to contact [info@lesdelicesbakery.com](mailto:info@lesdelicesbakery.com)

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COMMUNITY NEWS

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# Marquis Who's Who Listee Raffi Manjikian Featured in The February/March 2026 Issue of Forbes

JERSEY CITY, N.J. — Raffi Manjikian, professor of chemistry with Hudson County Community College, was selected by Marquis Who's Who for a prominent feature in the February/March 2026 Northern New Jersey regional issue of *Forbes* magazine.

Having dreamed of becoming an educator from a young age, Manjikian has now dedicated nearly 15 years to teaching. Beginning in 2012, he worked as an adjunct professor at 12 different institutions. Demonstrating a strong work ethic, Manjikian traveled between these schools, often teaching up to 60 credits a semester in a variety of subjects. He gained experience leading classes in biology, chemistry, physics and math.

Despite the challenges of this exhaustive schedule, Manjikian worked diligently until a full-time opportunity became available. That opportunity arrived in 2021, when he took on the role of instructor of chemistry at Hudson County Community College. Utilizing his cross-subject expertise, Prof. Manjikian primarily teaches chemistry but also leads classes in other subjects when needed. Further, he has demonstrated a high degree of comfort teaching in various modalities, which include in-person, remote, hybrid and fully online classes.

Among his responsibilities, Manjikian prioritizes uplifting his students and Hudson County Community College in every way he can. He has represented the school as vice chair of the All-College Council

and co-chair of the President's Advisory Council on Institutional Engagement and Excellence. Prof. Manjikian aims to motivate and inspire students with the general rule that anything is possible. He has written hundreds of letters of recommendation, served as a reference, tutored, and provided students with guidance above and beyond the subjects he teaches.

The core of his approach to interacting with students is rooted in an unfortunate personal history as a student. He recalls being frequently discouraged by his educators, a feeling he had to overcome by motivating himself to prove them wrong. Prof. Manjikian also points to the attitudes instilled in him by his parents. He grew up watching them work hard and treat everyone with respect.

Manjikian harbors great ambitions for his future, including achieving tenure in the coming year, and one day earning faculty promotions and taking on administrative roles, reflecting his drive to further shape the institution's curriculum and policies.

While he enjoys his role as a chemistry

professor, Manjikian is constantly eager to explore ideas for inventive new classes. He has expressed interest in creating biochemistry and postbaccalaureate programs at Hudson County Community College. He

plans in the future.

Prof. Manjikian's performance as a professor has been supported by his own education. He obtained a bachelor's degree in chemistry, graduating cum laude from Seton Hall University in 2009. Subsequently, he earned a master's degree in chemistry, graduating with distinction from the same institution in 2011. He is currently pursuing a PhD in health science.



Prof. Raffi Manjikian with the Northern New Jersey Forbes cover

has also pitched teaching a food science course, which — based on his experience teaching the course at a different institution — he is confident would prove extremely popular. He hopes to pursue some of these

plans in the future.

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**Spring**

MARCH

28

APRIL

6

**Summer 1**

JUNE

25

JULY

13

**Summer 2**

JULY

28

AUGUST

15

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# Arts & Culture

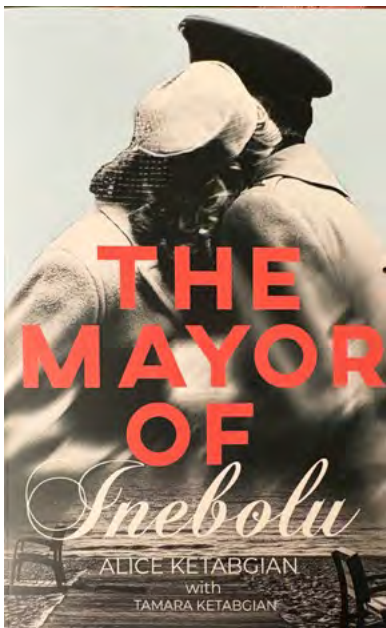
## BOOKS

### Balancing Pleasure With Instruction: Alice Ketabgian's *The Mayor of Inebolu*

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

The world the characters inhabit in Alice Ketabgian's newly released novel, *The Mayor of Inebolu* (Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, 2025), written with her daughter, Dr. Tamara Ketabgian, is an uplifting world, even if never-ending wars, separations and exile are an inextricable part of the characters' existences. Verjin, Sarkis, Yevkine and thirty members of the extended Balyan family are uprooted from their ancestral home in the town of Kastamonu near the Black Sea, in present-day Turkey, and moved to Scutari/Constantinople (currently Istanbul) to only be further transplanted to Saint-Etienne and Lyon in France, eventually immigrating to New Jersey, the United States. Ketabgian's resolve to convey a message of forgiveness and of hope amidst the disruption and the chaos of a life of permanent exile is unwavering.



The setting of the novel is May 1915, Inebolu, a scenic port town on the Black Sea coast in the Kastamonu Province. Ulvi, the handsome young Turkish mayor of Inebolu falls in love with the beautiful 17-year-old Verjin Balyan on seeing her in the fish market of Inebolu. The kind and generous mayor offers to give the Balyan clan safe passage to Constantinople in exchange for Verjin's hand in marriage. Verjin would be making "a huge sacrifice," we are told, to save her family from being deported into the Syrian desert, in accordance with the government's deportation orders for the entire Armenian population of Turkey. Yet, Verjin spends nine years with Ulvi as "a happy family," to borrow her own words to "Dear Mom and Dad," until she and her little girl Emine — later Yevkine — are abducted by her brother Sarkis to save them from a life among infidels: "Verjin and Emine belonged in an Armenian family."

*The Mayor of Inebolu* is a historical novel, notes Ketabgian in her Afterword to the book. The Hamidian massacres, the Death Marches, the Gallipoli war, the Spanish Civil War, Hitler's attacks on the Allied Forces in the Second World War, and the ensuing displacements, are indeed all in the background at one point or another. Besides these truthfully presented "facts," however,

see BOOKS, page 13



## Ola Abdel Monem

### 'For me, Armenians are not victims, but survivors!'

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN/ASYUT, Egypt — Ola Abd El Moniem is an Egyptian writer from Asyut, Egypt. She began writing in early childhood and later maintained a personal blog starting in 2008. In 2013 she awarded Saqiet El Sawy Short Story Competition. She is an author of novels (*The Legacy of Al-Ansari* and *The Market of Al-Aayeqa*, both 2022) and a short story collection (*Hiring a Doctor*, 2023–2024). At the beginning of 2026 she published a novel *The Alienation of the Duduk* (Cairo by Al-Rawaq), which is a human story about an Armenian family that, fleeing the Genocide, settles in Egypt. The new country becomes the starting point of a bitter journey of alienation, during which separation from the homeland turns into an experience of survival and reconstruction on new soil.

