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## Armenia Launches Investigation into Alleged Plot to Assassinate Pashinyan

By Nate Ostiller and Arshaluys Barseghyan

Armenia's Investigative Committee has launched an investigation over an alleged plot to assassinate Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. The case, announced on Monday, May 18, came after a video was circulated online showing a group of masked and armed men directly addressing Pashinyan and saying, "we know where and when you are going [...] you must answer for your every step."

"Motivated by hatred and intolerance, and combined with hooligan motives during a live broadcast, they disseminated a video containing a threat that poses a real danger of committing murder against the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, related to his state and political activities and conditioned by his political views," the Investigative Committee said.

An investigation on the grounds of an assassination plot, illegal trafficking of weapons, and computer sabotage has been opened, the committee said, the latter being due to the fact the suspects "accessed restricted computer network



Masked men in a video that contained threats towards Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Screenshot from video.

data to share the video during a live broadcast."

In the video, along with the threats, a masked man blamed Pashinyan for the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and repeatedly called him a liar. The man also alleged that Pashinyan wants to "hand over Armenia to Azerbaijan," and said

Armenians should not vote for him in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

The unknown individual was speaking in a Nagorno-Karabakh dialect, and the flag of Nagorno-Karabakh was present throughout the video on the wall behind him.

see PLOT, page 4

## Armenia Wants to Localize Production of Indian Munitions

As it seeks to secure lasting peace with Azerbaijan, Armenia is concurrently striving to strengthen a defense partnership with India.

Armenia is intent on establishing domestic production lines to manufacture Indian munitions, including 155mm artillery shells and Pinaka rocket launcher systems, according to a report distributed by India Defense Resource Wing (IDRW), an India-based portal. The re-

port did not mention how advanced bilateral discussions on the matter were.

In 2022, Armenia procured Pinaka systems from India in a deal worth \$265 million. The rocket launchers are an Indian version of the US-made HIMARS systems, which have high mobility and long-range strike capability. HIMARS systems initially proved effective when used by Ukrainian forces against Russian invaders. But Russia has developed

electronic warfare techniques that have hindered HIMARS of late. Pinaka-fired rockets have a significantly shorter range than HIMARS systems.

Armenia is reportedly seeking to manufacture weapons to guard against supply-chain problems in the event of a future conflict, according to IDRW analysts.

In recent years, the South Caucasus has effectively become an extension of the bitter South Asian rivalry between India and Pakistan. While Armenia has forged defense ties with India, Azerbaijan and Pakistan, along with Turkey, have forged an a security partnership.

For Armenia, growing strategic ties with India reflect Yerevan's currently strained relationship with Russia, the country's historical ally. "This partnership not only enhances Armenia's defense capabilities but also allows India to expand its influence in the South Caucasus, where it faces opposition from Turkish and Pakistani alliances that support Azerbaijan," according to an analysis published in 2025 by the Atlantic Council.

(This story originally appeared on [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org) on May 18)

## Another Ex-Karabakh Leader Protests from Azeri Jail

By Gayane Saribekian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Yet another former leader of Nagorno-Karabakh jailed in Azerbaijan has condemned his and the other Armenian prisoners' trials and accused the Azerbaijani authorities of continuing to violate their rights.

"This is not a trial but an ethno-political vendetta against the past and future of the Armenian people," Davit Babayan said in an audio message communicated to his family in Armenia by phone and made public on Thursday.



Davit Babayan in Nagorno Karabakh, March 31, 2022 (Azatutyun photo)

"All humanitarian, legal and international norms and their own legislation are being grossly violated," he charged. "I call on fellow patriotic Armenians to unite and defend our rights because we are going to appeal to the international court."

see BABAYAN, page 5

## More Armenian Opposition Supporters Arrested Ahead of Elections

By Karine Simonian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Ten more supporters of billionaire and opposition leader Samvel Karapetyan were arrested over the weekend after confronting members of Armenia's ruling Civil Contract party in disputed circumstances.

The incidents took place in two villages in Armenia's northern Lori province close to Karapetyan's hometown of Tashir. Videos posted on social media showed scores of his supporters waving flags and chanting "Samvel Prime Minister!" during a Civil Contract procession led by Defense Minister Suren Papikyan. Papikyan can be seen urging them to "open the road" before telling the police to take action against the "hooligans" and promising to teach their leaders a "political lesson."

see ARRESTS, page 4

### Boston MFA Director Pierre Terjanian to Speak at June 4 Tekeyan Program

WATERTOWN — The Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter will present a conversation with the director and CEO of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts Pierre Terjanian on Thursday, June 4, at 7 p.m., at the Baikar Building (755 Mount Auburn St.).

Terjanian started in this role at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston in July 2025. The museum is among

see TERJANIAN, page 15



### VATICAN

Executive Committee Of Catholic–Orthodox Dialogue Meets in Rome

Page 5



### WASHINGTON, D.C.

ICJ Report Confirms Sham Nature of Nagorno-Karabakh Trials in Baku

Page 7



### YEREVAN

Epic Soundworld Of Vahan Artsruni Unveiled at Yerevan Opera Stage

Page 13





ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Armenia Exports Domestically Made Weapons

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenia has exported domestically produced weapons worth millions of dollars for the first time, High-Tech Industry Minister Mkhitar Hayrapetyan said in a Facebook video message on May 19.

He noted that only a few years ago it was difficult to imagine Armenia becoming an arms-exporting country.

The minister said that in May, three Armenian companies exported weapons to two different countries.

“Over recent months, on various occasions and during different public speeches and interviews, I have said that several local manufacturers and Armenian companies received permits to export weapons. Now I want to announce that during May, three Armenian companies exported weapons to two different countries.

Despite facing sufficiently complex challenges and logistical difficulties, the Armenian companies managed to reach their target destinations. For the first time, Armenian companies succeeded in delivering final products developed and manufactured in Armenia to end-user countries,” he said.

He added that the government has invested billions in the defense industry in recent years and will continue making such investments in the future.

### Grandfather of Soldier Killed in Barracks Fire Confronts Pashinyan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The grandfather of a soldier killed in the 2023 military barracks fire in Armenia’s Azat village interrupted Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during a campaign stop in the northern town of Spitak, accusing the authorities of failing to fully investigate the tragedy ahead of the June 7 parliamentary elections.

“I want my child back. They took him to Azat and burned him,” Artyom Grigoryan, the grandfather of fallen soldier Aram Manukyan, shouted during Pashinyan’s speech on May 19.

Pashinyan dismissed the interruption, telling supporters that such incidents had become a “trend” at his public appearances and alleging that individuals were being paid to disrupt his events.

His security guards then forcibly removed Grigoryan from the scene, covering his mouth with their hands. Footage from the scene showed the elderly man resisting as he continued demanding accountability for his grandson’s death.

“I am presenting my demand. They took my child and burned him in Azat,” Grigoryan said. “I raised my child for 18 years and sent him to serve in the army. He had 25 days left before demobilization when he was burned.”

# Buckets, Sticks and Stories: Inside Armenia’s Woman-led Tradition Khabukhaz

By Kushane Chobanyan

As the cheerful chatter of birds fills the morning air in the western Armenian village of Nor Kyank, a group of women gather with milk buckets and tree branches in front of 73-year-old Tania Harutyunyan’s house, who emerges to greet them. To the passerby, the scene might appear bizarre: the women make a sign over each of their sticks with a knife before placing them into the milk bucket and handing it to Tania.

This unusual ritual — known as khabukhaz from the Turkish khab (“bucket” or “container”) and khaz (“sign”) — is a woman-led tradition that has helped communities survive for generations. Today, however, it is only practiced in a few villages in Armenia’s Shirak province.

Khabukhaz stems from a traditional form of milk exchange practiced among dairy farmers. In effect, it was a system of providing milk on credit, where gatherings of five, six, or sometimes more women from the same district would exchange milk with each other.

According to custom, women from families with only a few livestock would give the milk they collected twice a day — morning and evening — in specified portions to a single family who would then redistribute the milk accordingly. In this way, during the abundant milk months from May to the end of November, each family had a fixed amount of milk they could use. This system helped solve production-related household problems in a way that benefited everyone.

It was a tradition based entirely on honesty and trust, because without integrity, one could easily dilute the milk with water. Every time milk was given to a neighbor, one was supposed to make a sign on their stick to get exactly the same portion of milk when her turn came.

Today, finding information about khabukhaz and its origins is surprisingly dif-

icult. There are few written records, and it is unclear whether the tradition was ever practiced in other regions of Armenia. One of the rare references to khabukhaz can be found in Grigor Vantsyan’s book *The Traditions of Armenian Communities*, where

during Soviet times, it was not allowed to keep more than one animal, and the milk it produced was insufficient, which is why people decided to pool their milk together.

The eldest in the group, Amalya, was born and raised in Nor Kyank and has nev-



Amalya Hakobyan (photo via the Aragats Valley Local Action Group)

the practice is briefly described, confirming its historical presence in village life.

In the Shirak region, however, livestock farmers still face challenges due to the scarcity of pastures. Many have already stopped raising animals because it not only requires an enormous amount of time, but also the proper environment for animals to graze and produce quality milk. It is these scarcities that have allowed the tradition to survive here, though the number of women practicing has dwindled.

In Nor Kyank, Amalya Hakobyan, 91, Marik Margaryan, 72, Alvard Hovhannisyanyan, 65, and of course Tania, are considered masters of khabukhaz.

Tania, a former teacher, recalls that

er left the village. She has practiced khabukhaz with different women throughout her life.

When she first married in the 1950s, women were generally not allowed to gather without a clear purpose, and khabukhaz offered a rare opportunity to leave the house. The women would explain that they were going to take part in the “milk lottery”, and no one would protest. Khabukhaz was a rare chance to rest and catch up on the village’s most delicious gossip. This women-dominated tradition never allowed men to enter the group or influence the process; here, the women were in complete control.

continued on next page



Alvard carrying a milk pail (photo via the Aragats Valley Local Action Group)



## ARMENIA



Amalya Hakobyan, 91, sits in front of her home in Nor Kyank (photo via the Aragats Valley Local Action Group)

from *previouspage*

If a woman who wanted to join a group was not tidy enough, she would not be accepted. Usually, if the other women noticed that the yard of her house was not clean, or if the first milk she exchanged did not smell good, these would be seen as red flags, and the woman would be turned away.

“I was with another group of women when I first got married,” Amalya says. “They kept gossiping all the time, and I didn’t like it, so I decided to leave their group and join Tania.”

Amalya began participating in Tania’s collective in 1958 — today, her daughter-in-law continues the tradition, as Amalya can no longer go milking due to her age and poor health.

Similarly, Alvard, who was born in Yerevan, only began participating in khabukhaz after marrying and moving to the village, following after her mother-in-law.

Every group that practices khabukhaz has a leader, usually the eldest woman, who decides who takes the first round of milk. The others are responsible for being honest and actively participating.

“People who are not familiar with this tradition always wonder how we trust each other”, Alvard, who recently sold her cows, recalls.

“We can’t lie to each other, and we never doubt anyone in the group”.

The women in the group call each other “khabchi”, meaning someone who practices khabukhaz. Every morning and evening, they gather to exchange milk and discuss village life — who is engaged, who is in the hospital, who needs help, and who has visited the village. They talk about everything except politics, avoiding negative energy in a life that is often hard to manage.

Today, however, of the large group of women who once practiced khabukhaz, only Tania’s and Amalya’s families continue the tradition today.

“Only a handful of families in the village still keep animals. New brides who marry into our village don’t want to do animal husbandry; they simply buy milk”,

Tania explains.

