

## Ruben Vardanyan Steps Up Criticism Of Armenian Government

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Ruben Vardanyan, a prominent businessman remaining in Azerbaijani captivity along with at least 18 other Armenians, has stepped up his accusations that Armenia's government is indifferent to the fate of the prisoners.

"The government of Armenia has failed to establish any sustainable and coherent mechanism for communication with them — neither through third-party countries, including the embassies of states with a presence in Baku, nor through international organizations," Vardanyan said in his latest statement conveyed to his family by phone last week.



"Why? Why can Armenian officials travel to Azerbaijan on trade, economic, and other matters, but cannot organize a visit concerning the lives, health, and legal situation of Armenian captives? Is the fate of these people not more important than trade negotiations?" he asked.

Vardanyan said that many of the prisoners "have no adequate clothing and no way to receive what they genuinely need."

"Instead, whatever assistance does reach them is organized informally, without transparency, and without regard for the actual needs of the detainees... When people who have no teeth are sent dried fruit, that is not help. That is humiliation," he said.

"Have you no shame?" he went on, appealing to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. "Is there no shame in receiving a peace prize [in the United Arab Emirates,] speaking of peace, and accepting applause while citizens of Armenia remain in Baku's prisons without proper protection, systemic support, assistance or oversight from their own state?"

see VARDANYAN, page 3

## Armenia Thumbs Nose at Kremlin as it Receives Strong EU Endorsement

If a picture could serve as a declaration of independence, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's meet-and-greet photo with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, taken during the just-concluded European Political Community summit, could serve as the prototype.

For much of the post-Soviet era, Armenia was effectively a Russian protectorate. The tight bonds between the two states began fraying after Russia failed to honor its treaty obligations to come to Armenia's defense during the Second Karabakh War, which ended in 2023 in a disastrous defeat for Yerevan.

Pashinyan's hearty handshake with Zelenskyy, coupled with the fact that they spoke in English, effectively signaled Yerevan's intent on making a complete break with the Kremlin and fully embracing a future with the European Union.

"Eight years ago, this country [Armenia] was seen by a lot of countries around the table as a sort of de facto satellite of Russia," the EU-funded Euronews outlet quoted French President Emmanuel Macron as saying during the summit. He went on to praise Pashinyan for "de-risking this country [Armenia] from Russia."



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (right) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy shake hands in Yerevan on May 4 (photo primeminister.am)

Zelenskyy, the Kremlin's bête noire, tweaked Russia by stating Armenia and Ukraine will strengthen economic relations. "I proposed resuming the work of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation and holding its next meeting this year in Kyiv," the Ukrainian president wrote on social media. Russian leaders have reacted predict-

ably. A prominent Russian senator, Konstantin Kosachev, assailed what he described in a Telegram post as Armenia's "betrayal." He went on to accuse the West of playing a long game, stretching back over a decade and pre-dating Pashinyan's rise to power, working assiduously to de-couple Armenia from Russia.

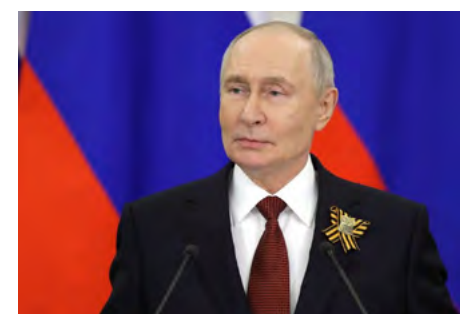
see EU, page 4

## Putin Offers Armenia an Amicable 'Divorce'

By Nate Ostiller

Russian President Vladimir Putin has acknowledged the growing divide between Armenia and Russia, suggesting the country could hold a "referendum"

to determine Yerevan's political trajectory. Putin added that if the Armenian people so choose, "we will make the relevant conclusions and take the path of a gentle, intelligent and mutually



Russian President Vladimir Putin at a press conference on May 9 (official photo)

beneficial divorce."

Once close allies, Armenia's relations with Russia have deteriorated in recent years, fueled by Moscow's inaction during Azerbaijani attacks on Armenia's internationally recognized territory in 2022. Since then, Armenia has increasingly shifted its focus to the West, prompting Russia to say that the choice is for Armenia to make, while simultaneously reiterating the risks the country would face by turning away from Russia.

Putin has said it is impossible to be part of both the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

see RUSSIA, page 5

## Pashinyan Says Karabakh 'Was Not Ours' As Armenia and Azerbaijan Look to Future

By Peter Barabas

YEREVAN (Euronews) — In an extraordinary admission, Armenia's PM Nikol Pashinyan declared that Karabakh was not Armenia's territory and that the Armenian movement for it was "a fatal mistake," as Yerevan forges its peace with Azerbaijan and its decisive pro-EU course.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stunned the Armenian society inside and outside the country with a passionate statement over the weekend, declaring that Karabakh was not Armenian and that Armenia's "Karabakh movement was a fatal mistake for us."

In a video widely circulated by the Armenian media on Sunday, May 10, Pashinyan is seen confronting accusations that Armenia "lost" Karabakh by asking repeatedly, "How was that land ours? How was it ours? Please explain how it was ours?"

Countering decades of prior Armenian national narrative regarding Karabakh, the Armenian prime minister said, "I don't want to speak behind dead people's backs, but let's say under the control of a few generals who planted wheat there for instance, let's say, was that it? How was it ours? How? Explain it, how was it?"

see KARABAKH, page 3

### ARMENIA

Armenians of Artsakh Protest During European Summit



Page 2

### PENNSYLVANIA

Armenian Heritage Walk Opens at The Philadelphia Museum of Art



Page 6

### NEW YORK

Aaron Poochigian: Expanding the Reach of Poetry And Armenianism



Page 13



ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Pashinyan to Skip EAEU Summit

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan will not participate in the Eurasian Economic Union leaders' summit scheduled for May 28 in Astana, his office announced on May 11.

He said that during his April 1 visit to Russia he had informed President Vladimir Putin that, because of the election campaign, he would be unable to attend the meeting, according to 1lurer.am.

The prime minister added that he had spoken by phone the previous day with the president of Kazakhstan. Deputy Prime Minister Grigoryan will participate in the event, he noted.

### US Delegation Visits Armenia

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan met with a United States delegation in Yerevan to review progress on the implementation of the “Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity” (TRIPP) project, the government said on May 12.

The delegation included officials from the US State Department and the Development Finance Corporation. Grigoryan thanked Washington for hosting the August 8, 2025 Peace Summit, describing it as a milestone event and highlighting the importance of following through on one of its key outcomes — the TRIPP.

### Pashinyan Clarifies Mirzoyan's Comments On Turkey Border

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has clarified remarks made by Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan on May 12 during the election campaign when the latter said “the Turks are opening today.”

Speaking to reporters during a campaign event in Shengavit, Pashinyan said that from now on, goods exported from Turkey to Armenia will officially indicate Armenia as the destination country, Sputnik Armenia reported.

Earlier, Mirzoyan had approached Pashinyan during a campaign stop and whispered to him, “The Turks are opening today, let's prepare a ‘Welcome’ text.” The minister's words were heard as Pashinyan was holding a loudspeaker.

Later, journalists asked Mirzoyan about the message. He replied, “They will open it, and we'll understand,” while clarifying that he was not referring to the border but exporting goods to Armenia.

According to Pashinyan, Turkish legislation previously did not allow Armenia to be listed as the destination country for shipments.

He explained that goods sent from Turkey to Armenia had first been formally processed through a third country before being transferred to Armenia.



Armenians of Artsakh protest with signs (photo Marut Vanyan)

# Armenians of Artsakh Protest During European Summit

By Marut Vanyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — On Monday, May 5, Artsakh Armenians held a peaceful protest in front of the Karen Demirchyan Sports and Concert Complex in Yerevan, where the 8th European Political Community Summit was taking place. More than 30 European leaders and Canada's prime minister took part in the summit. The protesters demanded the release of Armenian hostages imprisoned in Baku and the protection of the rights of the people of Artsakh/Karabakh. Political figures and civil society representatives from Armenia also joined the protest.

Those gathered came with Artsakh/Karabakh flags, posters with portraits of former military and political leaders of Artsakh/Karabakh imprisoned in Azerbaijan and placards addressed to the European leaders and Armenian authorities.

Mane Tandilyan, president of the Country to Live Party, declared through a loudspeaker: “Today I want to welcome you in Armenia and let you know that behind the curtains of hospitality you are enjoying in Armenia, behind the smiles and hand-



Some called for the release of political captives Ruben Vardanyan and Gurgun Stepanian by Azerbaijan (photo Marut Vanyan)

shakes, you do not see the real shame that Armenian people feel.” She continued: “You do not see that, because the government which is ruling Armenia today does not express the will,

the feelings and the thoughts of Armenian people. You can see a lot of protest voices here in Armenia but you will not hear it behind those walls — but I am going to tell you about the biggest shame that the free and democratic world is facing today. Stop shaking hands and smiling knowing that there are Christian Armenian prisoners held in Baku,” said Tandilyan.

Meanwhile fami-

lies whose loved ones are still missing ask, “Where are our loved ones?”

The Pan-Armenian Association of Relatives of Missing Persons declared: “We, the relatives of missing persons, continue to live in waiting and uncertainty. Our demand is clear: to know the fate of our loved ones. Join our peaceful protest for truth, dignity and our right to know, which is enshrined in International Humanitarian Law. This is a right that obliges states to take all possible steps to clarify the fate of missing persons. Our voices must be heard.”

In his speech, former Human Rights Defender and State Minister of Karabakh/Artsakh Artak Beglaryan assured that the European leaders know that mass crimes have been committed against the people of Karabakh/Artsakh.

“When we talk about the right of return of the people of Artsakh, naturally, first of all, assessments should be made of what crimes have been committed against the people of Artsakh. Only after that can we

*continued on next page*



The flag of the Republic of Artsakh was displayed all over (photo Marut Vanyan)



## ARMENIA

from previous page

talk about what return can be like in order to guarantee the prevention of new crimes,” he stated.

“For 2.5 years now, the people of Artsakh have been wanting to return to their homes in safe, dignified conditions, under international guarantees. No one is providing these conditions, no one is implementing the order of the International Court of Justice (November 17, 2023) and no international mechanism for dialogue is being introduced. Moreover, everyone is ignoring our appeals, right up to the person holding the position of the prime minister of the Republic of Armenia, urging us to forget our right to return. It is the prime minister who signed the appeal to the International Court of Justice, on the basis of which the order was adopted. Therefore, we are here to say that regardless of the position of any government of the Republic of Armenia, the people of Artsakh have the right to return and the desire to return,” he said.

The international community, according to Beglaryan, has an obligation to ensure the right of return of the people of Karabakh/Artsakh.

He continued: “Furthermore, if you want peace in the region, then our right of return and all our other rights — the return of prisoners, hostages, the protection of cultural heritage, private and public property — all must



The banner of the European Political Community summit was seen in Yerevan (photo Marut Vanyan)

be respected and restored. Otherwise, there will be no peace in the region, and the Aliyev genocidal regime will continue to commit new crimes against the Armenian people, the Republic of Armenia, and humanity.”

Speaking about the current authorities in Armenia, Beglaryan said: “As long as the Republic of Armenia, represented by these authorities, violates our rights in every way, naturally, no other country, including

France, will do more than the Republic of Armenia should do in protecting the rights of the people of Artsakh, not to mention that the violations of democratic principles are committed by the Armenian authorities themselves.”

On May 4, the European Political Community (EPC) summit took place under the motto “Building the Future: Unity and Stability in Europe” during which topics like Strengthening Democratic Resilience, Advancing Connectivity, Middle Corridor, Crossroad of Peace Initiative, Trump Route (TRIPP), Russian Gas Cut-off, and the War in Ukraine were highlighted. However, there was almost no discussion about Nagorno-Karabakh or its people’s current state, unless Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, who was participating in the Summit online, “reminded” them of it. Aliyev accused the European Parliament of spreading slander and lies about Azerbaijan and of sabotaging the peace process with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Roberta Metsola, the president of the European Parliament responded sharply: “The European Parliament is a directly elected democratic body, with resolutions adopted by a majority. We understand that outcomes may be uncomfortable for some, but we will never change the way we work.”

## Ruben Vardanyan Steps Up Criticism of Armenian Government

VARDANYAN, from page 1

Vardanyan, who held the second-highest post in Nagorno-Karabakh’s leadership from November 2022 to February 2023, similarly criticized Pashinyan’s government in his previous statement from an Azerbaijani jail circulated by his family on April 21. He also called on Armenia’s human rights ombudswoman, Anahit Manasyan, to try to visit the Armenian prisoners together with their relatives.

Manasyan responded by saying that she has no mandate to inspect prison conditions in Azerbaijan or any other foreign nation. She reiterated her position in the Armenian parliament on Thursday, May 7.

“If the protection of Armenian citizens held in Azerbaijani prisons does not fall within the mandate of Armenia’s human rights defender, then whose mandate is it?” countered Vardanyan.

Vardanyan was arrested at an Azerbaijani checkpoint in the Lachin corridor in September 2023 as he fled the region along with its practically entire ethnic Armenian population. Seven other former Karabakh Armenian leaders were also arrested during the exodus that followed an Azerbaijani military offensive.

Five of them were sentenced to life imprisonment while the two others as well as Vardanyan received 20-year jail sentences in February at the end of yearlong trials denounced by Amnesty International as a “travesty.” They all denied a long list of accusations brought against them.

Pashinyan and other Armenian officials insist that Yerevan has been doing its best to try to secure the release of the prisoners. Their critics dismiss these assurances. They accused the Armenian premier of actually helping Baku legitimize Vardanyan’s imprisonment with his scathing comments about the 57-year-old billionaire and philanthropist made in August 2024.



One sign contrasted Kosovo with Nagorno Karabakh, calling out political hypocrisy (photo Marut Vanyan)

## Pashinyan Says Karabakh ‘Was Not Ours’ as Armenia and Azerbaijan Look to Future

KARABAKH, from page 1

“Did we build a school there, did we build a kindergarten, did we build a factory, did we live there, a settlement... How was it ours? It was not ours. It was not ours,” Pashinyan emphasized.

In his passionate speech, the Armenian prime minister underlined his decision to continue unabated the historic peace process with Azerbaijan after decades of tragedies over Karabakh.

Pashinyan’s startling statement comes just days after the historic European Political Community (EPC) conference and the EU-Armenia summit, which underscored Armenia’s message to the world — and especially to Russia — that it has now decisively embarked on a pro-European course as it forges peace with Azerbaijan after decades of conflict.

With the June elections looming in Armenia, Pashinyan’s extraordinary statement sets out his government’s position: the country is now decisively looking towards a pro-EU future in a South Caucasus peace that is already bringing strong economic opportunities for Armenia, Azerbaijan and the region.

During the EPC summit in Yerevan, French President Emmanuel Macron seized the moment to hail Yerevan’s break from

its past, stating Armenia has consciously chosen the path towards a Europe “from Iceland to the Caucasus.”

“Eight years ago, many saw Armenia as a country heavily dependent on Russia, with its security entirely in Russian hands,” Macron said at the summit, adding that “after the Velvet Revolution, its policy of peace, and its turn toward Europe, we are now witnessing the opening of a new era,” he added.

### Aliyev Warns of anti-Azerbaijan Forces in Armenia

Meanwhile Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev warned on Sunday against the upsurge of anti-Azerbaijani forces in Armenia ahead of the June elections, stating that Azerbaijan is committed to a future of peace with its former rival.

“We know that within Armenia’s political sphere there are still circles driven by hatred towards the Azerbaijani people and state, and if they come to power, it is the Armenian people who will suffer,” Aliyev said during the inauguration of a new residential complex in the city of Zangilan, as part of Azerbaijan’s wider plans to rebuild civilian infrastructure in Karabakh.

Aliyev laid the foundation stone for the Zangilan City Park hotel and met with the first returnee families moving into new

apartments, saying that Zangilan, situated along a key transport corridor, will be transformed into a transport hub “not only for Azerbaijan but for the entire region,” underlining the new Armenia-Azerbaijan economic cooperation.