**Dear Ola, please accept my warm congratulations on the publication of your novel. It would be interesting to hear your thoughts on the current state of Egyptian women's literature today.**

Today, Egyptian women's literature feels vibrant and full of life. I am constantly inspired by how women writers bravely explore contemporary social and psychological issues with creativity and honesty.

What I love most is the focus on empowerment, the courage to challenge stereotypes, and the way identity is explored in all its complexity.

These stories don't just reflect society — they also celebrate women's evolving roles and voices in Egypt today.

As a writer, I feel a deep connection to this literature, because it shows how personal experiences can resonate widely and contribute meaningfully to cultural conversations.

Overall, it is a rich and dynamic landscape that makes me proud to be part of Egyptian women's literary scene.

**What were your first encounters with Armenians and Armenian history, and what inspired you to write this novel?**

Since my childhood, I have been captivated by brilliant Egyptian female artists such as Fairuz, Nelly and Lebleba. I was always amazed not only by their talent but also by how skillfully they sang and performed in ballet and dance. My mother would often point out, when noticing my admiration, that they were of Armenian descent — that their origins were not Egyptian. I found it fascinating that they mastered our language so perfectly while expressing themselves with such artistry.

As the centenary of the Armenian massacres approached, discussions in Egypt and around the world grew about that region, once devastated, what the Turks had done to its people, and the countries that have officially recognized the Armenian genocide.

**The *Alienation of the Duduk* portrays the transmission of grief, longing, and memory across four generations, while also revealing the human ability to transform death into life by putting down new roots and growing anew. How did you approach conveying this process in the narrative?**

For me, Armenians are not victims — they are survivors. This is at the heart of my novel. From the very beginning, I wanted to acknowledge the massacres they endured, but also to explore identity and roots — how a person interacts with their

see OLA, page 15

## Nuné Melikian Performs Babadjanian's Violin Concerto, Gives Book Talk In Charlottesville

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — On March 28, Dr. Nuné Melikian will give her debut performance of Babadjanian's *Violin Concerto* with the Albemarle Symphony Orchestra in Charlottesville, conducted by Philip Clark, a long-time admirer of Babadjanian's music. Clark has been deeply fascinated by Babadjanian's work and has even transcribed several of the composer's pieces for orchestra.

While in Charlottesville, Melikian will also give a book talk organized by the Armenian Club of the University of Virginia.

This collaboration marks a historic moment for this rarely performed piece.

"My aspiration is to make the broader public fall in love with Babadjanian's music and encourage other performers to embrace this amazing work," said.

In 1948, the ambitious young Arno



Dr. Nuné Melikian (photo Ilya Ratman)

Babadjanian was on the verge of graduating from the Moscow Conservatory. Full of passion and potential, he was driven by an unshakable desire to leave his mark on the world of music. At the time, his idea of composing a violin concerto seemed audacious — especially considering the towering figure of Aram Khachaturian, whose own violin concerto had already achieved legendary status. In the Soviet Union, following in Khachaturian's footsteps felt intimidating, yet Babadjanian boldly pressed forward.

It was, however, a risky venture. His *Violin Concerto*, which would become the first Armenian violin concerto to emerge post-WWII, faced considerable challenges. Though groundbreaking for its time, it never quite found a place in the standard Soviet violin repertoire, nor did it gain much international attention.

In 1949, the Composer's Union sharply criticized the concerto, accusing Babadjanian of merely

see MELIKIAN, page 13



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## Sev Ohanian's 'Sinners' Wins Four Oscars at 2026 Academy Awards

HOLLYWOOD — Armenian-American producer Sev Ohanian's film "Sinners" won four Academy Awards at the 2026 ceremonies on March 15, marking a major moment for the record-breaking film that entered the ceremony with the most nominations in Academy Awards history.

"Sinners" was written and directed by Ryan Coogler and produced by Coogler alongside his wife Zinzi Coogler and Ohanian, the film received awards for original screenplay (Coogler), lead actor (Michael B. Jordan), cinematography (Autumn Durald Arkapaw) and original score (Ludwig Göransson).

The genre-melding film is set in the Mississippi Delta in 1932, during the Jim Crow era, featuring the story of twin brothers, both played by Academy Award Winner Michael B. Jordan, who run a blues joint.

The trio of Ohanian and Ryan and Zinzi Coogler founded their production company, Proximity Media, in 2021. In February 2021, they signed a five-year deal with the Walt Disney Company for television productions and established a working relationship with Warner Bros. Pictures.



From left, Sev Ohanian, Zinzi Coogler and Ryan Coogler

## Balancing Pleasure with Instruction: Alice Ketabgian's *The Mayor of Inebolu*

BOOKS, from page 13

the reader is offered little that connects her emotionally to the young Armenian girl's "sacrifice" of having to live with an "infidel" in "permanent separation" away from her family — "after all, I'm a Turk, she's a Christian and a great gap separates us," says Ulvi—or that explores the larger tensions of living in Turkey as a member of a repressed minority. One yearns for scenes that would show Verjin's reputation being "irreparably stained among the Armenians of Scutari," once she moves to Constantinople.

Some 45 years later, at the conclusion of the novel, through her Turkish half-brother Adnan Demirel, Yevkine finds out that her father is a Turk. The initial shock is there, to be sure, but a glimpse

into her father's life leaves Yevkine "exhilarated and proud." She, in fact, plans to visit Inebolu with the hope that Adnan's wife and children will have started to appreciate their "father's impartial approach to history," earning her brother's praise of "my optimistic sister." The spirit of reconciliation is inevitably the driving force behind the story.