Even so, women in Nor Kyank are working to preserve the tradition, including through a Khabukhaz Club.

Marik Margaryan, from the nearby village Sarnaghbyur, is one club member. She is practicing khabukhaz with her neighbor, and views the club as a place where she can educate young people about village traditions, make new friends, and enjoy conversations. It is through the club that she and Amalya became close friends.

Speaking with OC Media, Marik notes that all the neighboring villages once practiced khabukhaz because most households had animals, and the system was beneficial for everyone. The women would not use scales to measure the milk, believing that a scale might make mistakes in different densities between spring and autumn

milk. In contrast, Marik says, the stick never lies.

“so you take the stick and make a sign on it for the first day”, Marik says, “then when you bring another bucket of milk, you add the second sign, and so on”.

“After 10–15 days, when it’s my turn to take the milk, we place the bucket on the ground, put the stick with all the marks in it, and as the milk is poured in, the first sign marks the portion for the first day”.

Established in 2022, the group aims to bring together eight settlements in the southern part of Shirak Province, uniting the communities of Artik and Ani, including the villages of Karaberd, Dzitankhov, Sarnaghbyur, Lanjik, Pemzashen, Lerna-kert, Nahapetavan, and Nor Kyank.

Tania’s granddaughter, Nelly Vardanyan, is the group’s executive director. She

remembers how active khabukhaz was when she was a child, and how, as animal husbandry declined, the tradition began to fade. Now, not only have the khabukhaz groups become smaller, but the ritual itself is at risk of disappearing.

“Following my grandmothers from both my mother’s and father’s sides, I realised that the next generation might have no knowledge of khabukhaz”, Vardanyan tells OC Media. “The aim of this club is to connect generations and give young people the chance to engage in conversations that might seem unusual or strange to us, but at the same time are fascinating and help us appreciate our culture”.

There is one story the women in the village love to tell about Nelly’s paternal grandmother Dasiko — though such retellings only began once Dasiko had passed away:

In the early 20th century, when Dasiko was a young bride in the village, she practiced khabukhaz with her neighbor Greta. They would meet early in the morning to exchange buckets of milk and begin chatting. Their conversations would last so long that, before they knew it, it was already 19:00 — the time for the second milking of the cows. Realising they hadn’t milked the cows or done any housework, they began to worry that the men would return and blame them for doing nothing all day. As a solution, Greta went home, pretended to faint, and laid on the ground as if she had been unconscious the entire day.

Nelly fears that her grandmother’s generation is probably the last to do khabukhaz.

“We have districts in the village, where only one family keeps animals. Automatically they can’t practice khabukhaz, because people in the group should live in the same neighborhood to engage in the process”, Vardanyan says.

Even so, she hopes the club may help re-invigorate the tradition. As she emphasizes, khabukhaz is more than just exchanging milk — it is a way of trust, community, and care that sustained families long before modern systems existed. For in every bucket passed, there is not just milk, but a shared story of village life, cooperation, and mutual respect.

(This article originally appeared on the website [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on May 14.)



Marik (left) and Amalya (right) cook together (photo via the Aragats Valley Local Action Group)



## ARMENIA

# Pashinyan's Threats Against Opposition Leaders Not Investigated

By Naira Bulghadarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prosecutors made it clear on Tuesday, May 19, that they are not looking into the legality of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's latest pledge to "take out" Armenia's top opposition leaders and his insults and threats addressed to refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh.

Pashinyan repeatedly lost his temper on Monday as he was approached and criticized by several citizens while campaigning for next month's parliamentary elections in Yerevan's northern Arabkir district. They included Arpine Soghoyan, a gynecologist whose brother, senior military medic Hrant Papikyan, went missing during the 2020 war in Karabakh. Soghoyan blamed Pashinyan for her loss and accused him of having "stolen my fatherland" and "tried to bring us to our knees."

Pashinyan responded by linking the middle-aged woman to the leaders of the three main opposition groups challenging him in the June 7 elections and pledging to "take out" them. He reacted even more furiously later in the day after being confronted by a Yerevan-based Karabakh activist, Artur Osipyan, who criticized his policies on Karabakh.

Osipyan was dragged away from Pashinyan after a tense exchange between the two men. Moments later, Pashinyan picked up a megaphone and rushed towards the man, shouting insults and threats.

"These Karabakh pseudo-elites must get the hell out of here," he cried. "What are you doing here? ... You should have died when there was the Karabakh issue. Why are you alive at all, you scumbag?"

Osipyan, who publicly campaigned against Karabakh's last leadership before

the region's recapture by Azerbaijan, was arrested by police on suspicion of "hooliganism" shortly after the incident. He remained in police custody as of Tuesday evening. It remained unclear whether he will be formally charged.

Pashinyan's outbursts provoked a storm of condemnation from the Armenian opposition. Samvel Karapetyan, a billionaire leading the main opposition Strong Armenia alliance, deplored "one of the most shameful and disgraceful days for our people" in a video message posted on social media on Monday night.

"Even 20 more days of Pashinyan remaining in power is dangerous for our country," said Karapetyan. "Our enemies can see the mentally unstable state of our country's temporary leader... Pashinyan is disgracing not only our state but also the image of the Armenian people, the Armenian man."

Former President Robert Kocharyan, who leads the opposition Hayastan alliance, again questioned Pashinyan's sanity, saying mockingly that "the patient needs our compassion." Other opposition figures claimed that with his latest antics the premier exposed his growing fears of losing power.

Predictably, law-enforcement authorities reported no criminal proceedings against Pashinyan over what critics see as death threats against the opposition. The Office of the Prosecutor-General told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on Tuesday that it has not even launched a preliminary inquiry.

This stance stood in sharp contrast with recent months' regular arrests of Pashinyan detractors accused of insulting the premier or his allies on social media. No such criminal cases have been opened against any government loyalists.

## Dolma Festival Returns, Celebrating Signature Dish with Culture and Tradition

By Anna Gziryan

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenia's annual Dolma Festival will return on May 24, bringing together chefs, visitors and culinary enthusiasts to celebrate dolma — one of the country's signature dishes — through tastings, competitions and cultural performances.

The event will take place at the Zvartnots Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve in Vagharshapat.

"During the festival, there will be more than 30 pavilions where chefs will present a wide variety of dolma dishes," said

Ani Nazaryan, Festivals Program Manager at the Armenian Cookery Traditions Development and Preservation NGO, led by master chef Sedrak Mamulyan.

The festival will also feature a chefs' competition in several categories, including Best Taste, Best Appearance, Best Idea and Grand Winner, with winners selected by a professional jury. Visitors will additionally enjoy Armenian traditional music and dance performances, while Ethno Colors Band will deliver a live performance.

Sedrak Mamulyan, President of the Armenian Cookery Traditions Development and Preservation NGO, said the festival is a

good opportunity to showcase and promote Armenian national cuisine and, in turn, increase the country's appeal to tourists.

Mamulyan noted that the festival will feature special varieties of dolma prepared with unusual recipes.

"This active tourism season is an opportunity to present Armenia's national cuisine to guests visiting the country. I should note that more than 60 varieties of dolma will be presented within the framework of the festival. From the selection of previous years, I would like to highlight dolma prepared in pumpkin flowers or with seafood. Truly, varieties of dolma with very interesting reci-

pes will be presented," Mamulyan said.

He noted that this is a good platform for presenting dishes prepared with traditional recipes, as well as chefs' new ideas. The Armenian Cookery Traditions Development and Preservation NGO has been conducting long-term research to rediscover forgotten recipes of national cuisine.

Mekhak Apresyan, President of the Armenian Tourism Federation, highlighted the significance of the Dolma Festival.

"This festival is a unique tourism product and a platform for shaping and developing other programs. It is of significant importance in terms of increasing Armenia's tourism appeal."

More than 30 international journalists and bloggers have been invited to cover the Dolma Festival, and over 5,000 visitors are expected to attend.

## Yerevan to Continue EU Integration while Rejecting 'Political Divorce' from Russia

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenia will continue deepening its ties with the European Union while maintaining constructive relations with Russia, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said during a joint press conference with visiting Lithuanian Foreign Minister Kęstutis Budrys in Yerevan on May 19.

Responding to a journalist's question about the recent Armenia-European Union summit and reactions from Moscow, Mirzoyan said the landmark meeting had been productive and marked a significant step in Armenia-EU relations.

"The Armenia-European Union summit, which I would like to stress was the first-ever meeting held in this format, was quite effective," Mirzoyan said, noting that the sides adopted a comprehensive 35-point joint document outlining areas of cooperation, intentions to deepen ties, and concrete projects to be implemented jointly.

According to Mirzoyan, the European Union has consistently supported Armenia's democratic development and will continue assisting the country's integration process across multiple sectors.

He stressed that Armenia's positions and priorities had long been communicated clearly to European partners and member states, and that the summit did not represent a dramatic shift in policy.

"It is no secret that Armenia and the European Union are getting closer day by day," Mirzoyan said, adding that the main driving force behind that process is the aspiration of the Armenian people. He referred to last year's civic initiative supporting closer European integration, which eventually became law after being adopted by the National Assembly.

Asked about remarks coming from Russia following the summit, including suggestions by Russian President Vladimir Putin that Armenia would eventually have to choose its geopolitical orientation, and comments hinting at a "civilized divorce," Mirzoyan dismissed such characterizations.

"We are not preparing for a divorce with any of our partners," he said. "Politics and diplomacy do not really recognize such divorces."

Mirzoyan stressed that Armenia does not seek confrontation or tensions in relations

with Russia and intends to continue developing mutually beneficial ties despite existing disagreements.

"We are partners connected by numerous ties," he said. "There are issues, of course, as in any relationship, but such issues should be resolved through constructive discussion."

At the same time, Mirzoyan underlined that Armenia reserves the sovereign right to determine its own future and make independent foreign policy decisions.

"We understand very well — and we do not need Russia to tell us — that membership in the Eurasian Economic Union and membership in the European Union are incompatible," he said.

Mirzoyan acknowledged that Armenia would eventually face a strategic choice regarding its future orientation. However, he stressed that such a decision would be made by Armenia itself and at a time determined by Yerevan.

"When the moment comes and a decision must be made on which family of countries we want to belong to, we will make that decision ourselves," he said.

## Armenia Launches Investigation into Alleged Plot to Assassinate Pashinyan

PLOT, from page 1

Shortly after, Pashinyan responded with his own set of insults and allegations, calling the men "scum" and "scoundrels" and claiming they were from Nagorno-Karabakh but had "ran away."

"They have put on masks, as if they are strong men. But do you know why they are wearing masks? Because once they take them off, we will see that these are the ones who abandoned our soldiers and ran away, filled with fear," Pashinyan said with visible anger.

"You ran away at Ferrari speed — who are you to speak," he added, apparently suggesting that they were former soldiers who had fled during Azerbaijan's final offensive in the region in 2023.

He vowed to find them "one by one" and urged them to voluntarily show up.

Daniel Ioannian from the Union of Informed Citizens organization, claimed it was "a clear example of a Russian false-flag operation." He described it as a "classic Russian" action to frame Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, along with other efforts to create tensions and foster internal divisions.

By contrast, human rights activist and opposition figure Nina Karapetyants claimed the possibility the entire plot could have been fabricated by Armenian authorities should not be excluded. She did not provide evidence to support her allegations.