Azerbaijan’s president also took aim at what he called “certain foreign leaders” who now portray themselves as “false heroes.”

“Now they allegedly claim to have rescued Armenia from our hands. We had no intention of destroying Armenia or depriving it of its independence,” Aliyev said.

“Yet they portray themselves as if they are protecting Armenia from us. There is no need to protect Armenia from us. We have achieved what we set out to achieve,” he concluded.

### Putin Calls for Armenia Referendum

Armenia’s choice of a pro-European future has finally prompted Russian President Vladimir Putin to say on Saturday, May 9 — right after Pashinyan snubbed his invitation to attend Russia’s Victory Day parade — that it would be “logical” for Armenia to hold a referendum on its EU membership path.

Putin told a press conference that “in my view, it would be right both in relation to the population, the citizens of Armenia, and in relation to us, as the main economic

partner, to decide as early as possible.”

“For example, to hold a referendum,” Putin said.

Putin added that the outcome of such a move would be that Russia “would make our own choice as well” and that “then we would have gone down the path of a gentle, civilized and mutually beneficial separation.”

However, Putin underlined that Russia unleashed its war on Ukraine after Kyiv announced its pro-EU course as well, stating, “We are all going through everything that’s happening in the Ukrainian direction right now.

“But how did it all start? With Ukraine’s attempt to join the EU,” Putin said.

Pashinyan replied to Putin on Monday that Yerevan is “not currently planning to put this to a referendum vote.”

“This will only take place when there is an objective necessity,” Pashinyan said, according to Armenia’s APA news agency.

This is “not a matter of political taste, but a matter of transformation,” the Armenian premier added.

Meanwhile, Armenia is not planning to leave the Eurasian Economic Union as “Armenia is a full-fledged member of the EAEU and treats its partners with respect,” according to Pashinyan.



## INTERNATIONAL

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## No Current Peace Treaty Signing Talks, Mirzoyan Says

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — There are currently no negotiations underway regarding the signing of a treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said on May 12.

According to him, the Armenian side is ready to immediately begin consultations on the venue and timing of the signing, but Azerbaijan has not yet demonstrated readiness to proceed while simultaneously reaffirming its commitment to the peace process, Factor.am reported.

He also stated that Armenia and Turkey are discussing new opportunities for cooperation, although no final decisions have yet been reached.

He noted that the agenda includes numerous technical and economic issues, among them topics related to Armenian-Turkish relations.

Mirzoyan recalled that an agreement to open the border for citizens of third countries and holders of diplomatic passports has existed for a long time, but its implementation has repeatedly been delayed.

According to him, the process continues “step by step,” and he is confident that in the future it will be possible to witness the full normalization of relations.

Mirzoyan also said that communication with Russia remains ongoing.

## Russia Offers Armenia Nuclear Plant

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Russia has offered Armenia a large-capacity nuclear power plant project that could operate for 100 years, according to Mikhail Kalugin, director of the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Fourth CIS Department, on May 11.

Moscow said the proposed nuclear facility would provide a long-term solution to Armenia’s energy challenges.

The Rosatom state corporation has presented Armenia with a large-scale nuclear plant project which, “if the Armenian leadership had the necessary political will,” would cover the country’s energy demands for decades, or even an entire century, Kalugin said, according to TASS.

He added that the project would also ensure affordable electricity tariffs for end consumers, which, among other things, would significantly stimulate industrial growth in the country.

The diplomat stressed that Russia is one of the world leaders in nuclear technologies and is always ready to share its expertise and developments with Armenia in the strategically important energy sector.

On April 2, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Overchuk warned that Yerevan could face an energy shortage if it does not make a decision on building a new nuclear power plant before the end of 2026.



The Armenian students with their certificate of baptism

## Baptism of Young Armenians and Festive Gathering In the Armenian Community of Rome

VATICAN CITY — On May 9, at the Armenian Church of Saint Blaise in Rome, five female students from Armenia who are pursuing higher education in the Italian capital received the sacrament of Baptism. The ceremony was conducted with the blessing and by the hand of Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Pontifical Legate of Western Europe and Representative of the Catholicosate of All Armenians to the Vatican.

In the months leading up to the ceremony, the young women had regularly attended Sunday Divine Liturgies and deepened their understanding of the sacrament of Holy Baptism. With great enthusiasm and heartfelt anticipation, they prepared themselves to be baptized and to embrace their Christian calling.

The godfather role for the five students was undertaken by five young men who have recently been actively involved in the life of the church community and in service at the altar.

Following the baptism ceremony, a festive gathering was held in honor of the newly baptized students. Their friends, together with young members of the lo-

cal Armenian community, joined the celebration with warmth and joy around a fellowship table set in the open-air hall of the Pontifical Russicum College. The occasion also marked the first large gathering of around fifty Armenian young people in the community.

At the opening of the celebration, Archbishop Barsamian expressed his appreciation to the pastors, Father Athanas Sargsyan and Father Bsag Tepirjian, as well as to members of the church’s Ladies’ Association, Lusine Abrahamyan and Naira Kerobyan, for their organizational efforts, devoted service, and important mission of bringing young people together.

Addressing the young people gathered around the festive table, the archbishop encouraged them to remain united, to treat one another with love and care, and to preserve their Armenian spiritual and national identity. He emphasized that they are the hope of both the present and the future, and that through them the rich centuries-old Armenian heritage will continue and be further enriched.

Archbishop Barsamian also urged the youth never to lose their faith and hope,



Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

noting that in times of hardship and uncertainty, faith and hope help a person remain steadfast and overcome challenges. He further called on them to stand in support of the prosperity and strengthening of the Homeland, and to take an active role in the life of the community and the Church.

## Armenia Thumbs Nose at Kremlin as it Receives Strong EU Endorsement

EU, from page 1

“Instructions ... are now being executed in full force — cynically, duplicitously, and without a shred of shame. There is not even a whiff of sovereignty in the air,” Kosachev wrote. “This serves as a crucial lesson for Russia — a lesson born of bitter errors. We will learn from it. It is never too late to do so, no matter how bitter the pill may taste right now, in the wake of this betrayal.”

Shortly after the start of the Yerevan summit and the Pashinyan-Zelenskyy meeting, major Russian online retailers, including Ozon, announced they would stop offering Armenian-sourced products on their platforms.

Meanwhile, Russian mass media declared the Yerevan gathering, which brought together almost 50 leaders from across Europe, along with top members of the European Union leadership, as an “anti-Russian summit.” One Russian outlet noted the fact that the summit was held in Yerevan this year “demonstrate[s] attempts

by Europe and the United States to expand their influence in the Caucasus region.”

An EU-Armenia summit, convened May 4 amid the larger pan-European gathering, gave a ringing endorsement to Pashinyan’s efforts to steer the country in a westward direction.

“This first EU-Armenia Summit elevates our partnership to a new level and sets a clear direction and agenda for the coming years,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement. “Going forward, we will also deepen political dialogue, strengthen economic ties, and work towards a more secure, prosperous, and stable future. Our cooperation is grounded in common values, a shared vision for the South Caucasus, and full respect for sovereign choices.”

The EU announced the establishment of a Partnership Mission in Armenia to enhance the country’s security and “resilience.” The two sides also created an EU-Armenia Connectivity Partnership,

which the EU statement lauded as “a major step forward in strengthening transport, energy, and digital links.”

The timing of the EU’s fresh support for the Armenian government’s political and economic course is crucial for Pashinyan, given that he is locked in a tough reelection battle against an array of Russian-backed opposition forces. He is counting on EU backing to boost his electoral fortunes. The country will hold parliamentary elections on June 7. Opposition leaders are on record as vehemently opposing Pashinyan’s pro-EU course.

In addition to backing Armenia’s efforts to diminish Russian influence, an EU statement “reiterated its principled position on Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, and reaffirmed its support for Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.”

(This story was originally published by www.eurasianet.org on May 6.)



## INTERNATIONAL

# Erdogan Uses Jihadist Figures and Ottoman Symbolism to Fuel Militarist Propaganda

By Levent Kenez

STOCKHOLM (Nordic Monitor) — Turkey's SAHA 2026 defense exhibition turned into a political and ideological showcase last week as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan used the event to promote the country's expanding defense industry ahead of a possible new election cycle, while pro-government Islamist figures framed missile programs and air defense systems in explicitly religious terms.

Among the most visible visitors at the Istanbul Expo Center was İhsan Şenocak, a hardline jihadist preacher and founder of the Center for Scientific and Intellectual Research (İFAM). Şenocak toured defense stands while recording videos that blended religious references, Ottoman imagery and military rhetoric with support for Turkey's growing missile and drone programs.

Standing in front of the newly unveiled Yıldırımhan ballistic missile display, Şenocak described the project as a weapon that would “frighten the enemies of Allah” and said Muslims were religiously obligated to produce advanced weapons in every era. Referring to the missile's reported 6,000-kilometer range, Şenocak linked the system to Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I, known as Yıldırım Bayezid, and described the missile as a message to “oppressed Muslims from Gaza to East Turkestan.”

In another video recorded at the exhibition, Şenocak praised Turkey's air defense systems through religious references, saying military technology was part of a divine mission to defend Jerusalem, Kashmir and other Muslim regions.

The videos circulated widely on pro-government social media accounts during the exhibition and reflected the increasingly religious and militarized language used by Islamist figures aligned with Erdogan's political bloc.

Şenocak has long supported Erdogan's foreign policy and security agenda. In previous speeches and social media posts, he called for military action against Israel, praised armed jihadist language and supported harsh crackdowns after a 2016 coup attempt. Nordic Monitor previously documented Şenocak's calls for “beheading traitors” and his close ties with Islamist organizations linked to pro-government networks in Turkey.

SAHA 2026 itself became one of the largest defense exhibitions organized during Erdogan's presidency. Turkish officials said more than 1,700 companies from 120 countries participated in the fair between May 5 and May 9 at the Istanbul Expo Center. Erdogan attended the closing ceremony on May 8 and used the event to present Turkey's defense industry as proof of national independence and technological advancement.

In his speech Erdogan praised domestic weapons production, criticized past opponents of defense spending and said Turkey would continue expanding its military-industrial sector despite international pressure and embargoes. He also referred to opposition politicians who had previously criticized missile testing and defense expenditures.

Defense production has become one of Erdogan's central political themes during election periods over the past decade. Military drones, naval programs, missile systems and fighter jet projects have repeatedly appeared in campaign speeches, state television broadcasts and rallies organized



İhsan Şenocak stands in front of the reported prototype of the Yıldırımhan missile at the SAHA 2026 defense exhibition in Istanbul

by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

This year's exhibition focused heavily on the Yıldırımhan ballistic missile, introduced as Turkey's first intercontinental ballistic missile project. Turkish media outlets and state-linked broadcasters described the missile as capable of traveling 6,000 kilometers at speeds reaching Mach 25. The missile was displayed with Ottoman symbols on one side and the signature of Turkey's secular founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, on the other, reflecting an attempt to combine nationalist and conservative imagery in the same political narrative.

The project immediately became one of the most discussed elements of the exhibition, partly because no publicly known flight test or operational deployment has been announced. Defense publications covering the exhibition reported that Turkish authorities presented a full-scale model and technical claims but provided no public testing schedule, deployment timeline or operational details.

The Turkish Defense Ministry's research center described Yıldırımhan as a liquid-fueled missile powered by four rocket engines and capable of carrying a payload of up to three tons. Yet official presentations stopped short of confirming whether

the missile exists beyond a concept or prototype stage.

The gap between state-backed publicity and the absence of confirmed operational milestones became more visible during Erdogan's own visit to the exhibition on May 8. Although Turkish state media and pro-government accounts devoted extensive coverage to Yıldırımhan throughout the week, Erdogan did not publicly mention the missile during his lengthy closing speech and did not visit the missile stand during the protocol tour of the exhibition halls.

The contrast drew attention because pro-government broadcasters had spent days presenting the missile as a historic strategic breakthrough, while officials avoided publicly discussing testing status or deployment plans.

Özgür Özel, the leader of Turkey's main opposition party, the secular Republican People's Party (CHP), also visited SAHA 2026 and posed for photographs near displays carrying Atatürk's signature, including the Yıldırımhan stand. Özel later praised Turkey's domestic defense industry and said investments in military technology represented a national achievement rather than a partisan issue. Erdogan later mocked Özel's earlier criticism of defense

spending during his own speech at the exhibition.

Online debate surrounding the missile quickly moved beyond military capability into political symbolism. Social media discussions focused on the use of both Ottoman emblems and Atatürk's signature on the missile body, a combination interpreted by many users as an effort to appeal simultaneously to Islamist conservatives and secular nationalists.

That dual messaging appeared throughout the event in the exhibition halls. Islamist preachers quoted Quranic verses in front of missile systems, while government officials described defense exports as evidence of technological sovereignty. Giant screens played promotional videos of hypersonic missiles and drones as visitors lined up for photographs beside fighter jet prototypes and ballistic missile mockups.

The exhibition also exposed contradictions within the Islamist rhetoric surrounding the fair. While pro-government preachers repeatedly described Israel as a long-term enemy and called for Turkey to prepare militarily for a future confrontation, they made no public reference to the participation of defense contractors linked to Israeli military supply chains.

Several exhibitors at SAHA 2026, including REPKON, BAE Systems, Leonardo and LBA Systems, faced protests from anti-Israel demonstrators during the exhibition because of their defense ties and military exports connected to Israel. Protesters briefly disrupted access to parts of the exhibition hall, leading organizers to temporarily suspend visitor entry before security restored access.

The fair itself was organized by SAHA Istanbul, a platform established by Turkish defense contractors and run by Haluk Bayraktar, the brother of drone manufacturer Selçuk Bayraktar, President Erdogan's son-in-law. Bayraktar, Turkey's leading drone producer, controlled by the Bayraktar family, recently entered a partnership agreement with Italian defense contractor Leonardo, which has supplied military equipment and technology used by Israel.

Despite the protests and the participation of companies accused by demonstrators of contributing to Israel's military capabilities, Islamist speakers visiting the fair avoided direct criticism of the exhibitors while continuing to frame Turkey's defense industry through religious and anti-Israel narratives.

## Putin Offers Armenia an Amicable ‘Divorce’

RUSSIA, from page 1

Addressing the situation directly during a press conference on Saturday, May 9, Putin said that as for “Armenia's plans to join the EU, this certainly requires special consideration.”

The Armenian Parliament passed a bill in March 2025 that calls on the government to pursue EU integration, but there have been few concrete steps since then.

Putin added, “we will support everything that will benefit the Armenian people. We maintained special relations with the Armenian people for centuries. And if the Armenian people consider any decision as beneficial, we will certainly have nothing to say against it.”

However, Putin then pivoted to listing

the potential economic risks turning away from Russia could entail, emphasizing that “it would be right with respect to the people, the Armenian citizens, and to us as its main economic partner, if a decision was made as soon as possible, for instance, at a referendum. This is not our business, but as a matter of principle it would be logical to ask the Armenian citizens what their choice will be.”

“On seeing it we will make the relevant conclusions and take the path of a gentle, intelligent and mutually beneficial divorce,” he said.

More ominously, Putin then implied there could be more tangible threats corresponding with any effort by Armenia to join the EU.

“We are currently living through everything that is happening in respect of Ukraine.

And how did it start? It started with Ukraine's [sic] joining or attempting to join the EU,” Putin said, distorting the process that led to the country's Euromaidan Revolution in 2014 and obfuscating his own responsibility in fomenting the subsequent unrest, as well as in ordering Russian troops to invade in 2014 and 2022.

The comments marked the latest upswing in tensions between Armenia and Russia, coming after Putin's testy meeting with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Moscow in April and Yerevan's hosting of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyi at the European Political Community summit earlier in May.

(This article first appeared on oc-media.org on May 11, 2026.)