A message of hope is a valuable insight, yet the effort to be encouraging becomes too palpable at times. To drive the moral home, Ketabgian often states the obvious with utterances such as, "That's a positive way to think," "It's a relief that you're talking about it. Talking is giving you permission to heal," or, "I've heard of times when misfortunes have forced people to explore more positive life choices," and many more. She, in fact, affirmed as

much at her book presentation: "I wanted to end everything on a positive note. There's no point in being negative."

More than the message, however, what one leaves *The Mayor of Inebolu* with is Verjin's burial scene. "The burial took place at a roadside cemetery. It was too windy to light candles. The stiff breeze quickly dried their tears. The bearded Armenian Orthodox priest was bundled in a parka. Everyone wept because it felt as if a piece of history was gone," evokes the uniqueness of a whole wider history of exile and of loss. The evocative power, on the other hand, of the almost poetic, "It had begun to rain, and the car's windshield wipers squeaked plaintively as they sat in silence," as Sarkis drives Yevkine to the airport — yet another uprooting — with her mother and his son Janno, forges a connection for the reader that goes far deeper than the all-too-obvious words of encouragement and the messages of "tolerance and love."

*The Mayor of Inebolu* is the fruit of 20 years of work and travels, an effort certainly worthy of recognition. Indeed, the novel helps bring to life many of our cherished traditions and values. Verjin and her daughter Yevkine delight their families and their guests with their favorite Armenian dishes, the tasty *dolma* and the "unusually labor-intensive dish," *soo beoreg*. The fruit from the quince tree in their backyard, made into delicious jams, and the magic of the Christmas tree decorated with home-made ornaments created from "leftover buttons, scraps of fabric and wool from [their] old pillows and comforters" are reminders of the Armenian housewife's devotion to her home and her family, always bastions of "calm and stability."

Ketabgian's genuine desire to be kind, to forgive, to hope, and to move forward also comes through. Both Ulvi and his son Adnan are "fair and honorable" human beings.

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GRACE AND PAUL SHAHINIAN ARMENIAN CHRISTIAN ART AND CULTURE LECTURE SERIES

# ARMENIAN ART AND THE WORLD

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

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

**Date: March 26, 2026**  
**Time: 5 p.m.**  
**Location: Heritage Hall\***

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

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

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**ABSTRACT**

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

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

## Nuné Melikian Performs Babadjanian's Violin Concerto, Gives Book Talk In Charlottesville

MELIKIAN, from page 12

imitating Khachaturian — a claim disputed by some scholars. After a rocky start, Babadjanian's concerto remained somewhat dormant, overshadowed by both criticism and neglect.

In modern times, Babadjanian's *Violin Concerto* is considered one of his most important works. The piece's orchestration, its thematic depth, and its vibrant contrasting characters across the movements mark a significant development in his compositional journey. Yet, it still remains vastly underperformed.

Melikian, a violinist and scholar, has dedicated herself to advocating for Babadjanian's legacy for nearly 15 years. Having performed his music all over the world, including on the stage of Carnegie Hall, she defended the first comprehensive dissertation about the composer, written in English, in 2019 at McGill University. In 2024, she continued her scholarly work by publishing the first monograph on the composer in English. Since then, Dr. Melikian has presented her book, *Arno Babadjanian: An Armenian Beat in Soviet Time* (Newmag Publishing House), in more than 20 live and online presentations, including at



Maestro Philip Clark

Stanford University, with NAASR in conjunction with Harvard University, UCLA, the University of Michigan, the Tekeyan Cultural Association, AGBU AVC, and the American University of Armenia. She has also held residencies at Lynn University and Concordia College while concurrently giving recitals highlighting Babadjanian's chamber music.

As the French version of the book is in process, Melikian remains fully committed to her performing mission.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

## CONNECTICUT

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

## MASSACHUSETTS

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

**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 Atinjian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont. Palm Sunday. Join us for our beloved annual Easter tradition featuring homemade Armenian specialties: Cheese Borek (10 pcs) – \$20; Choreg (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).

**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 Studios, University of Michigan Ann Arbor Weiser Hall 500 Church St., Ann Arbor. 734-647-4143. For more info visit [projectsave.org](http://projectsave.org).

**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.

## 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)

## 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 Manooagian 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>



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# ‘For me, Armenians Are Not Victims, But Survivors!’

OLA, from page 12

surroundings to create a life that is worth living, a space where growth and creativity can flourish.

My characters start as pure Armenians, carrying sorrow and longing for the past, deeply affected by the forced departure from their homeland. Then comes a new generation, still holding the past in their hearts, yet grateful for their survival and hopeful for what lies ahead.

The third generation becomes fully Egyptian, but remains connected to its history and ancestry, appreciating all those who extended a helping hand.

Finally, the fourth generation is hybrid — those compelled to leave against their will, who eventually return in search of their roots. For me, it feels as if the cycle of exile, alienation, and longing is engraved on my characters, and they journey through it until the very end, carrying both memory and hope.

**In the novel, the duduk serves as a symbol of Armenian sorrow and pain. In your opinion, what could serve as a symbol of Armenian joy?**

I believe that the success of Armenians in preserving their identity, both in Egypt and wherever they live, as we see today, as well as their excellence in every field they immerse themselves in, can serve as a symbol of joy.

Beyond their personal and professional achievements, they have succeeded in bringing their history and cause to the world’s attention for over a hundred years, inspiring many countries to acknowledge what happened and to show solidarity and compassion.

For me, this combination of resilience, accomplishment, and the ability to make their story heard is a true source of happiness and pride

**In January, your book was presented**

**at the annual Cairo International Book Fair. What kind of reception did it receive there?**

I was truly overjoyed by the warm reception of my novel in the cultural community. It was incredibly moving to see longtime friends and readers who have followed me from the very beginning, as well as new readers interested in history and the Armenian cause, embrace the work with such enthusiasm.

What made me even happier was the positive response from the Armenian community in Egypt and their heartfelt celebration of the novel. I was especially honored by the presence of Armen Mazlumian, president of the Armenian National Authority in Egypt, at the fair. We also agreed to organize a cultural event in the near future, bringing me together with the Armenian community to share and discuss the novel, which fills me with excitement and gratitude.