## More Armenian Opposition Supporters Arrested Ahead of Elections

ARRESTS, from page 1

Armenia's Investigative Committee reported ten arrests in the following hours. It accused the Karapetyan supporters of deliberately trying to disrupt the ruling party's campaign rallies. It claimed that they blocked a road with cars in one of the villages and "turned on loud music" and assaulted Civil Contract campaigners in the other.

The law-enforcement agency told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on Monday, March 18, that six of the suspects have been remanded in pretrial custody and another

moved to house arrest. The status of the three other detainees remained unclear.

Meanwhile, Karapetyan's Strong Armenia bloc condemned the arrests and demanded the immediate release of the ten persons. The gatherings of Strong Armenia supporters coincided with the Civil Contract rallies, it said, accusing the ruling party of staging a pre-planned "provocation." A senior member of the bloc, Gohar Meloyan, released a short video that seemingly showed a group of Civil Contract members charging towards Karapetyan

supporters demonstrating on a roadside.

Karapetyan's bloc is widely regarded as the most popular of the opposition groups running in Armenia's June 7 parliamentary elections. Dozens of its members or supporters have been arrested in recent weeks mostly on vote-buying charges denied by the bloc.

Meloyan put at around 300 the total number of such individuals prosecuted or briefly detained by police. She insisted that Strong Armenia remains undaunted by the crackdown.



## INTERNATIONAL

# Executive Committee of Catholic–Oriental Orthodox Dialogue Meets in Rome

ROME — On May 12, the Executive Committee of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches met at the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome to reflect on the future of their work and assess the progress made over the past two decades.

The meeting was co-chaired by Cardinal Kurt Koch and Bishop Kyrillos. Also present were the co-secretaries, Archbishop Narek Alemezian and Fr. Hyacinthe Destivelle. Participating as observers were Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Metropolitan Barnaba El Soryany and Bishop Thomas Adly Zaky.

The gathering was held in response to a recommendation made during the Commission's 2024 plenary meeting. At that time, members proposed that the 20th anniversary of the Joint International Commission should serve as an occasion to evaluate the documents produced by the dialogue and reflect on its methodology, with a view to identifying possible improvements for future work.

During the Rome meeting, participants engaged in substantial discussion on both the evaluation of the Commission's past work and the next steps of the dialogue. Their reflections resulted in the drafting of a document that will now be submitted to the respective Church authorities for consideration and possible action.

On Wednesday, May 13, participants also had the opportunity to greet Pope Leo XIV, marking a significant moment during



From left, Metropolitan Barnaba El Soryany, Bishop Thomas Adly Zaky, Archbishop Narek Alemezian, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Bishop Kyrillos

their time in Rome. During his meeting with the Holy Father, Archbishop Barsamian conveyed to Pope Leo XIV the fraternal greetings of Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II. Pope Leo warmly welcomed Archbishop Khajag, saying, "Very nice seeing you again," a gesture that reflected the cordial and longstanding relationship Archbishop Khajag has enjoyed with Pope Leo XIV, as with the previous pontiffs.

The exchange highlighted Archbishop Khajag's continuing role in fostering warm relations between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Holy See, building on years of friendship, mutual respect, and close cooperation. His presence at the meeting and personal greeting with Pope Leo XIV served as a further sign of the enduring



Pope Leo XIV and Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

bonds between the Churches and of the shared commitment to advancing ecumenical understanding.

The meeting underscored the common commitment of the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches to deepening mutual understanding and strengthening theological dialogue. As the Commission marks its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this latest gathering represents an important step in discerning how the dialogue can continue to develop in the years ahead.



From left, Father Hyacinthe Destivelle, Cardinal Kurt Koch, Bishop Thomas Adly Zaky, Metropolitan Barnaba El Soryany, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Bishop Kyrillos, Archbishop Narek Alemezian

## Another Ex-Karabakh Leader Protests from Azeri Jail

BABAYAN, from page 1

Eight former Karabakh Armenian leaders were captured right after the 2023 Azerbaijani offensive that restored Baku's full control over Karabakh and forced the region's Armenian population to flee to Armenia. They all denied a long list of war crimes charges leveled against them. An Azerbaijani military court sentenced five of them, including Babayan, to life imprisonment and gave the three others 20-year prison sentences in February this year at the end of two trials denounced by Amnesty International as a "travesty."

Babayan said that his appeal against the verdict filed later in February "disappeared" and did not reach a higher Azerbaijani court. He suggested that the authorities

in Baku are deliberately preventing him from appealing to an international tribunal, presumably the European Court of Human Rights.

Babayan, who had served as Karabakh's foreign minister, is the third Karabakh Armenian prisoner to have made a statement from the Azerbaijani prison. Ruben Vardanyan, who is also a prominent Armenian businessman, has done so on a regular basis.

In his most recent statement issued last week, Vardanyan stepped up his accusations that Armenia's government is indifferent to the fate of the prisoners. He also criticized Armenia's human rights ombudswoman, Anahit Manasian, for essentially dismissing his earlier appeal to try to visit

the prisoners together with their relatives.

Earlier in May, another former Karabakh leader held in Baku, Davit Ishkhanyan, urged Armenians to stay "strong" while decrying "blatant violations" of human rights and international law which he said occurred during the trials.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and other Armenian officials insist that Yerevan has been doing its best to try to secure the release of at least 19 Armenians remaining in Azerbaijani captivity. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev again branded them as "war criminals" when he addressed on May 4 a European Political Community summit in Yerevan via video link. Pashinyan did not respond to Aliyev, drawing strong criticism from the Armenian opposition.

## INTERNATIONAL

## Weightlifter Gor Minasyan Representing Bahrain Crowned Asian Champion

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Gor Minasyan, representing Bahrain, won the gold medal at the 2026 Asian Weightlifting Championships held in India on May 19.

Competing in the over-110 kg category, the 31-year-old weightlifter recorded a total of 457 kg and became Asian champion for the third time in his career, Aysor.am reported.

Minasyan's main rival was Iranian athlete Alireza Yousefi, who finished with a total of 445 kg and won the silver medal. The Iranian weightlifter lifted 261 kg in the clean and jerk event, setting a world record, but lost to Minasyan in the combined total.

The top three was completed by South Korea's Son Yong Hwan, whose final result was 416 kg.

Minasyan's result at the Asian Championships exceeded by six kilograms the total with which Armenia's Varazdat Lalayan had earlier won the European championship title.

## Ambassador Mammadov Of Azerbaijan Predicts Armenian Constitutional Changes

ANKARA (PanARMENIAN.Net) — After the elections scheduled in Armenia on June 7, the country will amend its Constitution through a referendum and remove territorial claims against Azerbaijan, after which a peace agreement will be signed, Azerbaijan's ambassador to Turkey Rashad Mammadov said in an interview with the influential Turkish newspaper Cumhuriyet on May 19.

According to the ambassador, Azerbaijan and Turkey are pursuing coordinated policies, while the normalization processes between Armenia and Turkey, as well as Armenia and Azerbaijan, are moving forward in parallel, Radar Armenia reported.

"Armenia's Constitution contains territorial claims against Azerbaijan. After the June 7 elections, they will change the constitution and hold a referendum. Once the issue of territorial claims is resolved, the peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which was initiated in the U.S., will be signed. After that, the borders between Armenia and Turkey, as well as Armenia and Azerbaijan, will be opened," he said.

The Azerbaijani diplomat also stated that the sides are currently advancing through small steps. In particular, he said Azerbaijan has already established trade ties with Yerevan by "ensuring its energy security through oil and fuel supplies," as well as assisting in the transportation of wheat and other goods from Kazakhstan and Russia.



## INTERNATIONAL

## Lebanon, Artsakh And Middle East Aram I's Agenda As He Meets Vatican Secretary Of State

VATICAN CITY (Public Radio of Armenia) — On the first day of his official visit to the Vatican on May 19, Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, accompanied by his delegation, met with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State. Cardinal Parolin, regarded as the second highest-ranking authority in the Vatican after the Pope, is responsible for administrative, political, and diplomatic affairs.

Aram I first addressed the situation in Lebanon and commended the consistent efforts of the Lebanese government under the leadership of the President and the Prime Minister. Referring to southern Lebanon, he stressed that Israel must withdraw its military forces from the region, allowing the Lebanese Army to assume full responsibility for the country's security and enabling the Lebanese state to reassert its sovereignty throughout all Lebanese territories. His Holiness also underscored the urgent need to strengthen internal unity among Lebanon's various communities and warmly welcomed the Vatican's continued support for Lebanon.

The Catholicos then turned to the challenges facing Christian communities across the Middle East, emphasizing the urgent necessity of halting Christian emigration from the region and highlighting the important role of the Churches in this regard.

Aram I praised the Vatican's longstanding support for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and for the reaffirmation of the rights of the Armenian people. Speaking about Artsakh, he stated that the return of the people of Artsakh, the restoration of their rights, the protection of Armenian churches and historical monuments, and the immediate release of the Artsakh leaders currently imprisoned in Baku remain imperative priorities for the Armenian Church and people. In this context, he called for the Vatican's continued support.

Parolin addressed the difficulties confronting Lebanon and shared information regarding the Vatican's ongoing diplomatic efforts with Israel and the United States. He also provided updates concerning Vatican initiatives related to Artsakh in general, and particularly regarding efforts toward the release of prisoners. Cardinal Parolin welcomed the proposal made by His Holiness to organize special consultative meetings at the Vatican for Christian spiritual leaders in Lebanon, as well as for Christian leaders throughout the Middle East.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Aram I presented Parolin with a commemorative gift depicting the Virgin Mary, along with a two-volume publication featuring Armenian churches in Karabakh.



The new TUMO center in the Nuñez neighborhood of Buenos Aires, Argentina

## TUMO Opens Two New Centers in Latin America Alongside LEADS Summit in Buenos Aires

BUENOS AIRES — The opening ceremony in Buenos Aires of the newest TUMO center, held on April 22, was attended by Chief of Government of Buenos Aires Jorge Macri and Minister of Education for the City of Buenos Aires Mercedes Miguel. They were joined by TUMO CDO Pegor Papazian and Head of TUMO International Chris Shahinian, together with a number of representatives from TUMO



The ribbon-cutting of the new TUMO center in Montevideo, Uruguay

HQ and TUMO centers worldwide, who were in town for the TUMO LEADS summit that followed.

This new center, located in the Argentinian capital's Nuñez district, comes less than one year after the initial Buenos Aires center in Barracas, which marked TUMO's first entry into South America. Launched in partnership with the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires, the Nuñez center plans to accommodate up to 4,500 students each week. They will acquire new skills in 3D modeling, game development, graphic design, motion graphics, photography, and programming, with GenAI and web development coming soon. A third center, located in the Chacarita district of Buenos Aires, is slated to open later this year. With this new addition, total capacity across the three Argentinian centers will increase to over 15,000 students weekly.

"The next generation will inherit a world full of possibilities, but also full of technological, environmental, social, and geopolitical challenges we have created for them. It is incumbent on us to help them acquire the skills they need to thrive in that fast-changing world" said Papazian.

The inauguration of TUMO Nuñez followed the launch of TUMO Uruguay in Montevideo on April 8. Present at the open-

ing ceremony were Uruguayan President Yamandú Orsi, CEO of Corporación América Airports Martín Eurnekian, Shahinian, and other guests. The center was launched in partnership with Aeropuertos Uruguay, Corporación América Airports, and Ceibal.

During the event, Tamar Colodenco, public policy and government relations manager for Southern Cone at Google, announced that Google will collaborate with TUMO Uruguay over the next two years to expand students' access to high-quality education, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence.