# Community News

## AIWA Celebrates 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

By Karine Armen

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GLENDALE — The Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) marked its 35th anniversary, alongside the 30th anniversary of its Los Angeles affiliate, with a gala on Saturday, May 2 at Reflections Venue.

The gala's master of ceremonies was Jacqueline Sarkissian, KTLA reporter. The keynote speaker was Silva Harapetian, an Emmy-nominated journalist, documentary producer, and Amazon best-selling author with over 20 years of experience reporting for major networks, including CBS, NBC, ABC and FOX. Greg Hosharian and the Armenian Pops Ensemble provided musical performances.

Sarkissian said, "Whether you are here because of your Armenian heritage, your values, or you believe in empowering women, your support tonight turns this vision into a lasting impact."

Archbishop Hovan Derderian expressed his support for and appreciation of AIWA and blessed the event.

Harapetian shared her memories



Guest speaker Silva Harapetian (Karine Armen photo)

of living in Iran, moving to Glendale, the challenges she faced when trying to become a reporter as an immigrant, and her mother's resilience. Harapetian said, "When no agent represented me, I created my own opportunities. Looking back, I didn't set out to be a trailblazer; I just wanted to tell meaningful stories." She added, "I kept pushing into rooms that were not built for people like me, and I stayed, because this is what legacy looked like."

President of AIWA Silva Katchiguian talked about the importance of empowering women and the support from the gala's participants. Later, some women received awards for their contributions to AIWA. Along with the awards, Los Angeles City Council member Adrin Nazarian gave certificates of appreciation.

The following founders of AIWA in Los Angeles, the late Hasmik Mgrdichian, Savey Tufenkian, Flora Dunaian, Elizabeth Agbabian and Hermine Janoyan were honored. Also recognized were six past presidents of the LA Affiliate: the late Laurel Karabian, Lily Ring Balian, Cindy Norian, Diane Cabraloff, Silva Katchiguian, and Nicole Nishanian.

see AIWA, page 8



Master of Ceremonies and Dedication Committee Chairperson Yeretzgin Arpy Minasian describes the Armenian Heritage Walk as "more than a collection. It's a covenant... Every detail whispers 'We are still here'..." Photo by Alec Balian.

## Armenian Heritage Walk Opens at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

PHILADELPHIA — The heavens smiled down on the Philadelphia Armenian community on Saturday, April 25, as more than 1,000 people gathered to celebrate the dedication of the Armenian Heritage Walk at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a 15,000-square-foot winding walkway of Armenian culture, art and native gardens. Defying the forecast of rain, the April skies stayed crisp and clear during the ceremony, as if to open their arms to the momentous achievement of the Philadelphia Armenian community, a lasting tribute in the birthplace of the nation to the contributions of Armenians in America and an expression of thanks to the nation for welcoming Armenians to its shores.

On the occasion of the 111th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and the 250th birthday of America, Armenian Heritage Foundation of Philadelphia leaders, committee members, volunteers, city officials, clergy, guests and friends spoke, sang, danced and prayed as they cut the ribbon on the masterpiece parcel featuring a restored 22-foot-tall bronze Young Meher statue. Depicting a mythical Armenian man in battle uniform with a knee bent and arms raised clutching a cross, the statue is the centerpiece of the walk and represents the indomitable spirit, faith, and courage of the Armenian people. It was first unveiled thanks to a group of visionary men in the Knights of Vartan organization in 1976 on the 200th birthday of the nation.

The opening of the walk marks completion of Phase 1, which includes more than 60 boulders, transported from Armenia to the site, and lining a lighted paved trail elegantly draped with hundreds of trees, shrubs, bulbs, and grasses. Located directly across from the north entrance of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the trail is adorned with areas for reflection and education about the Armenian culture. Numerous platforms await Phase 2, which will feature artistic creations by Armenian artists in keeping with foundation themes of Armenian language, faith, and traditions.

### Intercommunal Commemoration of Armenian Genocide

The Armenian Heritage Walk milestone was captured in a weekend of both solemn and festive events, beginning with an intercommunal service of peace and remembrance of the sainted martyrs of the Armenian Genocide led by religious leaders and altar servers from all five Philadelphia area Armenian churches and senior clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian Catholic Church at the Saints Peter and Paul Basilica in Philadelphia Friday, April 24th. The clergy and altar servers were accompanied by an Intercommunal Choir made up of members from all five Philadelphia Armenian Churches who adorned gowns from each of their respective parishes as a visible symbol of unity. The evening culminated in musical performances by children of the Armenian Sisters Academy and the blessing and gifting of an Armenian cross-stone (khatchkar) monument to the Catholic church to honor the Holy See of the Vatican for bringing attention to the Armenian nation and remembering the sainted martyrs of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Officiating were Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America; His Eminence Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Church of America; His Excellency the Most Revered Mikael Mouradian, Bishop of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg in the U.S.A. and Canada; V. Rev. Fr. Boghos Tinkjian, Pastor, St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church; Rev. Fr. Armash Baghdasarian, Pastor, St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church; Rev. Fr. Hakob Gevorgyan, Pastor, Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church; Rev. Fr. Asadur Minasian, Pastor, St. Mark's

continued on next page

## Attorney Mark Geragos Speaks About Career And Cases

By Gary Eynatian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WATERTOWN — Prominent California-based attorney Mark Geragos spoke to a large crowd at an event hosted by the St. James Armenian Church Men's Club on Monday, May 4. Fr. Arakel Aljalian, the pastor of St. James since 1999 remarked: "It was a great honor to have the well-known attorney Mark Geragos with us once again here at St. James and to listen to him speak. He is a great inspiration to us in the community, especially to the younger generation pursuing higher education in legal studies."

Speaking without notes, Geragos captivated the crowd with a talk touching upon his Armenian family history, some of the high-profile cases in which he was involved, and suc-



Attorneys Vasken Babikian, left, and Mark Geragos (photo Fr. Arakel Aljalian)

cessful litigation against insurance giants AXA and New York Life which had written life insurance policies for Armenians who died in the former Ottoman Empire. Death benefits had been withheld previously for a variety of complex factors. Many members of the audience that night were descended from Armenian Genocide survivors, making this a particularly moving topic for them.

St. James Armenian Church Parishioner and local attorney Vasken Babikian, who invited Geragos, declared: "It was an absolute honor to host Mark Geragos at St. James, for a second time. He is a true gentleman and a proud Armenian."

Geragos also touched on more contemporary issues confronting Armenian Americans and Armenians in the homeland. He mentioned Mehmet Cengiz Oz, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services since 2025, and US Congressman Randy Fine, who have both made derisory comments about Armenians bordering on hate speech. He voiced support for Daniel Bilzerian, who has launched a congressional campaign in Florida's 6th District running against fellow Republican and incumbent Fine.

see GERAGOS, page 8



## COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

Armenian Catholic Church; and Rev. Heather C. Ohaneson, Pastor, Armenian Martyrs' Congregational Church, alongside intercommunal deacons and altar servers. Sister Emma Moussayan, Principal of the Armenian Sisters Academy, offered prayerful words in the special ceremony. Archpriest Fr. Nerses Manoogian served as Honorary Chairman of the service. Dr. Garo Garibian and Noubar Megerian served as Co-chairs; Maroush Paneyan-Nigon and Karinne' Andonian as Co-choir Directors, and Veronica Kazandjian Babayan and Larry DerHagopian as Usher Captains. Many others served as volunteer ushers. Deacon Chiké Egbufoama, representing the basilica, offered words of thanks and prayer to the Philadelphia Armenian community and accepted the monument on behalf of the Philadelphia Archdiocese.

#### Dedication Draws Crowds

More than 1,000 guests then engulfed the Armenian Heritage Walk at the Philadelphia Museum of Art Saturday morning and afternoon, where an extensive program held the audience captive. Speeches traced the historical contributions of the 1976 Young Meher visionaries and the tireless efforts of the current foundation and committee members, architect, landscape designer, builder, and countless volunteers and donors whose work over the past eight years brought the ambitious project to life. An intercommunal choir, young Armenian dancers and singers, musical interludes, and theatrical performances drew cheers and tears from a grateful community.

Master of ceremonies and Dedication Committee Chairperson Yerezgin Arpy Minasian led the program with inspiring words. "I stand here as an American and



Officials and supporters cut the ribbon, a symbolic gesture of dedication of the Armenian Heritage Walk at the Philadelphia Museum of Art on Saturday, April 24 (photo Altoonian Photography)

"to God, this country, and our ancestors" and referred to the boulders as a testament to both the suffering and the strength of the Armenian people. His Eminence Archbishop Tanielian revealed at the "witnessing" of the walk's opening and reminded that "we are the children of light," descendants of a 5,000-year-long history and the biblical lands of Eden and Mount Ararat. His Excellency the Most Reverend Mouradian rejoiced that Young Meher's cross points upward, calling it a symbol of resurrection beyond death.

#### Historical Reflection

Foundation member Steve Barsamian offered a rich history of the Armenian Heritage Walk, declaring that it was 50 years and 1 day ago that the original Young Meher statue was dedicated at the same site. He paid tribute to the Knights of Vartan and the original visionaries for laying the foundation for the bicentennial project. Among them were Armenian Bicentennial Commemoration Committee Executive Chair M. George Mooradian, Esq.; Vice Chair John Bogosian, Secretary John Sudjian, Treasurer Albert Momjian, Esq.; Statue Committee Chair John Samelian and his committee members Harry Andonian, Harry Dorian, Esq.; Harry Hoplamazian, and John Mirakian; Banquet Committee Chair John Tokmajian, and numerous others.

Barsamian took on the task of maintaining the statue for decades. In 2017, he saw that it needed restoring and went to City Hall to get the ball rolling. He reached out to Viken Bazarbashian, then chairman of the Knights of Vartan, for help, and that led to the involvement of David Hoplamazian, Karolyn Chebookjian, Harry S. Cherken, Jr.; Kurk Selverian, Michael Santerian, and ultimately architect Simon Koumjian III, landscape designer Ned Moore, and Nanette Zakian. A committee of motivated community members was growing. Kurk Selverian took on the leadership role, as Koumjian III took on architecture, Hoplamazian, construction; Cherken, Jr., legal matters; Chebookjian and Zakian, fundraising and marketing, and the project was on its way. Barsamian said there are so many others that have contributed extensively to the massive undertaking that it is impossible to list them all. He said that "for as long as I've been here, I've never seen such unity, capital letters UNITY," and thanked the community for the outstanding accomplishment.

#### City Commendation and Accolades

City and state officials attending the dedication included staff from U.S. Sena-

tors David McCormick's and John Fetterman's offices, State Representatives Ben Sanchez, Tarik Kahn and Keith Harris, city officials Aparna Palatino and Doug Robinson, Parkway Council Executive Director Nicholas Anderson, and Philadelphia City Representative and Director of the Office of Special Events Jazelle Jones. Jones took to the podium to salute the Armenian community of the Philadelphia area. "For well over a century, Armenians have been a part of the city," she said. Philadelphia became "a place to build, to rebuild and to thrive."

Clergy and audience members then sang along with exuberant members of the Hamazkayin Meghri Youth Choral Group, a fitting prelude to the spirited presentation by site contractor David Hoplamazian, President of Mayfield Site Contractors, Inc. Hoplamazian, who worked hand-in-hand with site architect Simon Koumjian III, spoke of their dynamic collaboration, turning drawings into reality in as little as one year. Hoplamazian echoed Barsamian's words, crediting the originators of the 1976 Young Meher project (among them some of his family members) as well as the long list of today's foundation and committee members and "partners in the city" for their remarkable investment of time, skill, and talent in everything from policy and permits to engineering, accounting, legal work and fundraising to enable the project to move forward. "It takes a village," he said. Hoplamazian gave special accolades to supporter Andranik Danielyan for coordinating the daunting task of transferring more than 60 boulders from Armenia to Philadelphia and expressed thanks to the Armenian Sisters Academy for storing them on the school grounds before they were installed.

Foundation President Kurk Selverian took the stage to give additional thanks to the officials from the city, museum, and horticultural society who were instrumental in the success of the undertaking. Selverian paid special tribute to architect Simon Koumjian III, who labored indefatigably over every detail to make the project exceptional. Landscape designer Ned Moore was commended for his impeccable design and state-of-the-art renderings, which helped sell the project. Finally, David Hoplamazian was applauded for his expertise, flexibility, and timeliness in design-build construction, working closely with Koumjian III through every twist and turn for an exceptional outcome on a short timeline.

Keynote speaker for the dedication, Selverian presented a theatrical tribute to the Armenian people, beginning with a William Saroyan poem and poetically taking the audience through the Armenian-American story. The angelic voice of Hooshere Bezdikian, known as Hooshere on all the streaming platforms (@hooshereusic,

hooshere.com) elevated the performance with expressive renditions of Armenian and American songs, as Steve Odabashian accompanied on piano.

The festivities culminated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony, a flag processional of Armenian youth, and a dance performance by students of the Armenian Sisters Academy. Guests then flocked onto the walkway to rejoice in its beauty and lay white carnations on and around the Young Meher statue as a symbol of the continued life of Armenian Americans 111 years after the Armenian Genocide.

#### Gala Honors Armenian Americans

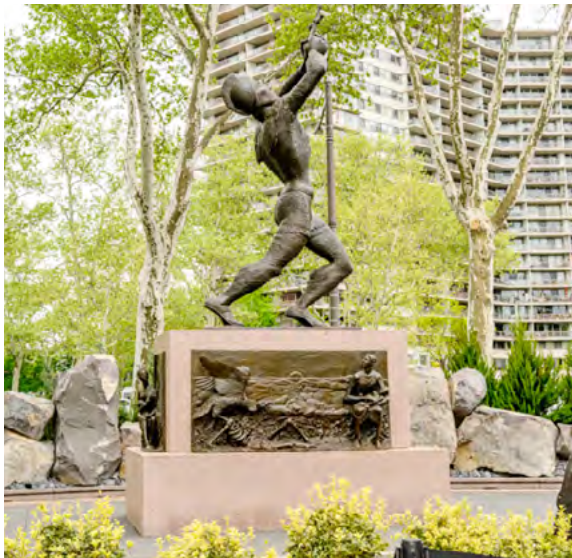
In a grand finale of the memorable weekend, some 450 guests gathered at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia at a black-tie gala to rejoice at the opening of the Armenian Heritage Walk and to present awards of excellence to several highly accomplished Armenian Americans. In a heartwarming opening, Armenian Heritage Foundation of Philadelphia Board Vice President and Fundraising Director Karolyn Chebookjian spoke of the historic roots of the Armenian Heritage Walk and its majestic Young Meher statue.

Chebookjian's toast was followed by an adulatory video message from Gov. Josh Shapiro, who congratulated the community on the completion of the project and the important contributions Armenian Americans make to the commonwealth. The evening continued with a signature video documenting each board member's thoughts about the importance of the project, their role in it, and their thanks to the community. The night kicked off with a comedic video presentation by TV host, comedian, writer and producer Sona Movsesian.

Author, podcaster, media personality, and former executive assistant of Conan O'Brien, Movsesian filled the room with warmth and laughter as she presented awards of excellence to seven honorees. They are Michael Aram, founder and designer of Michael Aram Inc.; Dr. James Philip Bagian, engineer, physician, and NASA astronaut; Mark Hoplamazian, chairman and CEO, Hyatt Hotels Corp.; Edele Hovnanian, president and CEO, H. Hovnanian Family Office; Major Gen. Stephen J. Maranian, two-time recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal; Katherine Sarafian, senior vice president of production, Pixar Animation Studios; and Peter Vosbikian, accomplished executive, household products industry. Each honoree offered their own unique inspiring words about their journey, often interjecting humor and always conveying a strong generational connection with the Armenian community that empowers and enriches their work. Renowned educator and performer of the Armenian duduk and clarinet, Mher Mnatsakanyan, delighted the audience with a musical performance.