**Thank you for your answers, dear Ola. I wish for your novel to be translated into various languages and hope that one day you will visit Armenia!**

I want to thank you for your kindness, your attention, and your dedication in researching me, as well as for your eagerness to connect. I hope my work will achieve the success it deserves, as it is still at the threshold of reaching readers. I also hope it will be translated into several languages, foremost among them Armenian, so that the story reaches everyone and they can understand how their ancestors survived against all odds — and how they were able to turn death into life.

Who knows, perhaps we will meet soon in Yerevan, and I can learn to play the duduk from you, and taste gata, khorovats and lavash bread myself!

Not all of us play the duduk, but it is hard to find an Armenian man who cannot make khorovats, so you’re welcome!



## CALENDAR

### OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

#### NEW YORK

**MARCH 21** — The Women’s Guild of Holy Cross Armenian Church of Union City is hosting a Lenten Luncheon on Saturday, 12 p.m. at the Church Annex, 318 27th St., between New York and Palisade Avenues, Union City. \$40 per person. Seating is limited. Payment (check or cash) accepted at door. RSVP to Diana Leone at 201-941-4108 (landline).

#### NEW JERSEY

**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.

#### PENNSYLVANIA

**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 hon-

or 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

#### RHODE ISLAND

**APRIL 25** — Armenian Genocide Remembrance Service and Concert. Saturday at 7 p.m. Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church, 70 Jefferson St., Providence. Program includes Armenian Genocide Remembrance Service and Memorial Concert by Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island.

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.

## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**  
SINCE 1932



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# War in Armenia's Strategic Backyard

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Although nearly 3 weeks have passed since the beginning of the war against Iran, and the United States has managed to kill Iran's Supreme Leader and several high-ranking military officials, destroy parts of the navy, and strike key infrastructure, the war is far from over. Initially, the plan was to carry out rapid and targeted military strikes against Iran based on the assumption that the Iranian system of the government would not be able to resist effectively. The expectation was that the population would not rally around the leadership, that uncontrollable public uprisings would occur, and that a decapitated leadership would be unable to function.

However, these expectations have not materialized so far. On the contrary, Iran's power centers appear consolidated, and the system shows no visible signs of internal fracture yet. It is important to understand what Washington's miscalculations were and how the US currently assesses the situation. One thing is certain: at this point, Iran has managed to disrupt the US-Israeli plan for a quick victory.

Expectations in Washington that a broad coalition would support the United States and Israel against Iran have also failed to materialize. Prior to "Operation Epic Fury," many within the Trump inner circle believed that various states and regional actors would join the confrontation once the operation began. Despite those expectations, no direct involvement occurred from Iraqi Kurdish units, NATO members, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, or other actors historically at odds with Iran.

The issue is not that these states have resolved their disputes with Tehran. Rather, they understand that airstrikes alone cannot achieve government change. Such a goal would require a ground operation — likely even more complex than the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — and neither the United States nor Israel appears prepared for such an undertaking.

At the same time, predictions that the Iranian opposition would seize the moment and launch a large-scale uprising have also proven unrealistic. Although Iran experienced protests months earlier, mass demonstrations have largely disappeared since the start of the war, likely due to wartime conditions and fear of harsher punishments under emergency rule. There is also a fundamental difference between opposing one's government and confronting a foreign military attack while outsiders encourage government change.

Regional actors are also acting cautiously. Kurdish forces remember their experience in Syria, where heavy losses produced little strategic gain. Meanwhile, pro-Iranian forces in Iraq and Iranian strikes in northern Iraq have suppressed Kurdish militant activity.

Saudi Arabia is also avoiding direct involvement, wary of Iran's military capabilities and the risks posed by escalation. Similarly, Azerbaijan — initially considered by some in Washington and Tel Aviv as a possible additional front — has avoided confrontation. Baku understands the imbalance of power and is unlikely to act unless Iran becomes significantly weaker.

Another factor is Turkey. As Azerbaijan's strategic partner and a regional competitor of Iran, Ankara prefers a weakened but not collapsed Iranian state. The collapse of Iran could destabilize the region and strengthen Kurdish separatist dynamics — an outcome Turkey seeks to avoid. Moreover, Turkish policymakers may calculate that after Iran, other regional powers could eventually become targets of strategic pressure.

Ultimately, regional actors understand a basic geopolitical reality: while American warships may eventually depart the region, Iran will remain a permanent neighbor as it has been there for thousands of years, even though weakened.

Azerbaijan also faces logistical challenges. Due to tensions with Tehran, the Iranian border has been partially closed, complicating access to the Nakhichevan exclave. At present, the most viable land route connecting Azerbaijan with Nakhichevan runs through Iranian territory. If the connection between Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan is disrupted due to the Iranian side, Azerbaijan will have to find alternative ways to ensure that connection. Such a development could be dangerous for Armenia to some extent, particularly for the Syunik region as the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) doesn't exist yet and under current circumstances it is difficult to judge how Iran is going to handle the situation in that regard. Azerbaijan may use the momentum and demand a land corridor from Armenia as the TRIPP is yet not ready for use. The statement of Aliyev on using "a Zangezur Corridor" without Armenians special permission is still very dangerous.

Within the Trump administration itself, there were skeptics about the feasibility of government change. As a result, the strategy focused on goals that could realistically be achieved and would allow the United States to declare victory and disengage. Officially, the mission centered on destroying Iran's missile capabilities, neutralizing its naval forces, and preventing the development of nuclear weapons.

Regime change, while often discussed rhetorically, was never formally declared as an official objective. This ambiguity may serve as a deliberate exit strategy, allowing Washington to end the war at a moment of its choosing while claiming that its stated goals were accomplished. The killing of Iran's Supreme Leader on the first day also created an opportunity to frame the campaign as a major success. For the American public, such a development can be presented as a decisive victory. However, policymakers understand that



without a large-scale ground operation, change of the government remains virtually impossible — something the United States is unlikely to pursue due to political, military, and strategic constraints.

## The New Leader, but the Old Leadership

Iran's response to the assassination of its Supreme Leader challenged expectations in Washington. Rather than producing internal fragmentation, the political system rapidly consolidated around a successor.

The election of Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei as Supreme Leader sends several messages. First, it demonstrates the continuity and resilience of Iran's political structure. Second, Mojtaba Khamenei is widely viewed as a powerful figure within Iran's political and security establishment, particularly due to his close ties with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Under wartime conditions, this choice reflects not only religious authority but also strategic and military considerations. It also signals that external powers cannot determine Iran's leadership. In other words, the assumption that leadership change would automatically lead to a shift in Iran's political course proved incorrect.