Following the Buenos Aires opening was the third TUMO LEADS summit. Forty-eight participants from 17 TUMO Centers in 11 countries (Albania, Argentina, Armenia, France, Germany, India, Japan, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Uruguay, USA) convened in Buenos Aires to share concrete practices, challenges, and ideas around topics such as student experience, community engagement, partnerships, and learning innovation. The theme of this year's summit was "Human. Creative. Intelligent — What learning is meant to be."

## Aliyev Says Nagorno-Karabakh Reconstruction 'Main Priority' for Azerbaijan

By Aytan Farhadova

Azerbaijan has hosted the 13th session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13), its largest global event since COP29 in November 2024. In his opening remarks on May 19, President Ilham Aliyev stated that one of the main tasks for the government "is the reconstruction of Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur."

He said that as part of the "Great Return" program, Azerbaijan built around 33 tunnels stretching over 70 kilometers, with five others expected to be built. He added that 435 bridges, power stations, water storage facilities, houses, schools and hospitals were built in the two regions.

Aliyev stressed that Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding territories "were under Armenian occupation for 30 years," and "suffered total destruction and devastation."

The region came under Azerbaijan's control in September 2023 following brief clashes that led to Nagorno-Karabakh's

surrender and the mass exodus of its Armenian population.

According to Aliyev, as of today, more than 85,000 Azerbaijanis already live in Nagorno-Karabakh.

On May 19, Aydin Karimov, the President's Special Representative in Shusha (known as Shushi in Armenian), offered a slightly lower figure for Azerbaijanis settled in Nagorno-Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur, at more than 80,000 people.

Presidential aide Hikmat Hajiyev told pro-government media outlet APA that "Azerbaijan's efforts in this area are unique"

Aliyev held meetings with a Georgian delegation led by Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, as a result of which, they agreed to resume daily passenger train services on the Baku-Tbilisi-Baku route from May 26.

Other agreements concerned Azerbaijan's supply of natural gas and electricity to Georgia.

The parties also signed the Protocol of

the Coordination Council concerning the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway construction project.

In addition, according to the agreement, electricity would be supplied to Georgia as well as sent to Turkey through Georgian territory.

Azerbaijan's state-run oil company SOCAR also signed an agreement with the Georgian Oil and Gas Corporation to "define the terms" of the company's operation on the "Georgian section of the Western Route Export Pipeline, including the Supsa Oil Terminal and associated infrastructure."

On the same day, Aliyev received Tomáš Taraba, Slovakia's Deputy Prime Minister and Environment Minister.

Taraba said that "Slovakia has always stood by Azerbaijan," and said that Azerbaijan had "been a reliable supplier whenever his country needed natural gas."

(This article originally appeared on [www.oc-media.org](http://www.oc-media.org) on May 19.)



# Community News

## Judge Bars Kars4Kids From Broadcasting 'Misleading' Ads In California

By Michael Levenson

ORANGE COUNTY (New York Times) —Kars4Kids, the charity known for its repetitive jingle that sticks like glue in a listener's brain, must stop broadcasting its ads in California, a judge ruled.

Judge Gassia Apkarian of the Superior Court of California, in Orange County, found that Kars4Kids's ads violated the state's laws against false advertising and unfair competition.

For years, the charity has broadcast TV and radio ads featuring children singing a jingle with the organization's phone number and urging lis-



Judge Gassia Apkarian

teners to "donate your car today."

But evidence presented at a civil trial showed that "children, especially needy or underprivileged children," were not the exclusive recipients of the proceeds of the donated cars, Judge Apkarian wrote in her decision on May 8.

Instead, Kars4Kids primarily funds a New Jersey-based Jewish organization, Oorah, which provides programs, including an adult matchmaking service, trips to Israel for teens and summer camps in New York, the judge wrote. The only program in California that Kars4Kids sponsored was a promotional giveaway of Kars4Kids-branded backpacks, she found.

Judge Apkarian said that Kars4Kids had 30 days to stop broadcasting its ads in California.

If Kars4Kids resumes advertising, she wrote, its ads must contain "an express, audible disclosure of its religious affiliation and the geographic location of its primary beneficiaries and the age of the beneficiaries, specifying whether they aim for children or families, or both."

Kars4Kids, a nonprofit based in Lakewood, N.J., said it planned to seek a stay of the ruling and would seek to have it reversed on appeal.

"We believe this decision is deeply flawed, ignores the facts and misapplies the law," the organization said in a statement. "It's well known that we are a Jewish organization and our website makes it abundantly clear."

see KARS4KIDS, page 12



The Armenian leaders from Karabakh (Artsakh) during their sham trials

## Newly Released ICJ Report Confirms Sham Nature of Nagorno-Karabakh Trials in Baku

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) welcomes a newly issued report Justice Under Pressure: Independence of Lawyers and the Right to a Fair Trial in Azerbaijan by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) regarding Azerbaijan. The ICJ is an international non-governmental organization of leading judges and lawyers working to promote human rights and the rule of law across the globe.

The ICJ report has produced a detailed and meticulous exposition of structural and institutional flaws in the Aliyev regime's entire justice system with specific application to those flaws in the trials of the former Nagorno Karabakh officials, globally considered as political show trials without any real legal basis. The ICJ's findings provide timely and crucial insight into the domestic situation in Azerbaijan, which directly affects the lives of Armenians and poses a threat to long-term regional stability.

The analysis pays particular attention to the Azerbaijan government's control of criminal defense and all other lawyers but also details with citations the authoritarian control exercised by the regime over all aspects of the criminal process. This begins in the pretrial stages, includes access to materials and to imposition of government-controlled defense counsel, and runs through interpretation/translation control, prosecutorial control, retaliatory discipline, torture, and detention conditions.

"In the context of its newly released report examining the independence of the legal profession in Azerbaijan and assessing its impact on the right to a fair trial, the Justice Under Pressure: Independence of Lawyers and the Right to a Fair Trial in Azerbaijan provided the most detailed and credible exposition the facts, circumstances and legal analysis concerning what are widely acknowledged as show trials of the 23 political and civilian Armenian Christian hostages seized from Nagorno-Karabakh by the Aliyev regime. The report's credibility is preceded by the ICJ's stellar reputation as an independent body and enhanced beyond reproach by its level of detail from public and confidential sources," said Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny.

"The Assembly and all those concerned about justice not only welcome this work and thank the Commission but also urge governments to stop turning a blind eye to the fate of these hostages and the destruction of Armenian Christian presence in Artsakh and elsewhere and take concrete action. We also extend our hope that the same shortcomings are cured for the benefit of Azeri citizens suffering from the same dictatorial regime and repeat our calls for the United States Government to implement and enforce existing sanctions on anti-terrorism, genocide prevention and other laws as written and supported by the American people."

The report concludes with recommendations to the Aliyev government of Azerbaijan, the government prosecutors, Azerbaijan's Parliament, and to the Council of Europe. As was widely reported, President Aliyev defiantly announced that Azerbaijan suspended respect for decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, and because of its well-documented abuses and genocidal pattern Azerbaijan is no longer a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The autocracy also severed ties with the European Parliament following the EU's recent resolutions calling for the immediate release of the NK trial hostages. Earlier this month, President Aliyev, speaking by video at the European Political Community Summit, used what should have been a forum for peace to rehash failed arguments rationalizing his genocidal policies.

see ICJ, page 12

## Levonty Kazarian Award for Genocide Studies Established By Zoryan Institute

TORONTO — The Zoryan Institute recently announced the creation of the Levonty Kazarian Award for Genocide Studies, made possible through an endowment from Dr. Shahe Kazarian in memory of his wife.

This newly established annual award will be presented to a high school student (Grades 9-12) selected as the winner of an essay contest judged by the editors of *Genocide Studies International* (GSI).

The recipient of the Levonty Kazarian Award for Genocide Studies will receive a \$1,000 CAD cash prize, and their winning essay will be published in an upcoming issue of GSI, published by the University of Toronto Press. For a high school student, getting work published in such a respected academic forum opens the door to new academic possibilities and encourages continued scholarship in this field.

Zoryan established this award in appreciation of Levonty Kazarian's extraordinary legacy of service and leadership, which reflects the values of justice the Institute seeks to uphold. A firm believer in social justice, she touched countless lives through her efforts to address domestic violence in society, her advocacy for cultural-



Levonty Kazarian

ly informed health care services, her championing of racially fair and discrimination-free employment opportunities for immigrants and refugees, and her ardent support of the arts.

The president of the Zoryan Institute, Greg Sarkissian, had the following to share in reflection: "I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Kazarian for this initiative in helping to create a lasting tribute to strengthen genocide and human rights education for years to come.

"While I did not have the privilege of knowing Levonty Kazarian personally, it is evident that her legacy has touched several lives, leaving a lasting impact on those who knew her. Through this award, her legacy will continue by encouraging young people to embrace the spirit of helping others, and also to engage thoughtfully in human rights praxis and education."

Applications for the 2026-2027 Student Essay Contest will open on September 8. Submissions will be reviewed by the editors of *Genocide Studies International*, with the winning piece selected in April 2027, during Genocide Awareness Month. To learn more, visit <https://zoryaninstitute.org/high-school-genocide-education-resources/student-essay-contest/>.



## OBITUARY

## Adrienne Arkun, 101

### Librarian, Descendent of Genocide Survivors

PEABODY, Mass. — Adrienne Arkun, who worked as a librarian for the Queens Borough Public Library in New York for 32 years, passed away on April 24 at the age of 101.

She was born in Ridgewood, NJ, to Nishan Nazaretian (1895-1927) of Amasya and Marie Sarkisian (later Chakerian; 1904-1985) of Bursa, on July 1, 1924. Adrienne's three paternal aunts and one uncle of Amasya, along with her paternal



Adrienne Arkun

grandmother, were lost or killed during the deportations of the Armenian Genocide. Previously, her paternal great-grandfather was beheaded during the Hamidian massacres. Adrienne's mother Marie (Mariam), the latter's mother Takouhi Papazian Sarkisian (1874-1965), and grandmother Manning (Mariam "Dudu") Kazanian Ekmekjian, were deported from Bursa along with many other relatives in 1915.

Marie came to the US as a "postcard" bride to marry Nishan at 18 years old. The latter had an oriental rug and floor

covering store (the Ridgewood Floor and Covering Store), but died of a heart attack at the age of 32, leaving toddler Adrienne (Adriné in Armenian) without a father for several years. Marie worked in a sweatshop and eventually married Roupen Chakerian (1892-1970), a Zeytun Armenian who had fought in General Antranig's army and later the French Armenian legion in Cilicia.

Adrienne's childhood was during the Depression years, which had a deep impact on her life. She was studious and thought of becoming a chemist, but her college advisors stated that this would not be easy for a woman and steered her to library sciences instead. In addition to her native English and Armenian, with some knowledge also of Turkish from her childhood, she studied French, Spanish and German. After obtaining a bachelor of arts degree from Queens College in 1946, she earned a second bachelor from Columbia University's Faculty of Library Service in 1947, which was the equivalent of a master's degree at that time in this field.

She began working as a librarian for the Queens Borough Public Library in NY in 1947. Eventually she rose to become a chief branch librarian in the system, including at the Glendale Public Library in Queens.

As the first-born in the US, Adrienne played the role of translator and intermediary for her parents, grandmother and younger sister (Arpy Shepard, 1932-2025). She was well known for giving books and helpful advice to friends and family, and especially to younger female relatives. She played a key role in bringing her mother's cousin and the latter's daughter, Nancy Shirinian (later Toumayan) to the US, providing an affidavit of support and arranging for her education, in the 1950s.