In closing remarks, foundation member Nanette Zakian offered sincere gratitude to all who made the Armenian Heritage Walk a reality, with special thanks to the evening's host, Sona Movsesian for reminding everyone that joy is essential to meaningful celebration. Zakian presented her with a very special gift, a piece of a boulder from Armenia affixed atop a basalt stone, also from Armenia. Reflecting on her own roots and the deeper meaning of heritage as a living connection between generations, she highlighted the project as a powerful symbol of unity, history, and cultural pride. Recognizing the dedication of donors, organizers, honorees, clergy, and fellow board members whose collective efforts transformed a simple idea into a lasting landmark, she honored the continuity between past and present, encouraging attendees to pass this moment on to future generations.

-Melissa Selverian



The Armenian Heritage Foundation of Philadelphia unveils the newly restored Young Meher statue at the Armenian Heritage Walk (photo Altoonian Photography)

an Armenian with a full heart... rooted in 2 identities," she said, proclaiming that America is strongest when it embraces its multicultural nature. She added that while "we mourn the loss of the ancient land of Artsakh [Nagorno-Karabagh]... we are not defined by what we lost... We carry faith, culture, resilience..." Minasian described how everything on the walk has symbolic meaning. "This is more than a collection. It's a covenant," she said. "Every detail whispers 'We are still here'..." She applauded the foundation members for giving "voice to the enduring spirit of the Armenian people."

The program began with blessings from and later uplifting words by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America; Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Church of America; and the Most Revered Mikael Mouradian, Bishop of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg in the U.S.A. and Canada. Bishop Parsamyan spoke of the gratitude expressed

## COMMUNITY NEWS

## AIWA Celebrates 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

AIWA, from page 6

Several long-standing committee members were singled out: 30-plus years Joan Agajanian Quinn, Argine Jean Kelegian, Ani Aivazian, Arsine Phillips, and Annie Balikian from New England.

Founded in Boston in 1990, AIWA is a nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing women's issues and fostering leadership and opportunity. With affiliates in Los An-



The recipients of Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarships, from left: Lilia Margaryan, Gabriella Deeb, Sylva Pinedjian, and Nicole Tsarukian (Karine Armen photo)

geles, New England, New York, San Francisco, Chicago, and Yerevan, AIWA has built a global network committed to uplifting women across communities.

AIWA International continues to lead several impactful initiatives, including EmpowerPath Armenia, which offers skills development for women from Artsakh, and EmpowerPath Lebanon, created in partnership with the Jinishian Memorial Association. Additional programs include elderly care and childcare training, scholarships, and financial support for university students worldwide.

For three decades, the Los Angeles affiliate has been at the forefront of these efforts, cultivating a legacy of service and empowerment. Its work includes supporting women in higher education, promoting equity in STEM fields, and expanding access to vocational training that leads to sustainable careers. The affiliate remains deeply committed to gender equity and social responsibility.

### Annual Meeting and Scholarship Announcement

AIWA's annual meeting was in the morning on May 2 at Oakmont Country Club in Glendale. The first part of the meeting in-



Ani Hovannisian showed photos of her family (Karine Armen photo)

cluded breakfast, a guest speaker, filmmaker Ani Hovannisian Kevorkian, and the announcement of the recipients of the Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarships. In the second part of the meeting, affiliates reported on their activities and events of 2025.

Hovannisian talked about her grandparents' struggle in surviving the genocide,

her parents' life in Fresno, and the importance of sharing our stories. She included a short video from her brother's wedding, in which her grandmother told the young couple, "Stay Armenian and have many children." She said, "Please document your stories, ask questions from your grandparents and parents." She told the new generation of women, "You are our voices, you are already doing what is going to take us forward."



From left: L. A. City Councilman Adrin Nazarian, AIWA president Silva Katchiguian, and AIWA L. A. affiliate president Houry Aposhian (Karine Armen photo)

Nicole Nishanian announced the scholarship recipients and announced that instead of \$5,000, each would receive \$10,000. The five scholarship recipients were Nicole Tsarukian, Gabriella Deeb, Nareh Abovian (who could not attend), Sylva Pinedjian, and Lilia Margaryan.

Houry Aposhian, the president of AIWA Los Angeles, said, "We have created a great relationship with the Armenian Consulate in Glendale. The staff is all women, and they support women's issues."

Lilit Yenokyan, San Francisco affiliate president, said, "I am very excited to be here and support the formation of the next generation of AIWA women, bringing everyone together, and creating belonging for Armenian women to come lean on each other, empower, and grow together."

## Attorney Mark Geragos Speaks About Career

GERAGOS, from page 6

Geragos made clear his displeasure with the current government in Armenia led by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and its controversial rift with several Armenian Church hierarchy.

Fellowship was the spirit of the event and Men's Club President Robert Berberian concluded the evening by reminding the audience that the next, and season final, meeting of the Club would take place on Monday, June 1. Live Armenian music will be played by the Steven Tashjian Ensemble during a loshkebab and kheyima dinner.



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## COMMUNITY NEWS

## America's Oldest Armenian Church Seeks Descendants of Founding Families for Anniversary Celebration

WORCESTER — Armenian Church of Our Saviour in Worcester, recognized as America's oldest Armenian church, is calling on descendants of its founding families - and all those whose family histories intersect with this historic parish to reconnect with their roots as the church prepares to celebrate its 135th anniversary on November 21 and 22.

Consecrated in 1891, the church's original sanctuary on Laurel Street was established by Armenian immigrants who came to central Massachusetts seeking opportunity and building new lives in America, many finding work in Worcester's wire mills. At a time when Armenian communities were just beginning to take root in the United States, the parish became the first seat of the Armenian Diocese in America and helped lay the foundation for Armenian church life across the country.

As the Armenian community in Worcester grew, the parish built its current sanctuary on Salisbury Street in 1952 to serve an expanding congregation. Today, Worcester remains one of New England's enduring centers of Armenian-American life, where three Ar-

menian churches continue to preserve faith, language, culture, and community.

As part of this milestone anniversary, the church is reaching out to descendants of its



The church in 1909

founders and early parish leaders, many of whose families may now be living across the United States.

"Many Armenian-American families began their journey in Worcester before putting down roots in other parts of the

country," said Steve Migridichian, deacon of the church and member of the anniversary planning committee. "We hope this celebration will bring families back to where so many of their American stories began, while honoring the vision, sacrifice, and faith of those who built this church for future generations."

The planning committee is especially hoping to connect with descendants of the founders and members of the committee that built the original Laurel Street church, including:

Bishop Hovsep Sarajian; Abraham Agajanian; Hamparsoom Arakelian; Minas Aroian; Krikor Bagdigian; Mardiros Bagdigian; George Mardiros; Garabed Tashjian; Z. Terzian; Kevork Avedisian; Mardiros Gujigian; Kevork Jusakalian; Hovanes Krikorian; Nazar Nors-

gian; Bagdasar Tashjian; Kevork Tashjian; Yacoub Torosian and Hovhannes Yaghjian.

Individuals who believe they may be descendants — or who know families connected to these early parish leaders — are encouraged to contact Steve Migridichian at smigridichian@danddsrealtyllp.com.

The anniversary committee is also seeking photographs, documents, and personal memories connected to the life of the parish. Families are invited to share photographs from baptisms, weddings, Sunday School, ACYOA activities, choir performances, picnics, and other moments that tell the story of Armenian-American life through the generations.

All are invited to join the 135th anniversary celebration on November 21, as the community gathers in the church Cultural Hall to honor not only the history of a church, but the story of Armenian faith, perseverance, and family in America. Details about this event will follow. On Sunday, November 22, a special worship service will be held at the church, presided by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church.

## OBITUARY

### Apo Ashjian

#### Founder of Sayat Nova Dance Company, Abaka School of Dance

WALTHAM, Mass. — Apo Ashjian, of Waltham passed away peacefully on May 4, 2026 with his family by his side.

He was the husband of Arlet Ashjian; father of Alina Ashjian Palanjian and her



husband Sevag, Garineh Ashjian and her husband Hrag, Vrej Ashjian and his girlfriend Megan Kaloukian; grandfather to Liana, Sevana, and Alique Palanjian, and Arek and Aren Thomasian. He was the son of the late Joseph and Alice Ashjian; brother of Sona Ashjian, Hagop Ashjian and his wife Arpie, and brother-in-law Alfred Ghoughasian; and uncle to Araz and Sariné Ashjian. He is also survived by many caring family members and dear friends.

Born in Aleppo, Syria, Apo moved to Lebanon at the age of 3 with his family. In 1970 he migrated to the U.S. with his family and settled in Cambridge. He later

attended Northeastern University majoring in physical education and was a collegiate soccer player.

After moving to America, Apos' parents felt it was important to preserve his Armenian identity and signed him up in as many Armenian youth organizations as possible. He joined the Tekeyan Cultural Association at the age of 17, and there he developed a passion for Armenian dance. This led him to direct the AGBU Daron Dance Ensemble in 1980 and the Hamazkayin Erebuni Dance Ensemble from 1981-1985.

In 1986, Apo and a few special individuals felt it was important to form an independent dance company, one free of any political or religious affiliation so that all individuals from all walks of life could join. This is when he founded the Sayat Nova dance Company of Boston in 1986 and directed its premiere performance that November to a sold-out audience. In October 1987, Ashjian traveled and studied with various dance ensembles throughout Armenia. He studied extensively with renowned choreographers and expert ethnographers and in 1994, he received his certification as an Armenian dance Director and Choreographer. In 1995, Apo also opened Abaka Dance Academy where he instilled the love of Armenian culture into the children of our community, giving generations of children something to belong to.

Through Sayat Nova Dance company of Boston and Abaka, the number of individuals that Apo has impacted is immeasurable. The lessons he taught went far beyond dance steps and choreography. He was a father figure and a role model, helping shape lives for countless individuals. His gentle guidance and grounding presence taught discipline and pride. By giving his life to something bigger than himself, he encour-

aged others to also lead a life with purpose. He did not only promote Armenian culture through dance, but also as a hairdresser, where he would educate his non-Armenian clients about Armenian culture and music. Many of his clients actually traveled to Armenia to visit the country after hearing from Apo about what a beautiful place it is.

Apo's ambitious character was contagious. As an 18-time marathoner, and a track & field coach, he quickly gained followers to run and cycle alongside him. Even when running marathons, he promoted the Armenian culture, carrying the Armenian flag across the finish line.

A man of great integrity and highest character, his influence as a public figure didn't come close to the immense influence

he had on his family. Apo met his wife Arlet in 1980. They married in 1981, and had 3 children, Alina, Garineh, and Vrej. He was so proud, not just of them, but of their significant others, Sevag, Hrag, and Megan. Above all else, Apo's proudest role was being a grandfather to his five grandchildren, Liana, Arek, Sevana, Aren, and Alique. His love for them was immeasurable and his legacy lives on through them.

Funeral service were held at Saint Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church, 38 Elton Ave., Watertown on Friday, May 8. Interment followed at Ridgelawn Cemetery, Watertown. In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to Sayat Nova Dance Company of Boston (PO Box 490 Newton, MA 02456).

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COMMUNITY NEWS

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Armenian Student Gathering Held in Chicago

By Paruir Sarkisian

CHICAGO — At the initiative of the Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Armenia in Chicago Oscar Tatosian, a meeting was held on April 20 with Armenian students studying at leading universities in Chicago and the surrounding region.

The purpose of the event was to create a collaborative platform where students could get to know one another, establish professional and personal connections, and discuss opportunities for their future engagement with Armenia.

The meeting was attended by students from the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, Northeastern Illinois University, Lake Forest College, Rosalind Franklin University, and other higher education institutions in the Chicago area.

Tatosian welcomed the participants. He emphasized the importance of such gatherings, noting that strengthening connections among Armenian students and bringing together their educational potential are of great significance both for community life

and for Armenia's future.

He highly valued the educational aspirations of the young people and noted that the knowledge and experience gained by each student can play an important role in Armenia's development. Tatosian encouraged the students to maintain active contact with the consulate, emphasizing that they may reach out to it with any questions or initiatives. He said that the consulate is ready to be as helpful as possible to young people and to serve as a bridge between them and Armenia.

Senior Advisor to the Consulate Paruir Sarkisian emphasized in his opening re-



Honorary Consul Oscar Tatosian leading a tour of the Union League Club of Chicago

marks that the main purpose of the initiative was not only to give Armenian students an opportunity to get to know one another, but also to lay the foundation for long-term

cooperation between Armenia and young professionals.

Addressing the students, Sarkisian stated: "You are Armenia's intellectual capital. The education you receive has strategic value for Armenia. The Republic of Armenia needs your knowledge and professional experience today and in the future."

He emphasized the potential of young professionals, who can play an important role in Armenia's economic, technological, and institutional development processes.

Sarkisian also referred to Armenia's current development priorities, noting that Armenia is at an important stage of economic activation and reforms. He noted that the country is attracting increasing interest from international business and the technology sector, including companies such as Nvidia and Firebird AI.

According to him, the advancement of the peace agenda, infrastructure and investment programs, as well as the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) initiative, can create new opportunities for Armenia's future development.

During the ensuing discussion, students raised questions regarding Armenia's political and economic situation, the role of young people, maintaining ties with the homeland after completing their education, and opportunities for professional engagement.

Areg Aslanyan, a student at Northwestern University with an interest in cybersecurity, spoke about the economic activity recorded in Armenia in recent years and the prospects for development in the technology sector. He declared that in the future he hopes to contribute his professional knowledge and experience to Armenia's technological progress.

In turn, Davit Miroyan, a student at the University of Chicago, addressed the importance of military service. He also emphasized that Armenian youth should have the opportunity to receive an education abroad while maintaining strong ties with Armenia.

According to the participants, the meeting was an effective and important step toward strengthening the Armenian student community in Chicago. The idea of having such meetings in a regularly scheduled format was discussed, with gatherings at least twice a year.

The event was held at the Union League Club of Chicago, one of Chicago's his-



First row, second from left, Senior Advisor Paruir Sarkisian and third from left Honorary Consul Oscar Tatosian, with Chicago area Armenian students

toric and distinguished clubs. At the conclusion of the event, Tatosian organized a tour of the club's halls for the participating students, presenting the club's history, established traditions, and significant role in Chicago's civic and cultural life.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# 124th Diocesan Assembly Envisions a Church ‘Renewed in Hope’

MILWAUKEE, Wis. — The 124th Assembly of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America convened on Thursday, April 30, and continued through adjournment on Saturday, May 2. It was the fourth Diocesan Assembly to be presided over by Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan.

As such, it was the occasion for the Eastern Diocese’s quadrennial election for the office of Primate, which saw Bishop Mesrop re-elected to serve a second four-year term.

St. John the Baptist Armenian Church of Milwaukee hosted the Assembly, with business and social functions taking place at the city’s historic Pfister Hotel.

The inaugural session was called to order on April 30. Delegates and guests were welcomed by host parish pastor Fr. Guregh Hambarzumyan, parish council chair Lyle Dadian, and parish Assembly Executive Committee members Harold Aghjian, Maritza Armagan, and Gary Seabrook.

A formal message from Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, was read to the delegates, after which Bishop Mesrop set a warm-hearted tone for the meeting with his welcoming words.

In all, 150 parish representatives — clergy, parish council chairs, and Diocesan delegates — along with a substantial number of observers, gathered in person for the proceedings. Among the guests were two visitors from the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin: V. Rev. Fr. Zakaria Baghumyan and V. Rev. Fr. Movses Sargsyan.

## ‘Renewed in Hope’

Parsamyan offered gracious words of thanks before launching into his yearly address to the delegates. Noting America’s upcoming 250th anniversary, he paid tribute to the country that has welcomed Armenians and embraced their contributions to society.

In a retrospective on the past four years, the Primate recalled his travels throughout the Eastern Diocese, visiting every parish and meeting the faithful in their home communities.

“Everywhere I have gone,” he said, “I have seen the same truth: Our church is alive. Yes, we face challenges. We live in a changing world. Our communities are diverse, geographically dispersed, and shaped by different experiences. But beneath all of that, there is a deep and abiding faith. There is resilience. There is love for the church. And there is a desire — not simply to preserve what we have received—but to grow, to renew, and to move forward.”