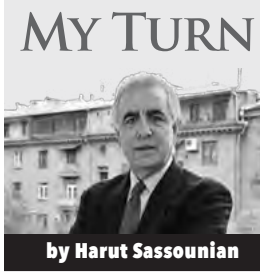
The final outcome of the conflict depends largely on how success is defined. If the main objective of the US-Israel alliance was to degrade Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities, then the campaign may eventually be framed as successful. However, if the underlying goal was regime change, that objective appears far less attainable. Even the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader has not fundamentally altered the country's institutional structure or foreign policy orientation.

The most likely outcome may therefore be a clash of narratives: Washington declaring victory after achieving limited military objectives, while Tehran argues that it successfully preserved its political system. Another possibility is a prolonged war of attrition. Yet such a strategy would be costly and politically unpopular in the United States, especially ahead of midterm elections. A long conflict could also intensify domestic political tensions and strengthen the influence of rival powers such as Russia in the region. For these reasons, a prolonged war is unlikely to serve Washington's long-term interests, making a controlled disengagement the most probable strategic option.

(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.)



## COMMENTARY



## MY TURN

by Harut Sassounian

## Pashinyan Exposes His Feuds with Church and Political Parties Before European Parliament

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan committed, last week, the sin of attacking the clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church and his domestic political opponents before the European Parliament. Regardless of internal disputes, it is unacceptable for the head of the Armenian government to disparage his people to a foreign audience. He should not disseminate outside of Armenia his feuds with local opponents.

Pashinyan began his remarks in Strasbourg on March 11 by praising himself for making “such changes in Armenia and in the South Caucasus in general, which have a century-long, if not a millennium-long significance.” In reality, his constant concessions to Aliyev and Erdogan have brought Armenia to its knees.

He then spoke of a non-existent “complete peace” with Azerbaijan, well before any peace treaty was signed.

Pashinyan repeated another false claim about a road crossing Armenia, linking Eastern Azerbaijan with Nakhichevan. This so-called “Trump Path” (TRIPP) was included in the memorandum signed on August 8 at the White House by Pashinyan, Aliyev, and Trump. The memorandum described TRIPP as an “unobstructed” path through Armenia which was done at the demand of Aliyev, who calls this road a “corridor,” implying that the Armenian territory it crosses belongs to Azerbaijan.

Although the Prime Minister is harming the country, he portrayed himself as Armenia’s savior, claiming that “in the months of March-April 2024 we had reached the brink of Armenian statehood, and if in April 2024 we had not made a decision to launch the demarcation process with Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia would today not be an independent state, but at most a territory under foreign rule.” This claim is delusional and detached from reality.

Pashinyan then claimed, “And how did we solve the problem? We talked to our employer, the people.” In fact, since promising to consult the public in spring 2018, Pashinyan has never sought the people’s opinion. He makes all governmental decisions alone, bypassing the government’s ministers, Parliament, and the President. The country has become a one-man show — a de facto dictatorship.

Pashinyan denied “that the Armenian government is restricting freedom of

conscience, that a dictatorship is being established in Armenia, that there are political prisoners in Armenia.” All three statements are facts, despite his denials. He blamed the “de facto head of our church..., the emissaries of the clergy, and representatives of certain lobbying organizations affiliated with them.” Actually, the clergy and opposition groups are attempting to make a last-ditch effort to save the country from his destructive policies.

Ironically, Pashinyan speaks of the rule of law while violating just about every law as well as the constitution by meddling in the Church’s internal affairs. He wants to decide who should be the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church and what the clergy can say in their sermons. He has accused clergy members of being foreign agents, without a shred of evidence. If true, the government would have taken legal action.

Near the end of his 26-minute speech, Pashinyan referred to “Karabagh” Armenians disparagingly, claiming that they are being given “false hopes.” Contrary to his defeatism, Artsakh Armenians hope to return to their homeland when circumstances allow. He also asserted that Artsakh Armenians “must receive Republic of Armenia citizenship,” despite being citizens of Armenia and possessing passports of the Republic of Armenia. Pashinyan is rejecting their Armenian citizenship to prevent them from voting against him in next June’s parliamentary elections.

To deflect from his failure to secure the release of the Artsakh leaders held in Baku, he cited four Armenian prisoners released in January by Azerbaijan. He did not disclose that they were exchanged for two Syrian Jihadist mercenaries who had been serving life sentences in Armenia after their capture in the 2020 war, while fighting for Azerbaijan.

In 2019, when Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), I wrote a commentary commending him for his speech and particularly his spontaneous answers to members’ questions. My commentary was titled, “Pashinyan passes first political test in the international arena.”

A few days later, Pashinyan shared my commentary on his Facebook page, after adding the following introductory note: “I am happy that one of the most prestigious newspapers of the Diaspora, ‘The California Courier,’ has appreciated in this way my speech at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).” His post received 3,900 likes, 181 comments, and 195 shares.

Months later, when I visited Armenia, the Prime Minister received me in his office. During our hour-long meeting, we discussed the critical issues facing Armenia, as I have done with all previous leaders of Armenia.

Given Pashinyan’s zero tolerance for criticism, I doubt he will share my new commentary on his Facebook page, let alone express his appreciation.

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

# The ‘Vance Syndrome’ and the Uncertain Future of The Armenian Genocide-Museum Institute (AGMI)

By Hayk Martirosyan

The rumors about the forced “change” of Dr. Edita Gzoyan, the director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI), have now been confirmed. It’s now possible to discuss this openly. Saying there is a significant amount of injustice and humiliation involved would be an understatement. Under such circumstances, even mentioning scientific impartiality and academic freedom seems pointless.

I myself worked at AGMI, with some interruptions, from 2006 to 2014. After that, I continued active cooperation, and during the last eight years, also in an institutional capacity as a researcher at the Lepsius House in Potsdam (providing archival materials and literature, organizing joint initiatives, etc.). I am currently also a member of the editorial board of the AGMI journal.