Adrienne married S. Vedat Arkun on February 13, 1957. Born in Tokat in Turkey, the latter worked at various jobs in the US involving heavy labor before becoming an accounting clerk for United Parcel Service. He learned Armenian from Adrienne's family. The couple had two children, Aram and Susan Baidzar Arkun (1962-2020).

After Adrienne and Vedat eventually retired, they enjoyed many trips to locations around the world, including South Ameri-



Adrienne Arkun, at left, at work at the Queens Borough Public Library

ca, Eastern Turkey and Europe, and visited some of their relatives scattered in different countries due to the Armenian Genocide. They lived nearly their entire married lives in Forest Hills, New York, but moved in 2012 to Henrico, Virginia, to be near their son and his family.

While pragmatic, Adrienne had firm notions of morality which guided her actions, and she was forthright in her opinions. Though their means were modest, she and her husband attempted to support various humanitarian causes, both Armenian and non-Armenian, and help individuals in need.

Vedat passed away in 2013 and Adrienne moved to the Boston area the next year to again be near her son and his family. Although her physical health was good, advanced age led to a form of dementia and she spent her last years in memory care and nursing homes in the Boston area, including the Brudnick Center for Living in Peabody, MA.

After her passing, thanks to the good services of the Giragosian Funeral Home in Watertown, Adrienne was transported to her family plot in Cedar Grove Cemetery in Queens where she was buried with her parents and grandmother. A private memorial was held for her afterwards in New York.

Survivors include her son Aram (wife Knarik), grandchildren Mark Antranig and Raffi Vedat Arkun, nephew Richard Shepard (Jennifer Konner), the children of cousin Nancy (and Peter) Toumayan and their families, nephews and nieces of her husband Vedat and their families, and relatives in various parts of the United States, France and Armenia.

Donations in memoriam in lieu of flowers are requested to be sent to the Tekeyan Cultural Association (755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 01940) with the appropriate notation or to Doctors Without Borders USA (P.O. Box 5030 Hagerstown, MD 21741-5030).

## Madlen Satamian, 1961-2026

### Marketeer

PASADENA, Calif. — Madlen Tagavarian-Satamian passed away on Monday, May 4, 2026 at the age of 65.

She was the wife of 42 years of Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU)'s retired long time Artistic Director Krikor Satamian.

Madlen had a master's degree in economics from Hunter College in New York City. For the past 11 years, she had a marketing business with a partner by the name of Keghan Diradourian-Artinian.

She was very energetic and innovative. On occasions, she participated in AGBU's drama productions in California as stage manager.

Madlen met Krikor at the AGBU's New York office, where she was working part-time, and they got married in 1984. They moved to Los Angeles in 1988 and settled in Pasadena. They adopted a son from Yerevan in 1998 and called him Levon.

Madlen Satamian's funeral service was held on Thursday, May 21, at the Old



North Church of the Hollywood Hills Forest Lawn and the burial will be in the same cemetery.

She leaves behind her husband Krikor, son Levon, and her sister Aida and the latter's family.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS / OBIYUARY

# 15th Annual Mentoring Forum Connects Armenian Students and Professionals in New York

NEW YORK — The 15th Annual Mentoring Forum on March 27 brought together Armenian students and professionals at the Diocesan Center's Kavookjian Hall.

More than 125 attendees participated, representing a range of fields including education, engineering, healthcare and media. Students traveled from across the tri-state region, including Connecticut and the Boston area.

Founded in 2011 by the Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America (AESA) and the Armenian American Health Professionals Organization (AAHPO), the Mentoring Forum has grown into a collaborative effort supported by leading Armenian organizations, including the Armenian Network of Greater New York, Armenian General Benevolent Union, Fund for Armenian Relief, and the Armenian National Committee.

This year's event showcased the breadth and diversity of the Armenian-American professional community, uniting mentors and mentees from disciplines ranging from engineering and education to medicine and media.

The program featured a panel discussion on networking, career development, and employment pathways. Panelists and their roles were: Nazo Haroutunian, serving as senior talent advisor at Oracle Cloud Infrastructure; Aram Babikian, who leads Xtrackers sales for U.S. wealth at DWS Group; Peter Bonjuklian, functioning as managing partner and national staffing leader; and Dr. Nouneh Gostanian, who



A scene from the mentoring forum

acts as medical director of EPIC transformation at Northwell Cancer Institute and assistant director of the Zuckerberg Cancer Center Infusion Center.

Attendees peppered the panelists with questions on how emerging professionals can best set themselves up for success in an AI-driven economy. The panel presented practical advice on building networks, standing out in the job market, and making strategic career decisions. Drawing on their own experiences, they also reflected on pivotal moments in their careers and lessons learned from professional setbacks.

After the discussion, attendees joined breakout sessions organized by field and interest. These sessions offered opportunities for more focused conversations between mentors and mentees.

Karen Dilsizian, college-readiness director at New City Kids and moderator of the panel, said the event continues to serve as more than just a networking opportunity.

"For many participants, the Mentoring Forum is more than a single evening," Dilsizian said. "It strengthens community ties, expands the Armenian diaspora's professional network, and offers practical career

insights to the next generation."

"The diversity and broad spectrum of professional mentors reflects the Forum's core mission: to ensure Armenian students and professionals can find guidance, opportunity, and connection—regardless of their chosen career path," remarked Hovhannes John Mardirossian, President Emeritus of AESA, Northeastern Branch.

"The Mentoring Forum is a powerful testament to the strength, unity, and enduring spirit of our global Armenian community. It is deeply inspiring to witness so many dedicated mentors generously share their time, wisdom, and experience to uplift and guide the next generation as they shape their futures," says Larry Najarian, MD, AAHPO President and Mentoring Forum Co-Chair.

This year's event was co-chaired by a coalition of Armenian organizations representing various professional fields, in addition to AESA and AAHPO: the Armenian Bar Association, Armenian International Women's Association Greater New York Affiliate, Armenian Behavioral Science Association, Fund for Armenian Relief, Armenian Jewelers Association, Armenian Assembly, Children of Armenia Fund, Association for Trauma Outreach and Prevention, Armenian Network of Greater New York, Armenian National Committee, Knights and Daughters of Vartan, Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Armenians in Banking and Finance, and the Armenian Missionary Association of America.

## OBITUARY

### Tatul Sonentz-Papazian ARF Leader, Poet and Editor

BOSTON — On May 6, veteran leader of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, artist, poet, translator, editor, archivist, devoted servant of the Armenian Relief Society, and lifelong fighter for the Armenian Cause, Tatul Sonentz-Papazian passed away, leaving behind a legacy that belongs not only to his family and ideological comrades, but also to the entire Armenian nation he served for nearly eight decades.

Born in Cairo, Egypt, in May 1928, he came of age during a period of Diasporan Armenian life when cultural preservation and the pursuit of justice were inseparable parts of Armenian existence. In 1946, at only eighteen years of age, and less than three decades after the Armenian Genocide, he pledged himself to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. From that day onward, he was not merely a member of an organization; he devoted himself to the principles and mission embodied by the ARF.

He graduated from the Mekhitarist School of Vienna and later from the Cairo School of Fine Arts. As a painter and graphic designer, from 1949 to 1951, he worked with Egypt's leading newspapers, including *Al-Ahram*, *Le Progrès Égyptien*, *La Bourse Égyptienne* and the *Egyptian Gazette*. He then served for seven years at the Cairo office of the United States Information Agency (USIA) as artistic director of publications and public relations. During those years, his work first appeared in the publications of *Hairenik*.

After relocating to Boston, he continued working in publishing and printing organizations, assuming editorial and production

responsibilities while designing and publishing numerous books for Harvard University Press, MIT Press, and independent publishers. From 1978 onward, he continued his professional work in publishing, editing, and printing, always placing his talents at the service of Armenian institutions.

It was this moral imagination that gave his life its distinctive force. Tatul Sonentz did not interpret the suffering of the Armenian people as a license for hatred, but as a call for moral clarity. He believed in the liberation of his people, yet also in a broader human struggle against oppression, erasure, and indifference. He could be both revolutionary and compassionate at once, because for him the Armenian Cause was rooted not only in national justice, but also in the belief that humanity itself could become more just.

In the 1960s, he played an active role in the work of the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia. Working alongside Leo Sarkisian, he played a leading role in the transformation and renaming of that committee, helping lay the foundation for a new structure: the Armenian National Committee.

After many years in which April 24 commemorations remained largely confined to churches and community circles, in 1965 Armenians, under the auspices of the Armenian National Committee, entered the political arena to demand justice for the Genocide committed by Turkey. Sonentz-Papazian prepared letters for the United States Congress, publications on the historical and moral foundations of the



Armenian Cause, and press analyses aimed at once again directing the world's attention toward a justice ignored for fifty years.

In 1974, when Turkey invaded Cyprus, the Greek-Armenian community turned to the Armenian National Committee for support. He and Leo Sarkisian assisted in the formation of the Greek lobby, working together to persuade the United States Congress to impose an arms embargo on Turkey. They also prepared informational reports for United Nations missions in support of resolutions condemning the Turkish invasion.

His editorial, archival, and literary work connected past and present. Through the archives of the ARF and the First Republic of Armenia, he helped preserve the documentary heritage of the generation that restored Armenian statehood in 1918. Through his writings, translations, and publishing work, he helped new generations interpret the Armenian experience. Through the Armenian Relief Society, he served one of the Armenian people's most enduring humanitarian

and communal institutions.

Tatul possessed the unconquerable simplicity and boundless depth of a man of faith. As editor, poet, and translator, he brought professional excellence and artistic sensitivity into Armenian public life. He served as editor of the *Armenian Review*, director of the archives of the ARF and the First Republic of Armenia, and director of the publishing division of the Armenian Relief Society. For three decades he also served the ARS, including as executive director and administrator of archives and publications. In 2015, the Eastern United States Regional Executive of the Armenian Relief Society honored him with the organization's highest medal, the "Agnuni" Award, in recognition of his decades of devoted service. He also received the "Mesrob Mashdots" medal from the Holy See of Cilicia and the "Vahan Cardashian" award of the Armenian Cause.

His passing signifies more than the loss of a distinguished Armenian. It marks the end of an entire era—the generation that gave everything to the Diaspora. A generation that, after the Genocide, built schools, churches, newspapers, youth organizations, relief unions, political bodies, cultural associations, and archives.

A devoted father to Viken and Armen, he was predeceased by his wife Seda (1925–2022), daughter of Dr. Yeround Khatanian, member of the ARF Bureau and editor of *Hairenik* from 1963 to 1968.

To those who knew him personally, Tatul Sonentz was, in the truest sense of the word, a companion and comrade — a leader, teacher, paternal presence, cultivated intellectual, and compassionate friend. To the institutions he served, he was a builder, guardian of memory, and disciplined steward.



COMMUNITY NEWS

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Armenian Studies Program Holds 38th Annual Banquet

By Nellie Chobanyan

FRESNO — On Sunday, March 22, the Fresno State Armenian Studies Program hosted its 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Banquet at Fort Washington Country Club. This banquet brought together students, faculty, donors and community members for an evening that reflected both the depth of the program's legacy and the strength of its future.

This year's banquet honored Fresno State President Dr. Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, on the fifth anniversary of his appointment, while also recognizing scholarship recipients and graduating Armenian Studies Minors. Importantly, the evening served as a meaningful personification of the intergenerational community that has and will continue to sustain the Central Valley as a whole.

Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdchian opened the evening by emphasizing the continuity of that community, pointing to the range of Fresno State alumni in attendance. Reflecting on this, he asked the audience to consider "all of these people from all of these different eras of Fresno State, joining together... to share in the joy...commitment

and loyalty we have."

A central theme throughout the night was growth, both in numbers and in impact. This year alone, the program awarded \$137,000 in scholarships to 51 students, marking a record high in scholarship awards. What began decades ago with only two named scholarships has now expanded to nearly fifty, with additional endowments continuing to be established.

Speakers repeatedly returned to the idea that this success is not accidental, but rather the result of sustained community investment. As Fresno State Provost Dr. Xuaning Fu noted, the strength of the Armenian Studies Program lies in a single word: "community." He highlighted how Armenian-Americans in the Central Valley have transformed historical hardship into opportunity, building institutions that not only preserve culture but also contribute broadly to education and public life.

Jiménez-Sandoval's remarks further deepened this reflection. Speaking personally about his connection to the Armenian community, he de-scribed two defining lessons he has learned: the ability to "convert



Fresno State President Dr. Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, center, with administrators, faculty, and Armenian Studies scholarship recipients. (Photo Benjamin Kirk)

the pain of the past into energy that honors the strength and culture of your family and your community," and the capacity to come together, set aside differences, and "build monuments like no one else."

He emphasized that the Armenian Studies

Program itself is one of those monuments, one that preserves memory while educating future generations. In his words, the Program serves to "preserve your family and your historical memory," while also extending that knowledge beyond the Armenian community through its courses, publications, and public programming.

The most personal and impactful portion of the evening came from student speakers, who reflected on their experiences within the program. Their remarks highlighted how Armenian Studies is not only an academic pursuit, but also a space for identity formation and connection.

In 2025-2026, seven students graduating with a minor in Armenian Studies were recognized: Natalie Agazarian, Jonathan Chardukian, Hovsep Manoukian, Aaron Rettig, Grigor Terpogosyan and Rachel Yepremian-Owens. Former ASO President Harutyun Amirkhanyan, who graduated in December 2025, was also recognized.

One student described how her coursework helped her understand her own background more deeply, explaining that "every single class I took truly helped shape my personal understanding... of what it means to be Armenian." Another emphasized how learning the Armenian language and visiting Armenia transformed what once felt like distant history into something immediate and personal.

Across these reflections, a common theme emerged: Armenian Studies at Fresno State provides students with both knowledge and belonging. It allows them to engage with their heritage in a structured, meaningful way, while also connecting them to a broader community that extends beyond the classroom.

The banquet concluded with the recognition of scholarship recipients and graduating Minors, showcasing the program's on-going commitment to student success.

As Jiménez-Sandoval expressed, each scholarship serves as "a light that you receive... and one that comes with great responsibility."

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Newly Released ICJ Report Confirms Sham Nature of Nagorno-Karabakh Trials in Baku

ICJ, from page 7

The Assembly believes the implementation of the Commission's recommendations is essential for fostering the potential for a lasting, positive peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Azerbaijan — a country with a consistently poor and deteriorating human rights record — remains in the spotlight of major transnational human rights stakeholders. Ranked among the most repressive petro-states in the world, the Azerbaijani regime is regularly criticized by international watchdogs for its domestic repression and severe crackdown on opposition voices.

Freedom House, for instance, recently assigned Azerbaijan its lowest rating, citing “persisting authoritarianism” and “little interest in democratic change.” Human Rights Watch has also consistently characterized Azerbaijan as a repressive regime that “severely restricts the freedoms of expression and assembly,” while also documenting ongoing “cases of torture and ill-treatment in police custody and places of detention.”

The U.S. Department of State's latest Country Reports on Human Rights Practices likewise highlights serious concerns, including “credible reports of arbitrary or unlawful killings, torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, arbitrary arrests, and other serious abuses.”

Azerbaijani human rights activists report that there are currently nearly 300 political prisoners in the country, including journalists, bloggers, opposition leaders and human rights defenders.

To avoid international accountability, in 2025 Azerbaijan also ordered the closure of the International Committee of the Red Cross office in Baku.

Azerbaijan's continued violations of international human rights standards are reflected in the regime's long-standing anti-Armenian stance. Decades of discrimination and attacks on the fundamental rights of the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), along with repeated military assaults and occupation of parts of the Republic of Armenia, have become the cornerstone of the regime's regional policy.

In 2022, Azerbaijan violated fundamental international human rights norms by imposing a total blockade on Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), threatening the lives of 120,000 people through starvation and lack of access to healthcare. In September 2023 — after nearly ten months of blockade — Azerbaijan launched a lightning offensive, attacking communities and committing war crimes against defenseless civilians in Nagorno-Karabakh. The attack forced the entire local population to flee to Armenia, fearing mass killings and repression by the Azerbaijani regime.

During the blockade and ethnic cleansing of Artsakh, Azerbaijan's security forces captured and imprisoned under preposterous charges 19 Armenian prisoners and, unofficially, scores more. Among the Armenian hostages are the former democratic leaders of Artsakh, including three Presidents, former State Minister Ruben Vardanyan, and other high-profile officials as

well as civilians.

The Baku court proceedings, which began in January 2025, have been marred by serious due process violations, including a lack of transparency and the denial of adequate legal representation. Armenian detainees are reported to have been subjected to torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, including prolonged deprivation of sleep and drinking water, as well as other abusive practices. In January 2026, they were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 15 years to life imprisonment. Two of the prisoners — Ruben Vardanyan and David Ishkhanyan — have recently appealed to the Human Rights Defender of Armenia, citing violations of due process by Azerbaijan's courts and requesting a visit to the hostages, as well as the use of “all available humanitarian and legal mechanisms” to ensure independent monitoring of the safety, health, and dignity of Armenians held in Azerbaijan's unlawful custody. Baku has rejected cooperation between the human rights offices and ordered the transfer of the Armenian prisoners from the State Security Service detention center to the high-security Umbaki prison.

The ICJ's report covers additional violations of basic fairness standards and international law concerning jurisdiction, misapplication of applicable law, use of military courts, systemic and judicial corruption, protection against self-incrimination, accepted humanitarian law, lack of media, public, and international access to trials, and more which put to rest any claim of legitimacy of the NK trials or creditwor-

thiness to the Azeri legal system. To this day, Azerbaijan refuses to release the Armenian hostages.

Aliyev's regime also continues anti-Armenian policies and violations of international norms by targeting Armenian history, culture, and regional identity in the South Caucasus. A policy of systematic destruction of centuries-old Armenian Christian churches, cemeteries, and cultural monuments in Artsakh is being carried out. The breadth of this vandalism is widely documented by independent observers who are tracking the measures. The most recent tragic examples include the destruction of Holy Mother of God Cathedral in Stepanakert, the capital of Artsakh, and the demolition of the memorial dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks in 1915. In light of these policy public statements by Azerbaijani officials laying claim to sovereign Armenian territory — including references to parts of Armenia as “Western Azerbaijan” can only be interpreted as a steady stream of threats.

The 2026 Report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended the US Government to maintain Azerbaijan on the Special Watch List, highlighting growing concerns regarding the protection of Armenian religious and cultural heritage sites in and around Artsakh. Documented violations include the destruction of Armenian religious sites, churches and cemeteries, as well as alteration and misappropriation of the Christian Armenian heritage.

## Judge Bars Kars4Kids From Broadcasting ‘Misleading’ Ads

KAR4KIDS, from page 7

Kars4Kids added that it helps “thousands of kids with youth development, mentoring and educational programs, including hundreds in the state of California, contrary to the judge's complete mischaracterization of our work and of the testimony at trial.”

“Like many youth-serving organizations,” the statement said, “helping children often means engaging parents and families as well, and continuing support through young adulthood.”

The ruling was the result of a lawsuit filed by Bruce Puterbaugh, a California cabinetmaker in his 70s who had heard a Kars4Kids ad “over and over” on the radio and felt he had been misled by it after he donated a Volvo to the organization in 2021.

He testified that the ad led him to believe that Kars4Kids benefited “underprivileged kids” from around the country, including in California, the judge wrote. After donating the car, he learned from a neighbor that the proceeds would fund a Jewish organization based in the Northeast. Puterbaugh said he felt “taken advantage of.”

The judge admitted she had never heard the Kars4Kids ad until it was played in the courtroom, surprising one of Puterbaugh's lawyer, Anthony G. Graham.

“Do you not have a television?” Graham asked, according to a trial tran-



script. Replied the judge: “Not the television I watch.”

But Judge Apkarian agreed that the ad was misleading, citing what she called “strikingly candid” testimony from the chief operating officer of Kars4Kids, Esti Landau.

According to the judge, Landau acknowledged that the 30-second ads, which have been running for two decades, do not “say anything” about the charity's specific nature and do not mention the word Jewish, even though Kars4Kids is a Jewish organization.

Landau testified that Kars4Kids sends about \$45 million a year, 60 percent of the money it raises, to Oorah, its sister organization, which operates out of the same office building in Lakewood, the judge said. Another 30 percent is spent on in-house advertising, and about 6 percent on administrative costs. Oorah has also spent money overseas, the judge wrote, including \$16.5 million to buy a building in Israel.

Landau testified that while the children who benefit from the car donations come from a wide range of socioeco-

nomic backgrounds, Kars4Kids's mission is to “help Jewish children and their families and provide them with the support they need throughout their life.”

Apkarian found the ads violated California's law against false advertising because they were “misleading by omission” and that Kars4Kids sought to make the jingle memorable through “extreme repetition, while simultaneously stripping it of all substantive facts.”

The ads also violated the state's law against unfair competition, the judge wrote, because “the public is misled into believing donations aid underprivileged children in California, when in fact the funds primarily support a separate organization benefiting specific families in New York, New Jersey, and abroad based on religious affiliation.”

In addition to barring Kars4Kids from broadcasting the ads in California, the judge ordered the charity to pay Puterbaugh \$250 for the fair-market value of the nonworking Volvo he had donated.

“This ruling reinforces a fundamental principle: charitable organizations cannot mislead the public to create one impression while concealing material facts from the donating public,” Neal Roberts, one of Mr. Puterbaugh's lawyers, said in a statement. “Transparency and honesty matters, and donors have a right to know exactly who their contributions are benefiting.”



# Arts & Culture

## Help a Gifted Musician from Armenia Take The Next Step

BOSTON — The Armenian community has long believed in investing in talent, education, and the arts, and Maria Aristakesyan's story is a wonderful example of why that matters.

Maria, a gifted young Armenian cellist, first attended Berklee College of Music's Summer Five Week Program in 2025 through the Armenian Scholarship initiative championed by Berklee Alumna Christina Azarian and internationally acclaimed pianist and composer Tigran Hamasyan. What began as a summer opportunity became something much bigger: Maria was awarded a full tuition scholarship to the undergraduate program. This level of recognition from Berklee, one of the world's leading institutions for contemporary music education, places her among a highly select group of emerging musicians.

This extraordinary and life-changing achievement reflects also Maria's exceptional talent, dedication, and



Maria Aristakesyan

years of hard work in music. During her short time at Berklee's summer program, Maria distinguished herself not only through her musical ability, but through her discipline, curiosity, and artistic identity. She demonstrated a clear understanding of her cultural roots while remaining open to innovation and collaboration. In just a few weeks, she put together an ensemble of students from all over the world to learn and perform Armenian pieces for her "Meet and Greet" at the college.

While her tuition is fully covered, the cost of housing and living expenses in Boston presents a significant challenge. For young artists, opportunities like this can be life-changing — not just professionally, but personally. Berklee has helped shape musicians from around the world, and Maria now has the chance to be part of that community.