Bishop Mesrop fondly recalled some milestones of his visits: ordaining more than 200 young altar servers; consecrating two new churches, and a new priest for the Diocese; spending time at the Diocesan camps and youth gatherings. He mentioned the resources created by the Diocesan Ministries departments that aim to deepen worship experience, engage youth and young adults, and extend Christian witness into the surrounding society.

And he spoke of the simple habits of generosity and welcoming outreach that assure members and visitors alike that the Armenian Church is their home.

A short video outlining these accomplishments reflected the theme of the 124th Diocesan Assembly: “Renewed in Hope.”

“These accomplishments tell a story,” he said: “not only a story of what we have done, but of what God has done for us.”

This theme animated the latter part of the Primate’s address, in which he looked ahead to his concerns for the coming term. Among these are increasing overall church attendance; more fully engaging the younger generation; helping local parishes relieve



financial burdens and identify up-and-coming leaders; pursuing additional opportunities for women to serve their churches; and making worship more accessible.

To close his address, the Primate returned to the theme of Hope. “Christian Hope,” he said, “is never wishful thinking. It is confidence grounded in the living presence of Christ. It is the assurance that the Lord who guided His church yesterday, who sustained her through persecution and uncertainty, is the same Lord who walks with her today—and will never abandon her in the future.”

“Let us carry that Hope into every parish, every ministry, every home, every heart,” he concluded. “Renewed in Hope, let us go forward together.”

## Elections, Reports, and Proposals

Under the guidance of Diocesan Assembly chair Herman Purutyan (of St. James Church, Watertown, MA), business moved forward at a steady pace. Serving alongside him were vice chair Zaven Kalayjian (St. Mary Church, Washington, DC) and secretary Laurie Bejoian (Holy Translators Church, Framingham, MA).

On behalf of the Nominating Committee, Gregory Saraydarian (Holy Martyrs Church, Bayside, NY) took to the podium to explain the secure method of voting that would be employed throughout the proceedings. All voting was conducted using a secure online balloting platform.

In a departure from the usual practice, the report of the Diocesan Council and the Diocese’s Ministries Department was conducted in a panel format, in which Diocesan Council vice chair Lisa Esayian (St. James Church, Evanston, IL) directed interview questions to a panel comprising Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Diocesan Council chair Richard Papalian (St. Gregory the Enlightener Church, White Plains, NY), and interim Director of Ministries Fr. Hratch Sargsyan (St. Gregory of Narek Church, Cleveland, OH).

Each speaker fielded questions on the current operating strengths of the Diocese, strategies for accomplishing programs with limited resources and personnel, and challenges that are being addressed. Topics under discussion included the ongoing St. Vartan Cathedral Renovation Project, and its connection to every parish; administrative reforms at the Diocesan Center that have improved its operational and financial functioning; the wide array of ministry programs that connect with youth and adults through new publications and interactive online sessions; and directions for the future of the Eastern Diocese.

A short video gave delegates an overview of the efforts and offerings of the Diocesan Ministries department.

Enhancing the presentation was an im-

pressive Annual Report with detailed information, that had been printed for the delegates in advance of being distributed to the public.

Various Diocesan organizations also reported to the assembly. Presenters included Sarah Andonian of the Women’s Guild Central Council; Fr. Hovhan Khoja-Eynatyan of the Sacred Music Council; Bree Carriglio and Sarah Stites of the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) and its crowd-sourcing platform “Ayo”; Marie Vanerian of the Armenian Church Endowment Fund (ACEF); and Fr. Mardiros Chevian of St. Nersess Seminary.

Delegates also heard from Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, the Diocesan Legate and Ecumenical Director, who spoke about his efforts to advance the causes of the Armenians of Artsakh and Jerusalem among the world ecumenical community.

Speaking on behalf of the Diocesan Board of Trustees, Sandra Shahinian and Melanie Dadourian outlined three priorities of the board, involving oversight of the cathedral and Diocesan Complex projects; understanding the valuation of parish properties; and assessment, utilization, and insurance for artwork in the collection of the Diocese.

Informative reports from the Diocesan Ministries departments were delivered during “breakout sessions,” in which groups of delegates rotated among different rooms to engage in small-group presentations and discussions, featuring staff from the Youth and Young Adult Ministry department and Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA); the Diocesan summer camps; the VEMKAR digital ministry platform; Armenian Language Ministry; and Children and Family Ministry.

The St. Vartan Cathedral Renovation Project and its Fundraising Committee received a prominent place in the assembly sessions. Haig Buchakjian (St. Leon Church, Fair Lawn, NJ) reported on the successfully completed exterior phase of the project, and looked ahead to the interior renovation slated to begin later this year.

He was joined by Richard Papalian in a detailed discussion of plans for the development of the Diocesan administration building, which outlined the overall vision guiding the plans, identified the highly experienced team of advisors, and addressed steps going forward. Both speakers underscored that this year’s presentation was built on two prior years of coming before the Diocesan Assembly delegates to explain and keep the assembled body fully informed. The presentation outlined the next step of going forward, which will involve issuing a public “request for proposal” to a vetted and curated list of developers in the coming months.

In a presentation on the efforts of the Cathedral Renovation Fundraising Committee, Melanie Dadourian and Laurie Onanian announced that the campaign’s fundraising has surpassed \$28 million (of a projected \$36 million budget). They urged the attending parish leaders to use the tools developed by the campaign—including a new printed brochure, social media, parish social events, and the project website—in their home settings.

(Learn about and support the St. Vartan Cathedral Renovation campaign on its website: [StVartan.org](http://StVartan.org).)

Five proposals were considered during the assembly. The first, presented by the Diocesan Council, sought to conform the language of the Diocesan Bylaws to the “stewardship” funding system adopted by many parishes during the course of a five-year pilot program. It passed in its initial vote, and will be brought to a vote again next year, in accordance with the Bylaws amendment procedure.

The second proposal, to allow remote participation in parish assemblies under certain circumstances, was the subject of extensive discussion, with the result of the Assembly passing a motion asking the Diocesan Council to collaborate with the motion’s sponsoring parish to conduct a multi-year pilot program.

Two related proposals, to add a precise definition of “quorum,” for purposes of Diocesan Assemblies, in the Diocesan Bylaws, were tabled.

A fifth proposal, amending the Diocesan Bylaws by enlarging the definition of “official notification” for parish assemblies to include electronic notification, was passed by the delegates, and will be brought to a vote again next year.

## Final Blessings

Saturday’s assembly session began with a requiem service for departed delegates, clergy, and Diocesan leaders of the past year, followed by a reflection on the assembly theme by Fr. Aren Jebejian (St. John Church, Southfield, MI).

Fr. Avedis Kalayjian (St. Mesrob Church, Racine, WI) presented highlights of the Clergy Conference, which had met in the days prior to the main gathering. The delegates also heard highlights of the Parish Council Chairs Meeting, which had immediately preceded the inaugural session. Arlen Haruthunian (St. Sarkis Church, Dallas, TX) delivered the report on behalf of the assembled parish council chairs of the Eastern Diocese.

The final session also saw the passage of a revised budget of \$5.7 million for 2026, and a balanced budget of \$5.5 million for 2027 — both introduced and explained in a detailed visual presentation by Diocesan Council treasurer Alex Topakbashian. He noted the steady recent increase in income from annual fundraising and rental of the Diocesan facilities, and introduced a new online “Diocesan Leadership Hub” that will link parishes for the sharing of resources and communication.

The 124th Diocesan Assembly adjourned ahead of schedule, but not before Bishop Mesrop approached the podium a final time to lead the participants in prayer, and to thank the host parish, delegates, staff, and all the Diocesan leaders for their ongoing activity in the church. “I look forward,” he said, “to seeing you in your respective parishes, to walking this journey together, and to seeing you at next year’s assembly.”

The 124th Diocesan Assembly was also the occasion for the Annual Awards Banquet, the Diocesan Clergy Conference, and the 37th Women’s Guild Assembly. Look for expansive treatment of these gatherings in the near future.



# Arts & Culture

## NAASR and Belmont Public Library Team Up For Children's Event

BELMONT, Mass. — On Saturday, April 18, the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) and the Belmont Public Library held their first joint children's program, "One Fine Day: Classic Armenian Stories and Art by Nonny Hogrogian," as a part of NAASR's ongoing ԱԲԳ (ABC) for Children series.

The two neighboring organizations — both are headquartered on Concord Avenue in Belmont — had previously partnered on other programs, but this marked the start of a new collaboration on children's programming. The April 18 event, which took place at the new Belmont Public Library building, was also the first NAASR children's event presented in English.



Deborah Borsuk of Belmont Public Library



One Fine Day by Nonny Hogrogian

The inaugural joint event was led by Deborah Borsuk, the Coordinator of Children's Services at Belmont Public Library, who presented stories by acclaimed Armenian-American artist Nonny Hogrogian (1932-2024). The program featured engaging readings, including Come Back, Moon and One Fine Day. In addition to storytelling, children were told about the author-illustrator and her husband, author David Kherdian, followed by a hands-on creative activity using a variety of materials. Many books written and illustrated by Hogrogian were displayed, and children and their parents were able to browse and familiarize themselves with them.

The event was joyful and warmly received. The next program, "Once There Was and Was Not," will take place at Belmont Public Library on Saturday, May 16, at 3 pm.

For more information about NAASR's ԱԲԳ for Children, contact her at [ani@naasr.org](mailto:ani@naasr.org).



Seta Injeyan on May 8 with one of her works (Karine Armen photo)

## 'Portraits of Nations' In Glendale

By Karine Armen

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GLENDALE — Armenian Arts Gallery presented an art exhibition by Seta Injeyan, titled "Portraits of Nations: Songs in Color and Struggle," from May 7 to 10, with an opening reception on Friday, May 8.

Gallery owner Stepan Partamian welcomed the audience.

Injeyan is a Los Angeles-based artist whose abstracts invite viewers to move beyond headlines and stereotypes, and to encounter nations as living presences shaped by struggle, history and aspirations. The exhibition included works inspired by countries across different regions of the world, offering a visual language of humanity that is both personal and universal. Rather than directly illustrating geography or politics, the works evoked the emotional, historical and spiritual character of each country.

Injeyan said, "I pay attention to rhythm and energy in my paintings. For 'Portraits of Nations', I began with the colors of a nation's flag, but I did not paint them literally. I wanted to reach the emotional life of a country: its beauty, wounds, history, struggles, and spirit." She added, "Each painting is an abstract portrait of a nation, and not a political statement. Together, these works speak to memory, identity, conflict, resilience and hope."

Injeyan explained how, over the decades, her practice has evolved through diverse series: early experimental works with transparency and film, the "Organic Flows" paintings inspired by the human body and nature, and the "Road Works" series exploring geography, energy and movement.

In recent years, Injeyan has expanded into curatorial roles, such as curating "Echoes of the Unconscious" for the TAG Gallery and serving as juror for the San Fernando Valley Arts & Cultural Center, enriching her dialogue with other artists and communities.

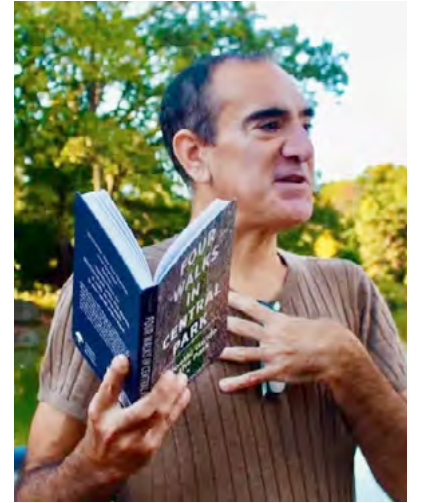
For more information about her works, visit <https://www.setainjeyan.com/>.



Artist Seta Injeyan on Saturday, May 9 (Karine Armen photo)

## Aaron Poochigian

Expanding the Reach of Poetry and Armenianism



By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/NEW YORK — Aaron Poochigian is an American poet, translator, and classicist born in 1973. He studied at Moorhead State University and later earned a PhD in Classics from the University of Minnesota in 2006. He also received an MFA in poetry from Columbia University, strengthening his dual career in scholarship and creative writing. Poochigian is especially known for his acclaimed translations of ancient Greek authors such as Sappho, Aeschylus, and Apollonius of Rhodes. His original poetry collections include *The Cosmic Purr* (2012) and *Manhattanite* (2017), the latter winning the Able Muse Book Award. In addition to poetry, he has written a verse novel titled *Mr. Either/Or* (2017) and its sequel, blending classical forms with modern themes. His book *American Divine* won the Richard Wilbur Award, and he continues to live and write in New York City.

**Dear Aaron, more than 30 years ago, Diana Der Hovanessian remarked in a conversation that fewer and fewer people in the United States were interested in poetry. I assume that in contemporary American society poetry occupies an even smaller place today.**

Yes, poetry is, famously, the worst-selling section in the bookstore. I don't blame the reading public; I blame poets themselves for forgetting that poetry, whatever else it might be doing, should always be entertainment as well. Poets should give readers what they need to be delighted. I have devoted my career to pushing poetry beyond academia and getting it in front of interested general readers. One recent event in that effort is the publication of my poem "Choop," about making moonshine, in *Zyurgy*, the magazine of the American Home Brewers Association. I have also resolved to read poetry, my own and others, as a busker in Central Park this summer. That's what I've been doing so far to expand the reach of poetry. I'm still trying to think of more I can do.

see POOCHIGIAN, page 16



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



## Tatyana's Everyday Food: Easy Pistachio Honey Baklava Rolls

Tatyana's Everyday Food specializes in flavorful unique desserts, everyday meals, old-fashioned cooking techniques and traditional Eastern European recipes with easy-to-follow video instructions and accessible ingredients. The site caters to both new and experienced cooks, whether you are time-pressed looking for a quick dinner or spending time creating unique birthday cakes, homemade desserts, and classic holiday dinners.

"From classic desserts to international dishes like Ukrainian borscht, you will discover many traditional Ukrainian, Russian and Eastern European recipes, that were passed down to me from my parents, alongside my own recipes inspired by the Italian, French and Asian cuisines," says Tatyana Nesteruk, a content creator and cookbook author. "I hope you enjoy my video tutorials, recipes and posts. Feel free to contact me should you have questions along the way."

Tatyana was born in the former USSR. Her Ukrainian family immigrated to the United States in 1989, and Tatyana was raised in Washington State in a tight-knit Slavic community. She learned to cook from her mother and grandmother, who passed down many of the recipes in her Ukrainian cookbook, *Beyond Borscht*. She has over 1 million followers across social media platforms on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest. She has appeared on the "TODAY Show" several times and many local TV channels, sharing her Eastern European recipes.

"These easy pistachio honey baklava rolls with honey syrup are made with pre-made puff pastry. They are my newest obsession and one of the easiest desserts to make. Buttery and flaky puff pastry filled with a pistachio paste, honey, optional raspberry jam, then brushed with a simple honey syrup. Enjoy these rolls with a cup of hot coffee or tea for breakfast, family brunch, or afternoon snack."

### INGREDIENTS:

2 sheets French puff pastry (Dufour brand, if available)\*  
3/4 cup shelled pistachios, salted and roasted  
1/4 cup sugar  
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
1/3 cup unsalted butter, extra soft but not melted  
2 tablespoons honey  
1/4 cup raspberry jam, optional  
1 large egg, for egg wash

### Honey Syrup Topping:

1/4 cup water  
1/4 cup honey  
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

### PREPARATION:

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line a half-sheet baking pan with parchment paper or a silicon mat.

### Defrost Pastry Dough:

If you need to make the dessert the same day, remove the pastry dough from the freezer and thaw at room temperature, until the dough is softened; about 1 hour. Return the dough to the refrigerator for an hour to chill. The dough needs to be cold when making the rolls.