Edita was elected director of AGMI two years ago. Clearly, these past two years have been the most productive in AGMI’s history across many areas: an unprecedented number of scholarly articles published in international and high-ranking journals; after persistent efforts, the International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies was included last year in the highly sought-after Scopus list of academic journals (the only one in this field in Armenia); international conferences and events were organized with global partners; an audio-guide system was introduced and made available in multiple languages; the contributions of all staff members — not just a select few — were recognized and encouraged; connections with diaspora Armenian scholars were strengthened, and their contributions to AGMI’s work increased. It is impossible to list all the accomplishments. Why remove Edita? Where did she fail?

Consider the scholarly aspect: review the works and articles published by Edita over the last two years, including those in international journals with impact factors.

How many people in our field can you name in Armenia who have more publications? Consider the active collaboration with diaspora scholars. The clearest proof of their disagreement with this decision is that the two diaspora scholars on the Board of Trustees — Raymond Kevorkian and Stephan Astourian — have both left the board (as well as Vasken Yacoubian, President of the AGBU Armenia office), along with two other scholars from Armenia (Hranush Kharatyan and Harutyun Marutyan).

Look at the management aspect: the best evidence is the joint letter-appeal from all 74 AGMI employees (although it was clear that it would not be accepted) asking to prevent the change of director. As someone who spent many years at AGMI and knows its inner workings well, I assure you that such unity and positive atmosphere have never existed there before — I, of all people, know that.

Apparently, the claims are correct that her dismissal relates to J.D. Vance’s visit and the director’s conversation about Artsakh, which is so undesirable to the authorities. Moreover, judging from the videos, she even had the “audacity” to accompany Vance to the khachkars commemorating the massacres of Armenians in Azerbaijan and tell him about them, and to present him with a book. (Here I would gladly recount an attempt to “convince” an influential professor in Leipzig on precisely this topic in a much more complicated situation, and the respected professor’s “beautiful” and “accessible” reply — but I cannot make it public.)

Personally, I believe that Vance’s visit was simply the final stroke. Because, to her credit, Gzoyan has always spoken out about the issue of Artsakh. A large amount of work has been done in that direction. She has also raised other topics undesirable for the “constructive” authorities within the context of the Armenian Genocide (for example, topics about Nemesis, Tehlirian Trial, etc.). The reason for Edita’s dismissal is certainly not the con-

struction works at the memorial complex, as is being presented. First, the construction is primarily under the ministry’s control. Besides, if that had been the reason, the director would have been dismissed last year when the controversy surrounding the construction reached its peak. Finally, if construction had truly been the issue, they could have appointed an “extraordinary and plenipotentiary foreman” until the work was completed. Or a rhetorical question arises: after the construction is finished, will the future director with construction expertise leave the position?

Gzoyan can leave with her head held high. Unfortunately, the enormous sense of hurt, disappointment, and injustice will hardly diminish because of that.

Well then — long live “academic freedom,” long live “effective” governance, long live the “appreciation” of diaspora Armenian scholars, long live the “recognition” of the efforts to internationalize AGMI’s work and Armenian scholarship, long live your talent for “taking into account” the opinion of AGMI employees, and finally, long live “justice.”

Now appoint a “professional” whose only qualification will be “flexibility” and adaptability. Otherwise, the “Vance syndrome” tends to recur.

*(Dr. Hayk Martirosyan served, with some interruptions, as a research fellow at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute from 2006 to 2014. Since 2017, he has been a research associate at the Lepsiushaus in Potsdam. Martirosyan studied Oriental and Turkic studies at Yerevan State University and earned his doctorate from the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia. His research focuses on the history of missionary activity in the Ottoman Empire, missionary biographies, and the history of aid organizations and rescue efforts for Armenians. He is the author of two monographs and more than two dozen scholarly articles.)*

# Genocide Scholars Express Deep Concern Over the Removal of Genocide Museum-Institute Director

(A group of scholars focusing on genocide issued a letter decrying the removal of Dr. Edita Gzoyan as the director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI) in Yerevan last week. The statement follows.)

We, the undersigned, express deep concern over the recent and troubling developments at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI) in Yerevan. On March 11, 2026, Dr. Edita Gzoyan, one of the most outstanding and dedicated directors in the history of the Institute, submitted her resignation — reportedly under pressure from the government rather than by free choice.

Dr. Gzoyan has elevated the AGMI to international academic prominence. Under her leadership, the Institute expanded its archival collections, organized key symposia and conferences, and produced scholarly works that have significantly advanced genocide studies worldwide. She has been a tireless advocate for rigorous historical research on the Armenian Genocide and related atrocities against Armenians — work that has strengthened global understanding of past injustices and supported the cause of historical truth.

What makes her forced departure particularly alarming is its timing and context. Just weeks earlier, Dr. Gzoyan had personally guided U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance during his visit to the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex. She highlighted not only the genocide of 1915 but also later massacres of Armenians in Sumgait, Kirovabad, and Baku, underscoring the historical continuity of anti-Armenian violence in the region. She also presented Vice President Vance with scholarly works on the Armenian Genocide and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict — essential context for understanding Armenia's history and contemporary challenges. On March 12, in response to a journalist's question regarding the forced resignation of Dr. Edita Gzoyan, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated:

"I was the one who asked the director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute to submit a resignation letter; it was done on my instruction. I considered giving a book about Artsakh to Vance to be a provocative act that goes against the Government's policy."

The sequence of events indicates a broader and deeply troubling pattern: the silencing of independent academic voices in favor of political convenience. There is every reason to believe that this is less about museum administration and more about repositioning the AGMI to align its work with geopolitical priorities — especially a desire to avoid honest discussion of atrocities related to Azerbaijan amid ongoing normalization efforts.

The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute is not merely a tourist site. It is a center of historical memory and scholarship — a bulwark against denial and distortion. Its leadership should be protected from political interference, not subjected to it. Dr. Gzoyan's forced exit sends a chilling message to academics and historians everywhere: that rigorous inquiry and truthful remembrance can be displaced for diplomatic comfort.



All of us have been actively engaged with AGMI in numerous meaningful capacities—participating in its conferences, serving on the editorial board of the International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies and on the academic board, collaborating with AGMI and its staff on joint scholarly initiatives, and contributing to the field through the publication of academic articles and books. Gzoyan has played a key role in involving us in AGMI's activities through her creative vision and outstanding scholarship, helping shape the Institute's future.