If you'd like to support a talented young Armenian musician as she takes this exciting next step, her fundraiser offers a direct way to help make that journey possible.

Sometimes a little community support can make all the difference.

<https://www.gofundme.com/help-maria-thrive-at-berklee-college-of-music>.



## The Epic Soundworld of Vahan Artsruni Unveiled at Yerevan Opera Stage

By Konstantin Petrossian  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN — On May 11, at the Alexander Spendiaryan National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre, musician Vahan Artsruni celebrated his 60th birthday and the 40th anniversary of his stage career, with a jubilee concert organized at the initiative of the National Opera Theatre by invitation of its director, Karen Durgaryan.

The evening featured as soloists, the musicians from Artsruni's rock ensemble and Norayr Kartashyan's folk group, while Artsruni's 15-year-old daughter, Anais Artsruni, made her stage debut. The symphony orchestra of the Opera Theatre was conducted by Harutyun Arzumanyan.

The concept and structure of the program enabled the audience to trace all major periods of Artsruni's creative evolution — from reinterpretations of Armenian sacred musical heritage to large-scale symphonic rock and epic symphonic compositions.

During the evening, audiences heard Artsruni's interpretation of the hymns of Mesrop Mashtots, distinguished by its reimagining of ancient fifth-century spiritual material through the lens of contemporary sonic thought. Particularly impressive was the performance of Artsruni's songs cycle Komitas: Ten Revelations based on the poetry of Komitas, in which the composer intertwines national melodic idioms with the expressive means of contemporary chamber music. The program also included songs set to the poetry of Razmik Davoyan, instrumental works in the progressive rock genre, as well as the compositions Ethnophonica, Inno Millennium, and The Call of the Wind that deliver an intense symphonic sound.

The musical and stage solutions of the concert created the impression of a unified synthetic work of art. The magnificent stage of the Opera Theatre was repeatedly transformed into a visual dimension imbued with national, ancestral, and spiritual symbolism through expressive stage design. The interaction of light, painterly imagery, and symbolic visual elements deepened the dramaturgy of the music, immersing the audience in a unique mystical and epic atmosphere.

The participating musicians demonstrated a remarkably high level of performance artistry. The symphony orchestra rendered with particular brilliance both the mystical and contemplative interpretations of the sacred hymns and the storm-like energy of the symphonic rock compositions. Throughout the evening, the concert maintained intense inner dramatic tension and festive solemnity, ultimately unfolding as a genuine musical spectacle.

Today, Artsruni is seen as one of the defining voices of contemporary Armenian music, known for blending contemporary, folk and medieval Armenian musical traditions into a sound that feels both rooted and modern. Beginning his musical journey more than 40 years ago, he went on to build a remarkably diverse body of work that includes 15 CD albums, music composed for three feature films, 21 documentary films, six animated films, nine theatrical productions, a pantomime performance, contemporary ballet and numerous projects in the sphere of contemporary art.



Vahan Artsruni and his daughter Anais Artsruni

## Irina Dzutsova

*Exploring the Armenian Heritage of Georgia*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN-PARIS — Irina Petrovna Dzutsova (born in 1941, Tbilisi) is an Ossetian historian and philologist by education, Doctor of Art History. From 1966 to 1970 she worked at the Russian newspaper *Vecherny Tbilisi* (Evening Tbilisi). For many years she was the

Georgia correspondent of the journal *Decorative Art of the USSR*. From 1970 to 2009 she worked at the Art Museum of Georgia. She founded and headed the manuscript and memoirs department, significantly enriching it with materials from the personal archives of artists and scholars. She was a member of the Union of Artists of Georgia. Since 1966 she has published in the press of Georgia, Armenia, Russia, England, France, the US and Serbia. An author of number of books in Russian and Georgian on the history of Georgian fine arts, Dzutsova writes widely on the history of Georgia's cultural and artistic ties with other countries. She has participated in international symposia, conferences, scholarly sessions, and collective volumes on art and cultural history. Since 2010 she has lived in Paris and continues to write books and articles.



**Dear Irina Petrovna, I have been reading your articles on Armenian artists for many years and would like to thank you for your professional assessments and numerous discoveries related to masters of the past. You are an Ossetian from Georgia, married to an Armenian, you write in Russian, and now live in France. I believe multiculturalism enriches a person and largely shapes one's character. How has it influenced you?**

In Tbilisi, a historically multinational and multiconfessional city situated at the crossroads of European, Russian and Persian cultures, and one that has proven its ability to absorb and embrace the best and brightest elements of this unique cultural "fabric," it is impossible to live and work outside this phenomenon of cultural and linguistic diversity. For example, my father-in-law, Varos Yengoyan, was fluent in Armenian, Georgian, Russian, Persian and Turkish.

By learning about others — our compatriots, their culture, customs, and ways of life — a person undoubtedly broadens his horizons, enriches his worldview, and expands his creative potential. My personal and professional development would have been very different had I lived in another cultural environment. In this sense, Georgia, and Tbilisi in particular, is a rather unique phenomenon: peoples here have always lived side by side — not in parallel, but truly together — not in a "melting pot" in the American sense, but while preserving their identity, forming mixed families, and looking at the "other" not with suspicion, but with goodwill.

There were, of course, difficult moments after the collapse of the USSR and the surge of ultra-nationalism. However, I believe that the spirit of "internationalism" characteristic of Georgia prevailed over politically see IRENA, page 17



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



## Khoresh Gheymeh (Meat And Split Pea Stew)

This recipe Khoresh Gheymeh (Meat and Split Pea Stew) by Naz Deravian was published in *The New York Times* on February 25, 2025. In the canon of iconic Iranian stews, khoresh gheymeh holds a top spot alongside classics like ghormeh sabzi. A seemingly humble dish of gently spiced meat and split peas, khoresh gheymeh can be served as a cozy home-cooked meal or a celebratory dish; in big batches as a means of giving alms to those in need; or during religious ceremonies. “Gheymeh” refers to the size of the meat, which should be cut into small pieces. Traditionally, lamb is used, but you can also use beef. The stew is enriched with starchy Iranian yellow split peas called lappeh (see Tip). In this version, the split peas are par cooked separately so their texture and cooking time can be controlled. The split peas finish cooking in the stew, becoming tender but holding their shape. Limoo Ammani, or dried limes, lend the stew its distinctly rich and earthy tang, but if you can’t find any, use lime or lemon juice. Khoresh gheymeh is famously topped with either fried matchstick potatoes (see Tip) or fried eggplant; this version uses potatoes. Spoon the stew over rice and serve, if you like, with Shirazi salad.

Yield: 4 servings

### INGREDIENTS:

#### For the Stew:

1/2 cup/100 grams slow-cooking Iranian lappeh, chana dal or yellow split peas, picked through and rinsed  
 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon olive oil or vegetable oil  
 1 large yellow onion, very finely chopped  
 Kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal) and black pepper  
 1 teaspoon ground turmeric  
 1 pound lamb or beef stew meat (see Tip), cut into 1/2-inch cubes  
 3 tablespoons good-quality tomato paste  
 1(3-inch) cinnamon stick  
 Large pinch saffron threads  
 Sugar, if needed  
 4 limoo Ammani (dried limes; see Tip), rinsed and dried, or 3 to 4 tablespoons lime or lemon juice  
 Lime juice or lemon juice, as needed  
 Basmati rice or polo ba tahdig, for serving

#### For the Fried Potatoes (or use store-bought crunchy potato sticks; see Tip):

1 Large Yukon Gold potato (8 ounces), peeled, cut into matchsticks and soaked in cold water  
 2 cups vegetable oil  
 1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric (optional, for color)  
 Kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal)

### PREPARATION:

Start the stew: Place the lappeh or chana dal in a bowl and cover with 3 cups cold water.

While the lappeh soaks, in a kettle or a saucepan, bring 8 cups of water to a boil and keep at a lively simmer. In a large (5-quart) Dutch oven or similar pot, heat 1/4 cup of oil over medium. Add the onion, give a quick stir to coat, and cook without stirring until the onion starts to turn golden at the edges and decreases in volume, 6 to 8 minutes. Begin to stir frequently and keep cooking until mostly golden throughout, 4 to 6 minutes more.

Season the onion with a little salt, add the turmeric and stir until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the meat, give a quick stir to coat in the onion mixture, spread

evenly over the bottom of the pot and don’t touch for 1 minute. Then cook, stirring frequently, until the meat is no longer pink, 2 to 3 minutes. Season with 2 teaspoons salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper.

Adjust heat to medium-low and add the tomato paste. Cook, stirring frequently, until the tomato paste releases its color into the oil, 2 to 3 minutes. (This step is very important for the final hue of the stew.) Add the cinnamon stick, give a quick stir and pour in enough boiling water to cover the meat. (You’ll use 2 1/2 to 3 cups water; reserve the rest for later.) Bring to a boil, stir, cover, adjust heat to low and gently simmer, stirring once in a while, for 1 hour, until the meat is tender.

While the meat simmers, prepare the saffron water: Using a mortar and pestle (or a spice grinder), grind the saffron to a fine powder (you will have a scant 1/4 teaspoon). If needed, add a small pinch of sugar to the threads to help with grinding. Add 2 tablespoons of the boiled water, gently stir, cover and let steep until ready to use. (If using a spice grinder, transfer the powdered saffron to a small glass to steep.)

Soak the limoo Ammani: Firmly hold one limoo Ammani at a time on a board and, with a fork or the tip of a paring knife, carefully puncture it a couple of times. Place in a small bowl, cover with boiled water and place another small bowl on top to submerge the limes. Let soak for 15 minutes to remove their bitterness. Drain and set aside until ready to use.

Par cook the lappeh: In a medium saucepan, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil over medium. Drain the lappeh, transfer to the saucepan and cook, stirring constantly, for 3 minutes (avoid overcooking, which would toughen the peas). Cover with 4 cups of the boiled water and add 1 teaspoon salt. Bring to a boil over high, adjust to a simmer, partially cover and cook, stirring occasionally and skimming off any foam, until the peas are al dente, 10 to 15 minutes. Drain, rinse with cold water and set aside.

When the meat has simmered for 1 hour, add the par cooked lappeh, drained limoo Ammani and 1 tablespoon of the saffron water to the stew, adjust heat to medium and bring back to a rapid simmer. Cover, adjust heat to low and simmer for 30 to 40 minutes, occasionally using the back of a wooden spoon to gently squeeze the limoo Ammani against the side of the pot, until the stew comes to life: The lappeh are tender but maintain their shape, the oils have risen to the surface and the flavors have come together. As the stew simmers, taste for salt and adjust as needed.

Remove the cinnamon stick, stir in the remaining saffron water and add lime juice to taste, 1 tablespoon at a time. Cook for 10 to 15 minutes more, until the consistency of the stew is not too thick and not too runny. (You should be able to spoon the sauce over rice.) Adjust as needed: Add just-boiled water to thin out a little, or simmer uncovered to thicken. (The stew will also thicken as it sits.)

While the stew simmers, prepare the fried potatoes (if using store-bought potato sticks, skip this step) so you can serve them hot when the stew is ready (or keep warm in a 250-degree oven). Drain the potatoes and thoroughly pat dry with a clean kitchen or paper towel. Place a wire rack over a sheet pan (or line sheet pan with paper towels). In a large (12-inch), high-sided pan, heat the oil over medium-high until hot, about 2 minutes. Add the potatoes and give a quick stir with a slotted spoon. Fry without stirring (so they don’t break) for 4 minutes. Sprinkle the turmeric (if using) into the pot and continue to cook, stirring frequently, until the potatoes are golden and beginning to crisp, 3 to 5 minutes more. Transfer to the sheet pan and sprinkle with a little salt. Transfer the stew to a serving dish, scatter the fried potatoes on top and serve with rice.