### Filling:

Place the pistachios and sugar into a food processor or blender. Pulse the nuts until they're finely diced. You're looking for a chunky mixture. Add the softened butter next and a sprinkle of cinnamon. Pulse the nuts and butter together until a thick paste forms. Set this filling aside.

### Making the Rolls:

Remove the puff pastry dough from the refrigerator, unwrap it, and lay it flat on your work surface. If needed, use a rolling pin to flatten the dough further. Using an off-set spatula, spread the prepared pistachio paste evenly, leaving a 1/2-inch border along the top and bottom. Next, drizzle honey over the paste. If desired, spread several tablespoons of raspberry jam over the paste. (Tatyana likes to do half with jam, and half without.)

Place the second sheet of pastry dough over the top, then press the top and bottom borders together with your fingers. Using a long sharp knife, score the pastry dough first into 1-inch strips, then slice the pastry dough from top to bottom. (Watch Tatyana's video tutorial link below to see how she does this step.)

To shape each roll, lift a strip of the pastry and gently stretch it lightly. If the pastry is sticking to your work surface, slide a knife underneath to release it. Next, begin to twist the strip of dough from both ends, creating a twisted rope. Turn the twisted rope of pastry dough into a pinwheel or roll shape, and tuck the end underneath. Place the shaped rolls onto the prepared baking sheet, spacing them at least 1 to 1 1/2-inches apart.

Crack the egg into a small cup or bowl and whisk it vigorously. Using a pastry brush, coat each roll all over the beaten egg.

Bake for 33 to 36 minutes. The rolls should be a rich, golden-brown color and the puff pastry should be baked all the way through. Check the doneness by pressing lightly onto the rolls. The pastry should be super soft, fluffy and spring back. If the rolls start to darken too much, lay flat a sheet of foil over the rolls to tent the pastries.

### Honey Syrup Topping:

Pour the water and honey into a medium saucepan and whisk together. Bring the syrup to a simmer over medium-low heat and simmer for 5 minutes, stirring. Watch the syrup carefully so it doesn't boil over. Remove the syrup from heat, then squeeze in about a tablespoon of fresh lemon juice. Whisk in the juice, then let the syrup stand while the rolls finish baking.

As soon as you take the rolls out of the oven, brush the rolls generously with the syrup, making 2 to 3 passes. Allow the syrup to really sink into the pastries. Let the rolls stand for 5 minutes after adding the syrup, then transfer them with a spatula onto a cooling rack to chill. Serve immediately.

Makes 12 rolls

\* Dufour Puff Pastry dough is often referred to as Pâte Feuilletée, or leafed pastry, because it has many leaves or layers. Puff pastry is the finest of doughs. It is crisp, buttery, flaky and especially light. Puff pastry makes a perfect wrapping for a variety of savory and sweet dishes. Tatyana adds, "Puff pastry: this is one of the most important part of the recipe. I recommend seeking out a high-quality French puff pastry that's made with butter. I like the Dufour brand sold at Whole Foods." Women-owned and Bronx based, Dufour Pastry Kitchens has produced award-winning frozen puff pastry dough, ready-to-bake tart shells, and hand crafted savory hors d'oeuvres for over 25 years. Dufour Pastry Kitchens has maintained its reputation for developing both traditional and trend-setting products to suit the needs of chefs, caterers, and home cooks that won't settle for less than the best. Dufour works behind the scenes to save you time and labor with absolutely no compromise. The distinctive quality of Dufour's products has earned the reputation as "The Chef's Secret Source."

See: <https://dufourpastrykitchens.com/puff-pastry-dough/>

For this recipe, go to: <https://tatanaseverydayfood.com/easy-baklava-rolls/>

For this video tutorial, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ffUjqjCyHLI>

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For Keto and Low-Carb recipes, see: <https://tatanaseverydayfood.com/specialty/keto/>

Also try:

•Pistachio Baklava Cake: the ultimate honey cake. This decadent and sweet cake tastes like a bite of baklava, with creamy pistachio buttercream.

•Chocolate Pistachio Cream Puffs: the filling inside of these is amazing. Chocolate glazed cream puffs filled with a creamy pistachio and Irish cream filling.

•Honey Pistachio Babka Bread – incredibly delicious. Soft, buttery dough filled with pistachio paste, glazed with honey.

•Super Easy Apple Fritters: Easy and fluffy apple fritters recipe with a cinnamon glaze.



Tatyana and her husband,



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE



This first exhibit of Arshile Gorky's work in an Armenian museum includes paintings and drawing from the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Housatonic Museum of Art, Yale University Art Gallery, and other lenders

## Arshile Gorky Exhibition at Armenian Museum Extended through September

WATERTOWN — Due to overwhelming interest and positive reviews from prominent publications such as Boston Art Review and Artscope magazine, the Armenian Museum of America recently announce that “Arshile Gorky: Redrawing Community and Connections” has been extended to September 27.

The show was highlighted as a top pick by the Boston Globe and by GBH Arts Editor Jared Bowen.

This landmark exhibition was opened to coincide with the 100 Years of Arshile Gorky programming in the City of Watertown. Curated by Kim S. Theriault and

sponsored by the JHM Charitable Foundation, the exhibition brings together works from private collectors and leading institutions including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Housatonic Museum of Art, and Yale University Art Gallery.

“Gorky’s work demonstrates an aptitude for navigating the zeitgeist of his time; through synthesizing surrealist, abstract, and modernist frameworks, he formulates an approach that was increasingly his own. By tracing his artistic development alongside his personal history, Redrawing Community and Connections situates Gorky as a progenitor of Abstract Expression-

ism,” writes Abigail Feliciano in Boston Art Review. “Comprising generous loans from the Armenian diaspora, the exhibition reinforces that Gorky’s work has been sustained not solely by institutions, but by individuals who chose to steward his place in art history.”

“Redrawing Community and Connections” explores how Gorky, who arrived in Watertown after surviving the Armenian Genocide, helped shape modern art in America while forging powerful connections rooted in resilience and belonging. “This exhibition presents a fresh lens on Gorky’s legacy, emphasizing the deep

human connections that shaped his art and life,” notes Dr. Theriault.

“As the first Armenian museum to host an exhibition of Arshile Gorky’s work, we are honored to share this remarkable collection,” adds Museum President Michele M. Kolligian. “When we saw the response from our members and the art world, we made every effort to extend the exhibit so we can share this unique story with a wider audience. We are truly grateful to the lenders for supporting the extension of the show. We are proud to present these rarely seen works and to invite visitors to engage with Gorky’s story in a meaningful way.”

## Tekeyan Cultural Association Participates in Armenian Cultural Day at Pasadena Library

PASADENA, Calif. — On Saturday, May 9, the Tekeyan Cultural Association participated in Armenian Cultural Day at the Pasadena Public Library – Lamanda Park Branch. The Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Society, Nor Serount Cultural Association and Tekeyan Cultural Association united to present

an afternoon of activities and interactive workshops.

Participants had an opportunity to listen to stories written by Hovhannes Tumanyan and poetry written by Vahan Tekeyan. Traditional Armenian dances and Marash-style embroidery were demonstrated and taught. An interactive workshop allowed for partic-

ipants to create an Armenian letter or cross made from clay. Another workshop focused on drawing and coloring using the bird style artistic design of Armenian letters which have been prevalent for centuries.

The goal of the Lamanda Park Library’s staff was to showcase the ancient and rich Armenian culture to a non-Armenian au-

dience. The organizing committee consisted of talented college students and experienced educators, among others, who accomplished this goal. Among the members of the organizing committee were Sevan Deirbadrossian and Aleen Yadegarian of the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter.



Aleen Yadegarian reading poetry by Vahan Tekeyan



Demonstration of traditional Armenian dances



Sevan Deirbadrossian taught the bird style artistic design of Armenian letters



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Aaron Poochigian: Expanding the Reach of Poetry and Armenianism

POOCHIGIAN, from page 13

During my three visits to Iran (may peace come as soon as possible), I was delighted to see how young people honor their classical poets, Hafez and Rumi, reading their works beside their mausoleums. How is respect for the classics expressed in American society?

I wish America had the same reverence for its “classic” poets, say, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost. Sure, their poetry is assigned in high school and college, but none of them has come to be a popularly accepted spokesperson for an entire people (say, all Americans). I am envious of the various “poets of the people” that appear in national literatures. We Armenians have Rafael Patkanian and Hovhannes Tumanyan. As far as I can tell, there are no contemporary American poets who have attained national recognition. Still, some students do come to my mythology class with a passion for Classical literature. By and large, though, I’d have to say respect for the classics of our national poetry isn’t expressed in American society.

**You are also actively involved in translating and interpreting ancient Greek and Latin, French, and Chinese classical poets into English. I was very pleased to read highly acclaimed reviews of your translation of *The Flowers of Evil* by**

**Charles Baudelaire, a book very dear to me, as my father is its Armenian translator, also highly appreciated. I am sure yours was not the first English translation of Baudelaire. What does your version bring that is new, and what challenges did you face in translating it?**

It is exciting to learn that you father translated *The Flowers of Evil* into Armenian. Baudelaire writes poetry that rhymes. In English, there are a number of older translations that are rhymed badly. I felt they could be improved upon. More recent translations have gone with unrhymed free verse. I see the exclusion of rhyme as a fatal flaw in those translations. They get the meaning, more or less, but leave out the music. A translator is obligated, as I see it, to recreate not just the content but the form of the original as much as the host language (here English) will allow. When I sit down to read the French, *The Flower of Evil* is like a trance to me. I feel like I am caught up in one of his dream poems, and the primary cause for Baudelaire’s incantatory power is rhyme and recurring rhythms. When I sat to translate *The Flowers of Evil*, yes, I wanted to outdo the previous translators, but I also wanted to make sure I did everything I could to entrance the reader.

**I have followed the works of writers of Armenian origin around the world, especially the themes of roots and identity in their writing. I have translated your poem “The Only Grandson” into Armenian. Beyond the obvious Armenian references, can critics and readers perceive other elements—moods or motifs—that reflect your Armenian background?**

You asked about “Classics” in your second question. I have been reading the classic Armenian poets Sayat-Nova, Rafael Patkanian and Hovhannes Tumanyan, both in translation and by working slowly with dictionaries. One of the things that distinguishes Armenian poetry, as I see it, is its propensity for the grand passions. It is emotionally extreme, one way or another. My work has the same operatic streak.

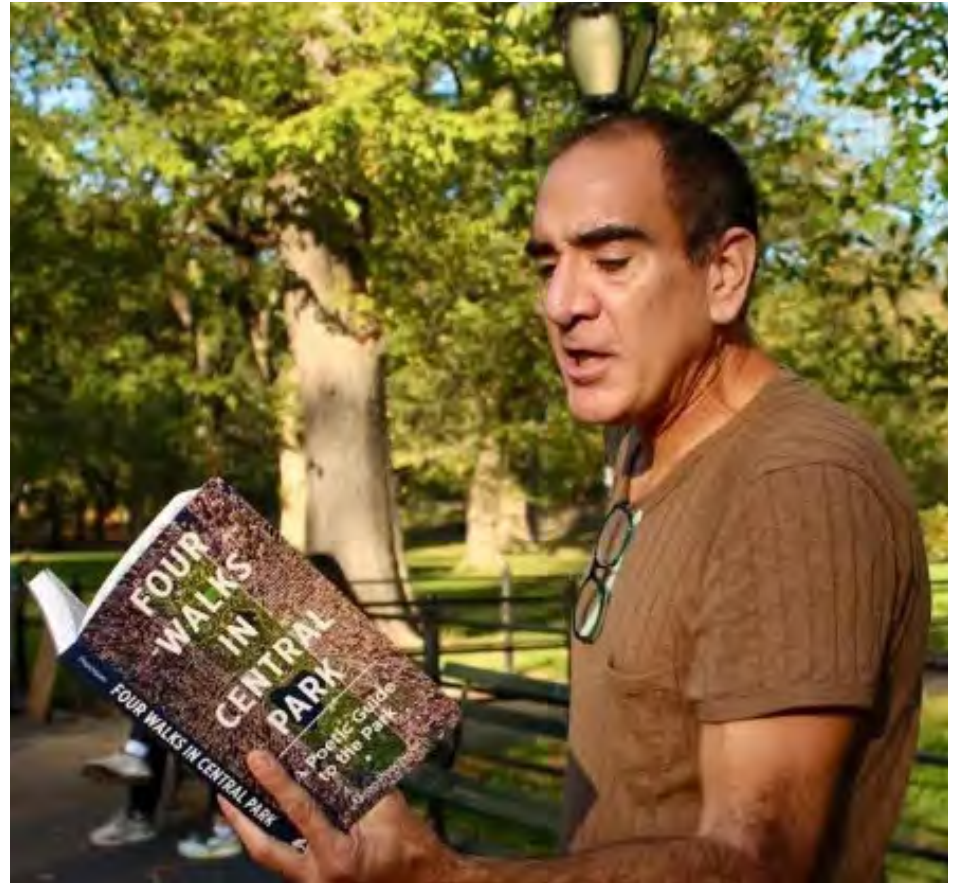
I also take inspiration from the earliest bit of Armenian poetry we have. It is preserved in Moses of Khorene’s *History of the Armenians*. The poetry in question is a description of the birth of the pre-Christian Armenian god Vahagn. He is the fire-giver, a benefactor to humankind. Here’s my attempt to capture it in English:

Contractions rattled sky and earth;  
pangs drove the crimson ocean wild;  
from it a crimson fennel stalk  
had surfaced and was giving birth.

Smoke spurted out of it at first,  
then gout of flame began to rise.  
Then, from that ache of blaze, a child  
with wildfire for a beard, a shock  
of hair like wanton wildfire, burst  
with suns for eyes.

I work a lot with the raw, elemental powers of mythological figures. I have been reading up on Armenia’s pre-Christian past, and what I have found has been influential on me.

**You share a surname with Chuck Poochigian, the eminent Associate Justice of the California Court of Appeals and a former California State Senator. Do you have any connection with him?**



As far as I know, all Poochigians are related. We have a labyrinthine genealogical chart. Yes, Chuck is my relative. He is my father’s cousin. I swam in his pool when I was young. He tells fun stories about working with governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. I respect Chuck very much. He worked with fellow senators and Schwarzenegger to get a bill passed that recognizes the Armenian genocide.

**“Poochig” means “balloon” in Armenian. Do you know the origin of this unusual surname? Tell us about the history of your Armenian ancestors and if there were/are some “old country” traditions in your family?**

Yes, I am fond of the “balloon” etymology for the name “Poochigian.” There is also a family legend that some Poochigian ancestor said “Bootch” or “Pootch” to summon the goats he was herding. I like the competing origin stories for the name; the more possibilities the better.

In the late 1890s, because of the genocide, my great-grandfather Bedros Poochigian left a village in historical Armenia, Perri, Kharpert, to seek his fortunes abroad. He intended to send for his wife and family once he had earned enough, but she and his younger son died before he could do so. In America, he worked in a coal mine in West Virginia at first and then a gold mine in California. Eventually reunited (after 14 years) with his elder son Kevork, he bought land for a grape farm in Fresno. He eventually married again and begot my grandfather, Vaughn Poochigian, born in 1909. Family legend holds that, once he made some money in America, Bedros worked for a time as a gunrunner, bringing weapons to Armenians to support the cause.

**Last year, you won the 2025 Anahid Literary Prize, presented by Columbia University’s Armenian Center in celebration of Armenian culture and talent. Do you have any Armenia-related projects, and have you ever visited your historical homeland?**

Thus far, I have translated two poems from Armenian, one from Moses of Khorene’s *History of the Armenians*, and the other, Rafael Patkanian’s “The New

Generation.” It took a lot of slow dictionary work. I grew up in North Dakota, far, far from my fellow Armenians, and I didn’t absorb the language at home. I would go stay with my Armenian relatives in Fresno during the summer, and I was baptized there at St. Paul’s Armenian Apostolic Church. My relationship with my Armenian heritage has always been vexed and full of guilt.

I have resolved to take Armenian language classes at the cathedral here in Manhattan, St. Vartan’s.