We believe that any attempt to remove Dr. Gzoyan from the directorship of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI) would seriously jeopardize the Institute's future and undermine its standing within the international scholarly community. Such a decision would not only disrupt the Institute's ongoing work but would also send a deeply troubling signal to leading scholars of genocide studies worldwide, discouraging them from collaborating with AGMI and weakening the global academic partnerships that are essential to its mission.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the Armenian government to refrain from interfering in the leadership of the Institute. We call on the authorities to respect the independence of AGMI and to ensure that Dr. Gzoyan is allowed to continue her work without political pressure or intervention. Protecting the Institute's autonomy and leadership is critical for preserving its credibility, safeguarding its scholarly mission, and maintaining the trust of the international academic community. We believe that directorship of the AGMI should be based on the qualities of the individual as a scholar and administrator and not the political expediencies of any particular administration.

The AGMI staff and members of the Board have expressed their full confidence in Dr. Gzoyan's exceptional leadership. We firmly demand that Dr. Gzoyan be reinstated immediately and allowed to continue the outstanding work she has been leading.

Prof. Bedross Der Matossian, Professor of History, Hymen Rosenberg Professor in Judaic Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Prof. Elyse Semerdjian Robert Aram and Marianne Kalosdian and Stephen and Marian Mugar Chair of Armenian Genocide Studies at the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University.

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## COMMENTARY

# Trump and the Kennedy Center

By Peter Balakian

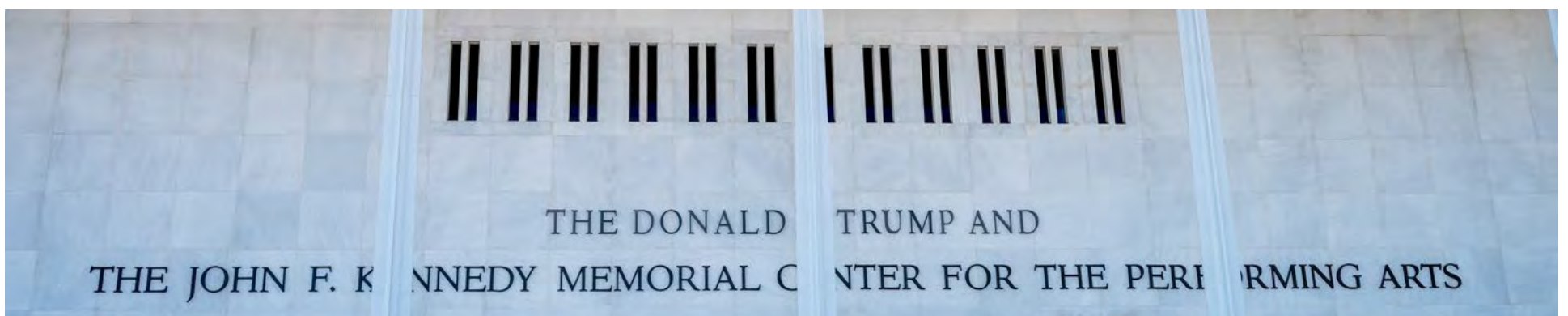
The fallout from Trump's effort to control The Kennedy Center for the Arts has been predictable, and now, in the wake of so many cancellations by artists, he has decided to close the Center for two years allegedly for renovations. His actions seem like nothing more than damage control in the face of what has become an embarrassment and a travesty. The latest departure from the Center is Jean Davidson, the Executive Director of the National Symphony Orchestra who found the new "external forces" too difficult to deal with. Prior to this, though, listening to what artists have said and done since Trump's takeover of the Center tells us something significant about American culture and the arts. Philip Glass's recent withdrawal of his Symphony No. 15, which was to be performed by the National Symphony Orchestra this year, is a particularly instructive act of protest against Trump's purge of the Kennedy Center board and his appropriation, including the assertion of his name on the Center's wall — an unlawful act without approval by Congress. The eminent American composer, who is a recipient of a Kennedy Center Honors Award, made it clear that "the values of the Kennedy Center today are in direct conflict with the message of the symphony." Symphony No. 15 celebrates Lincoln's early, important speech about the criminality of mob violence following the lynching of a law abiding, free Black man in St. Louis in 1838. Lincoln excoriates

tinuum of creative work in the arts and humanities that has defined America. A central location for culture and the performing arts, The Kennedy Center is by its definition an inextricable part of our culture of critical thinking. Performing artists are creative artists who think conceptually in their particular art forms as they critique power, human flaw, and institutional corruption, and often offer us edgy insights about ourselves and society that inspire us and can also make us uncomfortable. Popular, jazz, and classical musicians, opera singers, song writers, stage actors and directors, choreographers, conductors, dancers, and comedians have all defined the Kennedy Center for the past fifty-four years. If you think of just a few of the great performing artists who have performed or been honored by the Kennedy Center, you get a sense of what this great multicultural caravan of American culture means: Mahalia Jackson, Ella Fitzgerald, Pete Seeger, Count Basie, Martha Graham, Alvin Alley, Miles Davis, Placido Domingo, Carlos Santana, Gloria Estefan, Shen Yun, Yo-Yo Ma, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Barbara Streisand, Paul Simon, Bruce Springsteen, Dolly Parton, David Henry Hwang, Stevie Wonder, Queen Latifa, Marlon Brando, Elizabeth Taylor, Robert DeNiro, Jane Fonda, Sean Penn, Dustin Hoffman, Meryl Streep, Elizabeth Taylor, Madonna, Lin-Manuel, Aretha Franklin, Curtis Mayfield, James Brown, Marvin Gaye, Beyonce, Jay-Z, Chris Rock, Richard Pryor, George Carlin, Joan Rivers, Sarah Silverman, Cher, Lily Tomlin, Norman Lear, Mavis Staples, Ray

drug and sex traffickers, and his need to create division and enmity across our nation are inversions of what the arts embody.