I have a knack for picking up reading facility in foreign languages and am hoping to do the same with Armenian. I have decided not to do any more translations so that I can focus on my original work. Still, if I were to do translation again, it would be of the poetry of aforementioned poets: Sayat-Nova, Rafael Patkanian, and Hovhannes Tumanyan.

## The New Generation

By Rafael Patkanian (1830-1892)

When Mama with a shove and holler  
supplies a child, and it’s a boy,  
let Papa give the little crawler  
a knife as his first toy.

Instead of pick-up-sticks, a wee  
wood horsey or some other trifle,  
let his reward for standing be  
a very accurate rifle.

When he is school-aged, teachers must  
instill the longhand script of swords.  
After he learns to slash and thrust,  
the kid can squint at words.

It’s fine to read and be well-versed;  
writing can be a useful skill,  
but, when you test him, let the first  
question be: “Can you kill?”

This is the only way to save  
Armenia from dependency.  
Playing the beggar grates on brave  
grown-ups who would be free.

## St. Hagop Annual Madagh Picnic Scheduled for Sunday, June 28

RACINE, Wis. — On Sunday, June 28, 2026, St. Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church will hold its annual Armenian (“Madagh”) Picnic at Johnson Park, 6200 Northwestern Avenue, in Racine. St. Hagop’s has held this traditional picnic or “Madagh” since 1938.

The word ‘Madagh’ means offering and goes back to the time of Abraham who was willing to offer his only son, Isaac, to God to prove his love, faith and obedience to the Lord.

The blessing will be officiated by Archpriest Father Zareh Sahakian. From 10:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., the public is invited to attend the picnic featuring seasoned ground sirloin leleh kebab dinners, hot dogs, sarma (stuffed grape leaves), penerlee (cheese puffs), khurabia (butter cookies), and other Armenian delicacies and pastries. From 1-5:00 pm, live Armenian music will be performed by the Mideast Beat for everyone’s listening and dancing pleasure.

Tickets are available for a cash raffle, with the raffle drawing at 4 p.m. Admission is free.

Donations for “Madagh 2026” are being accepted via Cash or check brought to St. Hagop Armenian Church on any Sunday or check (made payable to St. Hagop Armenian Church) mailed to: St. Hagop Armenian Church, 4100 N. Newman Road, Racine, WI 53406



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

**MAY 15 and 16** — The Armenian Memorial Church of Watertown will hold its Annual Fair on Friday, May 15, from 4 pm to 8 pm and Saturday, May 16, from 12 pm to 7 pm (rain or shine). Both days, the Church will be serving kebab dinners and exquisite desserts. Kebab dinners complete with sauce, rice pilaf, salad and pita bread, meatless meals, paklava, kadayif, cheoreg, mante, yalanchi, tourshi, beureg. 32 Bigelow Avenue in Watertown. Admission is free. The Church is wheelchair accessible. For more information call 617-923-0498.

**MAY 17** — MCMA Presents "Voices From the Homeland," featuring violinist Haig Hovsepien, cellist Suren Bagratuni and pianist Karen Hakobyan. Follen Church, 755 Massachusetts Ave., Lexington, 7 p.m. Tickets \$15-\$30.

**MAY 28** — Save the Date! "Father" by Diana Markosian, art exhibition opening. "Father" traces an emotional journey through photography, video, and archival materials, exploring themes of loss, identity, and belonging. Thursday, 7 p.m., Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown.

**MAY 20** — 40th Annual Membership Meeting of the Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City Association (CYSCA) with guest speaker Christina Maranci, Mashtots Professor of Armenian Studies, Harvard University, speaking on the medieval Armenian city of Ani. Business meeting at 7 p.m. for CYSCA members and others interested in becoming members, followed by guest speaker and a reception. Free and open to the public. At the Cambridge Citywide Senior Center (across from Cambridge City Hall), 806 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge. Parking nearby: on street; at Green Street Garage (260 Green St), and Central Square municipal lot #8. To RSVP or for more info, email info@cambridgeyerevan.org.

**MAY 23** — Friends of Armenian Culture Society (FACS) presents the 74th annual Armenian Night at the Pops, featuring violinist Sofya Vardanyan as soloist with the Boston Pops Orchestra, performing Alan Hovhanness' rarely performed Ode to Freedom for violin and orchestra, in a tribute to the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Also featured is the renown, genre-blending ensemble Pink Martini. Symphony Hall, 7:30 p.m. For tickets and information, visit FACSBoston.org.

**MAY 28** — Opening Night Preview: A Conversation with Artist Diana Markosian & Curator Anahit Gasparyan. Father traces an emotional journey through photography, video, and archival materials, exploring themes of loss, identity, and belonging. The opening night preview will feature a conversation between artist Diana Markosian and curator Anahit Gasparyan, followed by a reception. Thursday, 6:30 PM, Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown. This preview event is for Armenian Museum members only. Please RSVP at [www.armenianmuseum.org/rsvp](http://www.armenianmuseum.org/rsvp). Exhibition on view May 29 – September 13, Hours: Thursday – Sunday 12 PM – 6 PM.

**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)

**JUNE 1** — Monday, St. James Men's Club Dinner dance, Live Armenian music by the Steve Tashjian Ensemble, 6.15 p.m. mezza, 7 p.m. Losh Kebab & Kheyma dinner. \$25 per person, all are welcome. 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown.

**JUNE 4** — Special evening talk and reception featuring Pierre Terjanian, director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, sponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association, Boston Chapter. 7 p.m. SHARP, Baikar Building 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. Use Norseman Ave. entrance. RSVP [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com)

**JUNE 7** — Sunday, St. James Armenian Festival – Annual Picnic! Delicious Armenian food, Live Armenian music, children's activities, inflatables, and more! Rain or shine. Noon-5pm. St. James Armenian Church - 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown. For more info visit [www.stjameswatertown.org/festival](http://www.stjameswatertown.org/festival) or call 617.923.8860.

**JUNE 11** — Music in Color concert series featuring master oud virtuoso John Berberian and acclaimed contemporary artist Antranig Kzirian, this special evening brings together two generations of musicians in a dynamic exploration of sound, improvisation, and cultural expression. Sponsored by Nancy R. Kolligian. Thursday, 7 PM, Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown. **SEPTEMBER 24, 2026** — Save the Date! Celebrating Contributions! Gala to benefit the Armenian Heritage Park at the Inter-Continental Boston.

**JULY 27** — Monday, St. James Church 26th Annual Harold Partamian Golf Tournament, Oakley Country Club, hosted by the St. James Men's Club, following golf- cocktails, appetizers and banquet dinner at Oakley Country Club, for full details and online registration, please visit [www.stjameswatertown.org/golf](http://www.stjameswatertown.org/golf) office 617-923-8860.

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

## Tekeyan Boston Cooking Demonstration Showcases Mushabak and Mortadella

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — The Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Boston Chapter presented a new episode on April 30 of its ongoing cooking class series, this time starring Aleppine-style mortadella and mushabak, at the Baikar Building in Watertown. Expert cooks Rita Balyozian (co-chair of the chapter) and Rubina Davidian presented demonstrations on how to prepare these items before the audience got to taste samples.

Mushabak is a deep-fried sweet made from semolina and other ingredients, while Aleppine mortadella is distinct from the Italian type, with seven spices, Aleppo pepper, pistachios, garlic and other ingredients.

The chefs were supported in the evening's demonstrations by many of the members of the TCA Boston chapter. Stay tuned on Tekeyan social media and the Armenian Mirror-Spectator for more demonstrations of cooking tasty foods coming your way this fall!



Mmushabak (photo Aram Arkun)



Chef Rubina Davidian prepares mushabak (photo Aram Arkun)



Mortadella (photo Aram Arkun)



Chef Rita Balyozian in the process of making Aleppine-style mortadella (photo Aram Arkun)



Chef Rita Balyozian, at right, with Maral Der Torosian (TCA Boston Chapter Recording Secretary),



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE  
UNITED STATES

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The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is published weekly, except two weeks in July and the first week of the year, by:

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**SUBSCRIPTION RATES**

U.S.A.	\$100 one year
Canada	\$150 one year
Other Countries	\$230 one year

© 2026 The Armenian Mirror-Spectator  
Periodical Class Postage Paid at Boston,  
MA and additional mailing offices.

ISSN 0004-234X

COMMENTARY

# Who Is an Armenian *Gharib* In the 21st Century?

By Nareg Seferian

I was recently quite moved by one of the fantastic posts of the Armenian Museum of America's Sound Archive series. It featured the voice of Karnig Kuludjian from 1945. A genocide survivor who ended up in the Chicago area, Kuludjian expresses confidence on the disc now online that the war in Europe would soon come to an end in favor of the Allies and the boys would return home. It is a fun recording, quite organic, made at home — a rarity for the era. You can hear the muffled voices of people in the background, laughing at Kuludjian's amusing observations. The disc becomes even more compelling with a wonderful *à propos* song: *Gharib Akhper*, a work addressed to, roughly, a brother in exile, often framed as brothers in arms, expressing hope that they will come back. It is a song I have heard my father sing many times around many tables. So, I got a good sense of what that gathering in Chicago eighty years and more ago must have been like — beautiful, charming, melancholic.

The post offers an explanation of the term *gharib* — an exile, a wanderer, an emigrant. That category has featured vividly in Armenian life and times over the past few centuries. Even before the genocide, the Armenian Diaspora existed for a thousand years or so. Many Armenians have moved away from their communities for economic opportunity, following violence, for the sake of curiosity or adventure, and many other reasons. The phenomenon of the *gharib* also has *garod* tied to it — that is, a yearning. The *gharib* may be an economic migrant, but he (in art and literature, almost always male) would have preferred living and working at home, being near his loved ones. Many Armenian poems and stories display this theme of the lonely *gharib* in a far-off land, longing for home. (One remarkable modern manifestation of that tradition are the musical renditions of the works by the medieval poet, artist, and clergyman Mgrdich Naghsh by John Hodian and the Naghash Ensemble, reflecting yet again the enduring nature of being a *gharib* and expressing *garod* in Armenian life.)

It is a thought-provoking and moving category as such, and something that personally resonates with me. Indeed, I, unfortunately, sound too self-centred — the status of being a *gharib* has probably applied to most Armenians in the 20th century, and into the 21st. I would like to invite the consideration of some nuance along these lines, mainly tackling the dimension of identity and degrees of belonging to a place. Many Armenians in the West live in

what some scholars call “second diaspora” or “second-generation diaspora.” That is to say, they have moved more than once in the recent past. Most of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide were driven away from their homes and communities where they had lived for generations, centuries, and perhaps even millennia. To put it another way, they were dispossessed of their long-standing geographies and had to accommodate themselves in new ones. That was a violent exile creating hundreds of thousands of *gharibs*, forever driven apart, their *garods* never to be fulfilled as a “first diaspora,” so to speak.

My great-grandparents were among them. Their children and children's children found new homes and communities in the Middle East. In the decades that followed, for a variety of reasons, many of them ended up in the West — a “second diaspora,” yet another new geography, though not always the result of a violent deprivation of one's long-standing home. Surely the generation of my parents had meaningful senses of identity as Syrians, Lebanese, Egyptians, Iraqis, Jordanians, or otherwise. Becoming American, Canadian, Brazilian, Australian, or something else could not erase their past. Still, I know more than one person in Boston who would have gladly stayed on in Beirut had the war not caused such immense upheaval in Lebanon. I would say that that is a different kind of *gharib* status than the lonely, nostalgic migrants of old or the survivors of genocide. It is painful in its own way. But that layering of identity becomes entangled with numerous related phenomena — including modern ones, such as legal citizenship — which makes it problematic to categorize directly as *gharib* in the older sense.

Armenians from Armenia who have moved elsewhere for various reasons might in some sense or other consider themselves *gharibs*. (Seasonal workers who spend part of the year in Russia or elsewhere often use the term *khopan* to describe their travels.) But they have the luxury of regular communication and connection with the country — another modern facet that changes the intensity and the directionality of the *garod*. Armenians from Artsakh, meanwhile, display the tragic, classical dimension of being violently driven away from a long-standing geography. At the same time, they have access to an identity and belonging with a country and government that offers, again, multiple layers of entanglements to tease out. Some of our brothers and sisters from Artsakh choose to live in and become full citizens of the Republic of Armenia, some do not — yet again, for a variety of reasons.

In my own family, we have had multiple geographies over the past few generations, and I myself have lived and worked in a number of places. In listening to Kuludjian sing on that recording from 1945, I asked myself if I was a *gharib*. Somehow I could never go home to the place I was born and raised, in part simply because time had passed and things are different now. That's natural. That's plain nostalgia. On the other hand, I ask myself how many layers of identities, second or even third diasporas might inform one's sense of self, and, as a result, whether or not I could ever fully, truly belong anywhere.

Or whether or not, in fact, being a *gharib* can be a kind of reassuring identity for itself. There is a parallel in Jewish discourse — the category of “*Doikayt*” (“Here-ness”) or “Diasporism.” It is meant to convey the sense that Jewish communities can or perhaps even should exist where they are, that being in diaspora is an essential characteristic of Jewish identity. In Armenian discourse as well, there is an enduring debate across the meanings of homeland and diaspora, of *Tebi Yergir*, of brain drain, or what kind of engagement the government in Yerevan can or should have with communities around the world and vice-versa, what arrangements can be made or how to think of citizenship or residency in the Republic of Armenia, and so on. Indeed, for so many Armenians, engaging with the Republic of Armenia, with all of its challenges and delights, offers a way out of being a *gharib* that was never available in the past.

The examination of these categories leads me to the conclusion that the Armenian *gharib* in the classical sense does not quite exist in the 21st century. However, I am still not fully certain what it would mean to go home. Karnig Kuludjian and my great-grandparents made new homes and communities for themselves. Every generation since has continued to do so, to whatever extent possible. That could be one resolution, then — the possibility of a *gharib* looking forward as well as back to a home. Depending on where that home is and attitudes in broader society or its more dominant components, that might mean a perpetual state of being a *gharib* or it might mean, at some point, confidently claiming a secure, stable identity and sense of full belonging to a place. Recognizing such a status would require more investigation of what it entails exactly — that is, how to measure identity and belonging, or the scales of being a *gharib* and having *garod*.

(Nareg Seferian is an independent researcher. His published writings are available at [naregseferian.com](http://naregseferian.com).)

## Memory As Witness, Unity as Strength

(The following are remarks by Dr. Mary A. Papazian delivered to the Armenians of the South Bay at the Armenian Genocide Commemoration at St. Andrew Armenian Church, Cupertino, CA, on April 25. It has been slightly edited for space considerations.)

We gather here, in this sacred place, under the eyes of God and in the spirit of our ancestors, to mark what can never be unmarked — the 111th anniversary of the Ar-

menian Genocide. I am honored to stand before the Armenian community of the South Bay — Armenians of every denomination, joined together as one people — and to do so in this house of worship, St. Andrew Armenian Church, our gracious and generous host tonight, a congregation that has long been a keeper of our flame, a guardian of our memory.

Every April, no matter where I find myself, this day centers me. I have stood at

Times Square in New York City, helping to anchor a commemoration watched by thousands, voices rising above the noise of the world's busiest crossroads to declare what the world still too often refuses to hear: Medz Yeghern — the Great Crime — happened. It was Genocide. And we will not be silent. And I have stood on Armenian soil itself. I have walked the long march up the hill to Tsitsernakaberd — the fortress of

*continued on next page*

Postmaster: Send address changes to The Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472

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## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Rep. Fine Should be Kicked Out of Congress For His Anti-Armenian Racist Remarks

Randy Fine, a Jewish-American Republican Congressman from Florida, made a highly insulting remark by telling the audience on a nationwide podcast — the Jenny Beth Show — on April 30, “We don’t want Armenians to be able to serve in Congress.”

Rep. Fine made this controversial comment while criticizing Dan Bilzerian, a social media influencer with 29.6 million Instagram followers and a U.S. veteran, who is running against him in the Republican Primary in Florida. President Trump has endorsed Fine, calling him a “MAGA Warrior.”

Fine said that Bilzerian “lives in Las Vegas when he’s not in his foreign country of Armenia. But you know, he’s just a terrible anti-Semite. I think what he’s trying to show is that this group of hate-filled lunatics and losers can take hold in the Republican Party.... The little Armenian said, I think that President Trump was a pedophile rapist who should be impeached. That’s not a winning argument. It may work in Armenia, where he’s from, but that’s not an argument. That’s not gonna work in the United States. So, it’s bad. We have to take it seriously because we don’t want this to take root in our party. We don’t want Armenians to be able to serve in Congress. But I’m not gonna lose too much sleep about it.” Bilzerian is not from Armenia. He was born in Tampa, Florida, and became a dual citizen of Armenia in 2018.

If Rep. Fine had simply criticized Bilzerian because he did not like his controversial views, that would have been understandable. However, targeting all Armenians because of his disagreement with one Armenian-American is completely unacceptable and foolish. This is pure and simple racism. Fine was rebuked by several members of Congress, including Rep. Brad Sherman (Democrat-CA), Rep. Laura Friedman (Democrat-Ca), Rep. Brendan Boyle (Democrat-PA), and Rep. Delia Ramirez (Democrat-Illinois). Fine was also criticized by several members of the U.S. media, and online commentators.

“This isn’t just racist — it’s disqualifying,” stated ANCA National Grassroots Director Gev Iskajyan. “Saying Armenians shouldn’t be allowed to serve in Congress is blatant bigotry. No elected official who traffics in this kind of hate should be running for office.”

Rather than apologizing for his unsavory remarks, Fine doubled down on his insults by posting on X two days later: “Armenians should not serve in

Congress. Neither should Somalis. Or Guatemalans. Or — wait for it — Israelis.” He made matters worse by adding several other nationalities to his racist remarks.

How would Jewish Rep. Fine feel if someone says: “We don’t want Jews to be able to serve in Congress?” I am sure all hell would break loose. There would be nationwide condemnation of that person for being blatantly anti-Semitic. And if such a racist thing was said by an incumbent member of Congress, there would have been calls for his immediate resignation. The least Congress should do now is strip Fine of his membership on the prestigious House Foreign Affairs Committee.

I disagree with a lot of the controversial things Bilzerian says about Jews, such as calling Rep. Fine “a fat Jew.” The Israeli government has ranked Bilzerian number one on its list of the 10 most prominent anti-Semitic influencers.”

Rep. Fine himself “has a long history of making bigoted comments about Muslims, and suggested in 2025 that nuclear weapons should be dropped on Gaza. He has also used racist and Islamophobic language toward Muslim politicians in the US, such as New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, whom he called ‘little more than a Muslim terrorist’, adding that his citizenship should be stripped and he ‘should be deported to the Ugandan shithole he came from,’” Nate Ostiller reported in OC Media.

Fine introduced last October the “Disqualifying Dual Loyalty Act” (H.R. 5817), but Congress has not taken any action on his proposal. Serving as a dual citizen in the U.S. Congress is not against the law and cannot be an excuse for making racist comments about such individuals.

Over the years, many dual citizens have served in Congress, such as Sen. Ted Cruz who held joint U.S. and Canadian citizenship until 2014, and Congresswoman Michele Bachman who held joint U.S. and Swiss citizenship until 2012.

There are several other serious problems with Rep. Fine. Along with five other members of Congress, Fine is a cosponsor of H.R.6534, introduced by Rep. Anna Paulina Luna (R-FL), in the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Dec. 9, 2025. If adopted, H. R. 6534 would repeal Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act and lift longstanding restrictions on U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan, including providing military weapons.

Doing further research using the recently formed website GovItUp.com, I discovered that Ezra Friedlander, the principal of the Friedlander Consulting Group, a lobbying firm hired by Azerbaijan, donated \$1,000 to Rep. Fine’s campaign on Sept. 18, 2025. In addition, the Friedlander firm reported to the U.S. Department of Justice that it had arranged two meetings in June and July 2025, for Nigar Shiralizade, Political Officer at Azerbaijan’s Embassy, and Sanan Farajov, Second Secretary of Azerbaijan’s Embassy, with Rep. Fine’s Chief of Staff, to discuss “U.S.-Azerbaijan relations.”

As the expression goes, “People who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones at other houses.”

from previous page

swallows — in Yerevan, in a river of tens of thousands of Armenians moving in near silence toward the eternal flame, arms full of flowers, the air thick with grief and defiance in equal measure. To lay flowers at that memorial, on that hill, in that homeland, is to feel the full arc of what our people have endured and what they have refused to surrender. There is nothing like it in the world.

But I confess that there is no commemoration quite like this one — standing inside a church, surrounded by community, where the weight of what we carry together becomes visible. Here, among family, the solemnity is not performed. It is felt.

I am the granddaughter of Armenians who survived against the odds, though by different paths. My father’s family made their lives in Greece, where my father was born — exiles from Sis who rebuilt themselves in the diaspora before my father eventually found his way to America. My mother’s parents were born here in California, in Fresno, but their families had arrived on these shores under very different circumstances: one branch came in the 1890s for economic opportunity, seeking a better life; the other came as survivors of the Hamidian Massacres of 1895 — the great slaughter that preceded 1915 by two decades and served, in retrospect, as a rehearsal for what was to come. My family’s story is thus not one story but many, branching across continents and traumas. And yet all those branches lead here — to this room, to this day, to this obligation of memory.

As a child, I remember the annual April 24 commemorations my family attended — solemn, communal, essential. I remember, as a little girl in the mid-1960s, participating in the groundbreaking of the Armenian Genocide memorial in Montebello, carrying

a candle in the darkness. I did not fully understand then of what I was part. I understand now. That small flame was an act of defiance. It was a declaration that our dead would be named.

I think often about the long road our community has walked toward recognition — a road built by remarkable people. Richard Hovannisian, whose foundational histories of the Armenian people, the Genocide, and the 1st Republic, created the scholarly record the world could not ignore — and whose first books my own mother helped bring into the world as his editor. Vahakn Dadrian, whose meticulous documentation of the Genocide’s legal and historical dimensions gave that record its evidentiary spine. And Taner Akçam, the Turkish historian who broke with his own country’s official denial at great personal risk — whom my late husband Dennis Papazian brought to the United States in 2000 as a scholar-in-residence at the recommendation of Dadrian himself, when such a bridge between Armenian and Turkish academics was almost unimaginable. And so many more, a whole generation of scholars who refused to let silence stand.

Dennis stood among them — but he occupied a singular place. He was one of the founders and first executive director of the Armenian Assembly of America, the organization that in the 1970s launched the Armenian community’s coordinated effort to bring genocide recognition into Congress. What made Dennis rare was his refusal to choose between the library and the legislative chamber. He understood that scholarship without political will is a monument without a foundation, and that political advocacy without rigorous truth is noise. He built both — the Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan-Dearborn as a

home for evidence and memory, and the Armenian Assembly as the vehicle for turning that evidence into recognition. He believed, as I believe, that when genocide goes unpunished and unacknowledged, it emboldens future perpetrators. Sadly, history has not stopped proving him right.

But I cannot stand before you in a posture of pure retrospection. Because history is not finished with us.

In September 2023, the world watched — largely in silence — as the Armenian population of Artsakh, Nagorno-Karabakh, the ancient Armenian heartland, was forced from their homes in a matter of days. Over 100,000 people — an entire indigenous population — fled in a mass exodus that can be called nothing other than ethnic cleansing. Families who had lived on that land for generations left with whatever they could carry. Churches that had stood for centuries were left behind.

And this week — just days before we gather here — Azerbaijan’s occupation administration destroyed the Holy Mother of God Armenian Church in Stepanakert. A church built between 2000 and 2019. A living symbol of Armenian faith and revival on that ancient land. They did not wait for the anniversary to pass. They did not pretend. The demolition happened in plain sight, days before April 24, as if to punctuate what we already know: this is not the end of a process. It is the continuation of one. Not only are buildings being destroyed — but memory, identity, and the right of a people to return to their homeland.

This is not ancient history. This is happening in our lifetime. And the echoes of 1915 are not faint — they are deafening.

We must also speak the names of those still imprisoned. Among the political prisoners held in Baku today is my friend Ru-

ben Vardanyan — a visionary philanthropist who gave up extraordinary personal privilege to serve the people of Artsakh, only to be seized and imprisoned. He is not alone. Other Armenian leaders, officials, and citizens remain in Azerbaijani detention, their continued imprisonment a deliberate act of erasure — a tactic with deep roots in our history. On April 24, 1915, it was the Armenian intellectuals and community leaders of Constantinople who were rounded up first. We know what that pattern means. We must demand, loudly and without equivocation, the immediate release of all Armenian political prisoners.

These patterns do not belong only to our history. The novelist Chris Bohjalian — himself of Armenian descent — wrote this week that the language of genocide is growing in America. He reminds us that ethnic cleansing always begins with language: slurs become policy, and policy becomes murder. He draws the line connecting the Armenians, the Jews, the Cambodians, the Bosnians, the Rwandans — and asks how much genocide one sentence can hold. We Armenians know that line intimately. We were called microbes and subversives before we were marched into the desert. The word “genocide” itself was coined, in part, because of what was done to us — Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin saw in the Armenian annihilation a crime so total it demanded its own name. When dehumanizing language rises again — anywhere, directed at any people — we must be among the first to name it. We know what it sounds like. And we know where it leads.

I also must acknowledge what happened just yesterday, when the White House released its annual statement on Armenian

# Memory As Witness, Unity as Strength

MEMORY, from page 19

Remembrance Day. President Trump invoked the Meds Yeghern. He pledged that “the United States and Armenia will continue our work toward building a more secure and prosperous world.” He acknowledged the Armenian spirit. He spoke of “the hope at the center of Christianity” — a recognition, at least, of who we are. These words are not nothing.

And yet — as in his first administration — the statement did not use the word “genocide.” Not once. The administration reached, as presidents before Biden did, for softer language: “exiled and brutally massacred,” “devastating events,” the Meds Yeghern. These phrases orbit the truth. None of them land on it.

President Biden used the word genocide every year of his presidency. President Reagan used it in 1981. Congress voted for it by near-unanimous margins in 2019. All fifty states have recognized it.

The word matters. It was coined, in part, for us — because Raphael Lemkin saw what happened to the Armenians and understood that the crime demanded a name that law could hold. It matters because without the word, the world can always look away. It matters because our dead deserve more than euphemism.

This brings me to something I want to speak about with care, because it requires of us both honesty and love.

The Armenian world — diaspora and homeland — does not always agree. We disagree about strategy, about politics, about the role of the church, about the relationship between recognition and normalization, about the terms of peace with neighbors who have not yet acknowledged their culpability. These are real disagreements. They deserve serious debate. I do not ask that we suppress them.

But I do ask — I implore — that we hold fast to the one thing that cannot be negotiable: the full recognition of the Armenian Genocide as the foundation of any path forward. Recognition is not a bargaining chip. It is not a starting position from which we make concessions. It is the minimum threshold of historical truth.

When I stood at Times Square, what moved me most was not the size of the crowd but its composition — Armenians of every political persuasion, every generation, every denomination, every opinion about every other question — standing together because on this, on this, there is no division. That unity is not weakness. It is our greatest strength.

The Republic of Armenia today faces extraordinary pressures — geopolitical, economic, demographic. Armenia is navigating a precarious path surrounded by powers with interests that do not always align with ours. The diaspora has a role to play: not to dictate, not to demand, but to stand alongside — resourcefully, vocally, and in solidarity. Alignment does not require agreement on every question. It requires a shared commitment to Armenia’s survival, security, and sovereignty.

I want to say something about memory it-

self — about why we do this, year after year.

There is a term in psychology: intergenerational trauma. The idea that catastrophic loss does not end with those who survived it, but travels forward — carried in the stories told and untold, in the silences around certain subjects, in the way a grandmother’s hands tightened when she spoke of home, in the hunger for a homeland that most of us have never seen. Many of us grew up in its presence before we had a name for it. I know I did. That weight is real.

But memory is not only a wound. It is — and this is the harder, more necessary truth — a form of forward motion. Mark Twain is said to have observed that history does not repeat itself, but it rhymes. For Armenians, that is not a metaphor. It is a diagnostic tool. When we recognize the rhythms of 1915 in the present — the language of dehumanization, the targeting of community leaders, the demolition of sacred places, the practiced silence of the world — we are not catastrophizing. We are pattern-recognizing.

We are here today because someone before us refused to be silent. A grandmother who told her story. A priest who kept the liturgy alive. A scholar who built an archive. A child who carried a candle at a groundbreaking. A community that, year after year, in cities around the world, said: We remember. We bear witness.

And we remember them not only as victims of history, but as something more. In 2015, the Armenian Apostolic Church canonized the 1.5 million martyrs as saints. This was a theological declaration: that those who died did not die as mere casualties of political violence, but as witnesses — to faith, to identity, to the indelible claim of a people upon the earth.

I want to speak directly to those of you who belong to the generation that came after the last survivor. You did not sit across a kitchen table from someone who had walked the desert roads of 1915. You did not see the scar on a wrist, or hear the silence that fell when certain towns were named, or feel the particular weight of a grandparent’s

hand on your shoulder when the subject turned to home.

I want to tell you: that does not diminish your claim to this memory. It changes your relationship to it.

What your great-grandparents carried in their bodies, you carry in your will. The knowledge of what happened, the insistence that it be named, the refusal to let it fade into abstraction — these are not inherited. They are learned. And then they are chosen. Every year that you walk into a gathering like this one, every time you say the word “genocide” in a conversation, every time you stand at a memorial or teach a friend what April 24 means — you are making a decision.

That is, I would argue, a more demanding form of memory than inheritance. Your great-grandparents could not have forgotten if they tried. You can choose to forget — and you are choosing not to. That choice is a form of love for people you never met. It is the only way the living can still do something for the dead.

You are not the end of the chain. You are what happens when a people decides to remember not by blood alone, but by conviction.

## Tekeyan Cultural Association & UCLA Armenian Music Program’s

# Vem Ensemble

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

#### Philadelphia

Friday, May 1, 7:30 p.m.

Co-sponsor Villanova Armenian Students' Organization  
Cinema at Connelly Center  
Villanova University  
Tickets \$20. For more info/tickets call Vahe at 215-908-9502 or Sira at 267-902-0700

#### Boston

Sunday, May 3, 2 p.m.

Co-sponsor Holy Trinity Armenian Church  
145 Brattle St., Cambridge, MA  
Free admission.  
For more info, email [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com)

#### Montreal

Friday, May 8, 8:30 p.m.

Tekeyan Armenian Community Center  
825 Manoojian St.,  
Ville Saint Laurent, Québec  
Donation \$35, contact Tekeyan Center at 514 747-6680

#### Southfield, MI

Saturday, May 9, 7:00 p.m.

Co-sponsors: Saint John Armenian Church, Music Guild of St. John Armenian Church  
St. John Armenian Church Cultural Hall  
2001 Northwestern Hwy, Southfield, MI  
Free admission. For info, email [agop45@sbglobal.net](mailto:agop45@sbglobal.net) or call Diana Alexanian 248-505-6159 or Madisen Lundquist 503-758-8805

#### Ann Arbor, MI

Sunday, May 10, 3-5 p.m.

Co-sponsor University of Michigan Center for Armenian Studies  
Helmut Stern Auditorium at the University of Michigan Museum of Art  
525 S. State St., Ann Arbor, MI  
Guest speakers: **Melissa Bilal, Ronald Suny, Anoush Suni.**  
Free admission. For info, email [armenianstudies@umich.edu](mailto:armenianstudies@umich.edu)

#### Altadena, CA

Sunday, May 17, 5 p.m.

TCA Beshgeturian Center  
1901 N. Allen Ave.  
Free admission. For info, email [tcawestcoast@gmail.com](mailto:tcawestcoast@gmail.com)