Donald Trump's name and John F. Kennedy's do not belong together on anything let alone a center devoted to the Arts in the nation's capital. Whatever one's assessment of JFK, I think Americans can agree that he was a man of intellectual depth. His advisors were professors and intellectuals like Arthur Schlesinger Jr., John Kenneth Galbraith, McGeorge Bundy who gave birth to the phrase "the best and the brightest." The great poet Robert Frost read at his inauguration, and Kennedy went to Amherst College to give a speech in honor of Frost. The Kennedy White House was a place where artists, writers, and musicians and Nobel Laureates dined. Pablo Casals played there and Andre Malraux was feted there, and the President joked that "the White House was becoming an eating place for artists." Kennedy's elegant language, wit, and cultural knowledge and his capacity for self-reflection (he apologized to the nation on TV for his error in judgment on the Bay of Pigs invasion) are the antithesis of Trump's behavior.

Trump needs his name on the wall of the Kennedy Center; he needs to take over Greenland; he needs to call himself the greatest president in history; he needs to have a Nobel Prize, and so on. It seems all of a piece and one shockingly unbecoming a head of state. By comparison, Presidents Clinton and Obama, whose intellectual



"the disregard for law that pervades this country," speaks about the urgent need for "sound morality," "reason," and the "reverence for the constitution and laws." As Glass suggests, Lincoln's call for law and morality stand in stark contrast to the various acts of lawless cruelty carried out by the Trump administration, including the needless killings by ICE of more than forty people over the past year, which would certainly include the killings of Renee Goode and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis.

The continued string of cancellations by scheduled performers (ticket buyers and board members are cancelling in droves as well), and most dramatically the exodus of the National Opera Company, tells us something about artists and their work, and about American culture and the ethnic diversity that has defined it. In cancelling the sensational musical *Hamilton*, the producer Jeffrey Sellers said that "the purge by the Trump administration of both professional staff and performing arts events at or originally produced by the Kennedy Center flies in the face of everything this national center stands for." The American folk duo Magpie referred to the boycott as a "moral picket line," while the choreographer Doug Varone said the renaming "pushed me off a cliff." Singer-song writer Sonia de Los Santos said that she "[does] not feel that the current climate at this beloved venue represents a welcoming space for myself, my band, or our audience." Folk singer Kristy Lee stepped back "out of respect for the artistic freedom and the Kennedy Center's founding mission." The Puerto Rican band Balun cancelled, explaining that "the space no longer aligns with our values. Our safety, integrity, and commitment to justice come first." The US Marine Band, the country's oldest professional music organization, cancelled noting "the program once based on equity and diversity of voices is no longer supported at the deferral level under this administration." Stephen Schwartz, the composer and lyricist for musicals such as *Wicked* and *Godspell*, cancelled his appearance with the Washington National Opera saying that the Center's home for apolitical free expression for artists of all nationalities and ideologies has been severely undermined by Trump.

The Kennedy Center is part of a powerful tradition of America's culture, both past and present. Since its doors opened in 1971, it has been an important part of the con-

Charles, Arthur Rubenstein, Gene Kelly, Cecily Tyson, Alvin Alley, Martha Graham, Marian Anderson, Oprah, Harry Belafonte, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Sammy Davis Jr, Arthur Miller, Leonard Bernstein, Morgan Freeman. Given Trump's animosity to diversity, it pushes one's sense of irony to think of his name on a performing arts center in the nation's capital given what the performing arts owes to African Americans, Latinx Americans, Jewish Americans, Asian Americans and many others.

At the core of the contradiction of Trump's self-proclaimed directorship and name usurpation is his pervasive anti-intellectualism and hostility to critical thinking. Ever more in his second term, he has become an embodiment of what the historian Richard Hofstadter identified as "anti-intellectualism in American life" — a hostility that is manifest in his language and actions. He vilifies professors as "Marxist lunatics and traitors." He disdains liberal culture deriding it as wokeism — a clichéd slogan for the unthinking and one that has become grist for his social media propaganda. He has dismantled the Department of Education, the National Endowment of the Humanities, and the National Endowment for the Arts, while also gutting the National Science Foundation and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting — all hubs of the nation's intellectual and knowledge production and all of which involve critical thinking. His campaign to control some powerful universities by withholding federal funding is an extortion-like tactic. His efforts to censor journalists and the critical-thinking media are assaults on the First Amendment.

The arts embody human empathy, a passion for truth, the unorthodox dynamism of the imagination, a reverence for language, and the authenticity of the human voice. Artists engage with human suffering and vulnerability, moral conscience, and the capacity for self-irony and historical critique, and they take us into the complexities of both the tragic and comedic dimensions of existence. Trump's lack of humanity is a glaring inversion of these values. His compulsive lying and fabrications, his often-vile language and name-calling at perceived enemies has lowered the moral and cultural atmosphere of the nation. His contempt for diversity, for vulnerable immigrants and refugees, his pardoning of white-collar criminals including

achievements are impressive, would never have imagined intruding on the Kennedy Center. They understood it was a sacred memorial to a slain President whose gifts and talents intersected with the performing arts and more broadly with American intellectual culture and history. Their respective memoirs are works of introspective thinking and engagement with language. Their educations — all earned on their own from humble beginnings — are American role models. Clinton was a Rhodes Scholar before he attended Yale Law School. Obama was the president of the Harvard Law Review. Both Presidents were admired global leaders who brought eloquent and analytical language to the world stage as they did their best to forge alliances with other nations based on common democratic values and honorable traditions of diplomacy. They were also admired by the nation's intellectual and cultural communities.

Trump's intrusion on this memorial is another act of vengeance against culture, education, and the arts and humanities. This, like so much else Trump is doing, is needless violence against our foundational democratic institutions. It also feels like an act of vandalism, what the legal scholar Raphael Lemkin referred to as destroying a nation's cultural and artistic treasures. For the time being, America's performing artists are making their statement by exiting, and they are taking an ethical stance as they find new venues to keep expressing their unique voices and celebrating with joy and humanity the heart of America. I'm sure they know that there will be a return to the Center after Trump is gone. As banjo player Bela Fleck put it: "I'll play another time in the future when we can together share and celebrate art."

(Peter Balakian: Pulitzer Prize winning poet (*Ozone Journal*), essayist, and author of many books including *New York Times* best-selling *The Burning Tigris*. His op-eds have appeared in *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Guardian*, *Slate*, *Salon*, *Daily Beast*, *Consequence*, *Literary Hub*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and others. He is the Rebar Professor of the Humanities at Colgate University and was the first director of Colgate's Center for Ethics and World Societies. This commentary originally appeared on <https://consequenceforum.substack.com/p/trump-and-the-kennedy-center>.)



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