### Tips:

Lappeh, Iranian yellow split peas, can be found at Iranian and Middle Eastern markets, and online. Make sure to use the “slow cooking” kind. You can also use Indian chana dal or yellow split peas.

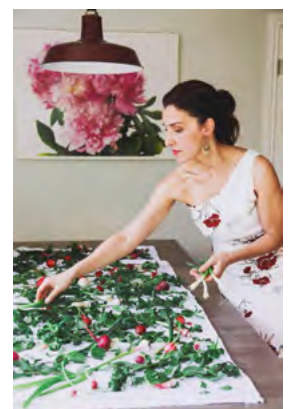
Lamb (such as boneless lamb shoulder or leg) and beef (chuck or eye of round) are good choices for the stewing meat.

Limoo Ammani, often called Omani, can be found at Middle Eastern markets and online. The dried limes are served with the stew but typically not eaten. Unless you’re a diehard fan, in which case you can include small pieces, avoiding the seeds which are very bitter, with your bites of stew.

Instead of frying your own potatoes, you can purchase crunchy potato sticks (also called shoestring potatoes) online and in Middle Eastern markets in the snack section to use as a topping.

Naz Deravian is a writer and actor born in Iran. She grew up in Italy and Canada and now lives in Los Angeles with her husband and two children. She is the award-winning voice behind the food blog *Bottom of the Pot*, which won the 2015 International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) Award for best narrative culinary blog. She has also been twice nominated in several categories for the *Saveur* Food Blog Awards. For her website and recipes, go to: <https://bottomofthepot.com/home/>

Naz Deravian lays out the multi-hued canvas of a Persian meal, with 100+ recipes adapted to an American home kitchen and interspersed with Naz’s celebrated essays exploring the idea of home. At eight years old, Naz Deravian left Iran with her family during the height of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis. Over the following ten years, they emigrated from Iran to Rome to Vancouver, carrying with them books of Persian poetry, tiny jars of saffron threads, and, always, the knowledge that home can be found in a simple, perfect pot of rice. As they traverse the world in search of a place to land, Naz’s family finds comfort and familiarity in pots of hearty aash, steaming pomegranate and walnut chicken, and of course, tahdig: the crispy, golden jewels of rice that form a crust at the bottom of the pot. The best part saved for last.





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Books

## Michael Minassian's *1000 Pieces of Time* Resurrects Past Themes

By Christopher Atamian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

"You may delay, but time will not." — Benjamin Franklin

The past haunts the pages of Michael Minassian's work. Although nothing so terrible as the fratricide in *Hamlet* motivates the people and places he describes, his latest 2025 volume of poetry goes back deep in time to understand the present — a continued meditation on man and his place in the world as we know it. A former college professor and host of the podcast series *Eyes on Literature*, Minassian now devotes his time to poetry and serves as contributing editor for the online journal *Verse-Virtual*.

The current volume *1000 Pieces of Time*, divided into three parts, follows on the heels of his previous works, which include *Time Is Not a River* (2020), *Morning Calm* (2020) and *A Matter of Timing* (2021). In rewriting the stories of famous figures from history and literature, the poet problematizes the very notion of narrative structure itself, questioning how much



Michael Minassian

subjectivity shapes reality and how we view it. The influence of existentialism can also be felt beneath Minassian's narrative surface, as he examines issues such as love, family, and community. Winner of the 2021 Catherine Lubbe Prize in Poetry, Minassian's work is also deeply invested in moral issues pertaining to the past, whether that of his own people or other indigenous groups.

The first part features historic characters whom Minassian transposes into amusing situations in today's world: Achilles on a subway, Christopher Marlowe in a bar, and more. Horatio, Dante, Einstein, Cromwell, Darwin or Helen of Troy shopping at Trader Joe's — it's a veritable who's who of the global literary canon. Parts Two and Three deal more with family drama and quirky, often hard-to-categorize verse.

Fellow poet Robert Wexelblatt writes that "Minassian's whimsies are funny but resonant bon-bons with nutritious ingredients," but I assign them more gravitas than that, though humor is indeed present throughout. The whimsy of temporally transplanting historical figures represents the highlight of the anthology and works better in some places than in others. When asked, Minassian stated that he wanted to see, "How would figures from the past, both real and imagined, deal with the modern world?" But in fact, these poems do more than that — they create imaginative new worlds for the reader, while positing that one's fate in life is as dependent on time and place as on any other factors.

The lead poem, "Achilles in the Underground," plunks the Greek Achaean hero in full body armor on New York City's MTA:

When the lights flicker  
and the train stops  
between stations, I notice  
the other passengers  
shift nervously  
as he lifts his sword  
and gets to his feet,

This matter-of-fact introduction leads into an unexpected, striking image:

but he's only giving up  
his seat to an old  
woman all in black  
like the widows of Troy  
dressed like crows  
before they leapt  
off the wall.

Farther on, "The True Story of Lot" purposefully clashes with the Biblical version but also dialogues with that of another Armenian poet, Nigoghos Sarafian. A member of the so-called "Menk Group" or "We Generation" nearly a century ago, Sarafian warned Armenians not to keep looking back at the past or risk, like Lot's wife, being turned into a pillar of salt. Here Minassian emphasizes the tragedy that befell Lot and his assumed bloodline:

Later Lot's daughters  
claimed Moab and Ammon  
were their father's sons,  
but the hard nubs  
on the boys' shoulders,  
vestiges of wings,  
told a different story

Lot left to mourn alone,  
as the stars shrugged  
and his wife's shadow  
trailed behind.

In "Dressing the Buddha," the poet recognizes Shakyamuni Buddha in the street "wearing only a thin robe, / walking barefoot along the road" and takes action:

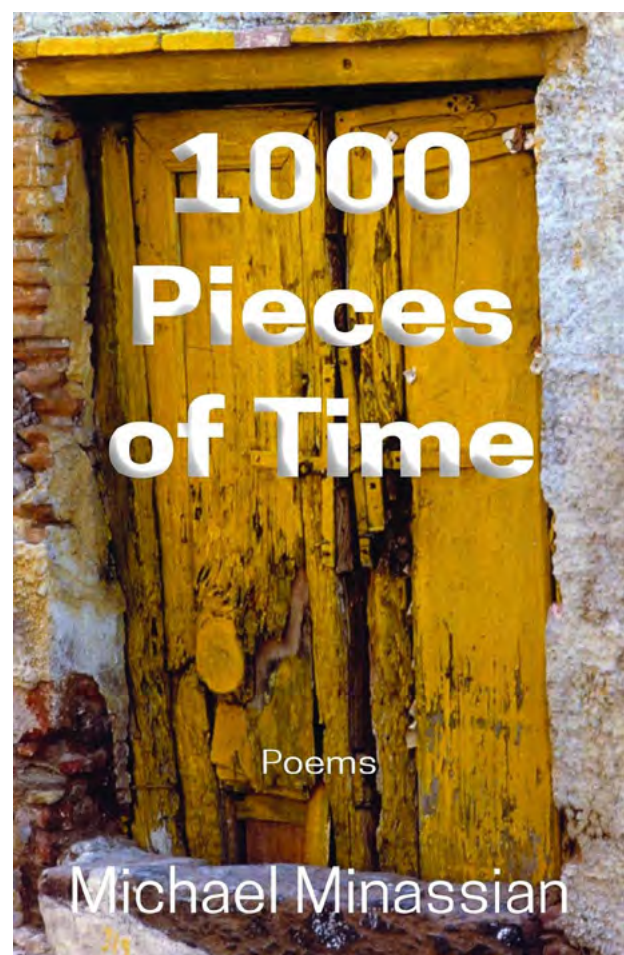
...I took off my coat  
and draped it over his shoulders,  
then took him home  
for a cup of tea and bowl of rice.

He also gives Buddha a pair of his wife's boots! This irks her of course but, like her husband, she has kind heart and comes to the Buddha's succor as well. In a tender image which borrows from Edna St. Vincent Millay's famed *Recuerdo* (We hailed, "Good morrow, mother!" to a shawl covered head... And she wept, "God bless you!" for the apples and pears./And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.") Minassian writes instead:

"Have you been meditating again?"  
she asked me, shaking her head,  
"you can take me shoe shopping  
as soon as I put these groceries away" —  
but before the Buddha could cross the road  
she ran after him and gave him her saffron-colored scarf,  
wrapping it gently twice around his bare neck:  
"Thanks," is all he said.

In other places, Minassian's verse left me puzzled, as when he writes:

"Don't worry about what is to come," he shouted  
as he climbed into his time machine,  
"the past goes whizzing past your head like a bullet.  
The rest is all made up."



Here the poet seems to reverse past and present — but to what end? Another opaque image reads: "Poets may speak of loss and regret, /but the next day brought only knives of zero/and the dawn's empty hand."

In the end, my favorite poem may well be "Emily at the Waffle House," where Minassian reimagines Emily Dickinson as a waitress who scribbles down brilliant verse between serving pancakes and eggs:

I watched her write furiously  
on her waitress pad, scrawling poems  
instead of someone's breakfast order,  
or writing letters to the dead  
she would post later  
on bathroom walls.

...Half of poetry is language,  
the other half  
the hollow part  
of thought, I wrote.

And then in "I Will Speak for the Bees," there is the striking:

"The heart knows what it wants  
but not who it wants —  
I will speak for the bees,  
the sting of love fierce on my tongue."

Poetry, more than any other form of writing is very much a matter of personal taste. To me, the poems in Part I ring strongest, though the final poem of the anthology, "It's a Black and White World Again," also lands. A clever riff on the film "Casablanca," it offers a paraphrased poetic rendition of this classic film, in which Minassian writes with cheek:

"After all, this whole story is from the script  
of an unproduced Broadway play  
which somehow ended up as a movie  
where people speak in code —  
maybe because they forgot their lines."

Along with Bogey and the ending of Minassian's *1000 Pieces of Time*, I will end my review with a wink: *Here's looking at you, kid*.

Buy the book: [https://sheilanagiblog.com/shop/michael\\_minassian\\_1000/](https://sheilanagiblog.com/shop/michael_minassian_1000/)

## Boston MFA Director Pierre Terjanian to Speak at June 4 Tekeyan Program

TERJANIAN, from page 1 the top 20 largest art museums in the world. A seasoned fundraiser, he was appointed Ann and Graham Gund Director and CEO after working at the museum as its chief of Curatorial Affairs and Conservation for about a year and a half. He is known as an important scholar on arms and armor, and previously worked curatorially at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

He is also a Curator Emeritus at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, having previously been appointed Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Curator in Charge of The

Met's Department of Arms and Armor.

Terjanian was born in Strasbourg, France. He has a graduate degree in history from the Université de Metz. Prior to his tenure at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (which he joined in 2012), he held the dual role of J. J. Medveckis Associate Curator of Arms and Armor and acting head of the Department of European Decorative Arts and Sculpture before 1700 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Terjanian is the author of *The Last Knight: The Art, Armor, and Ambition of Maximilian I* which accompanied and augmented

the exhibition he curated at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Princely Armor in the Age of Dürer: A Renaissance Masterpiece at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Terjanian succeeded Matthew Teitelbaum as director of the MFA Boston, assuming the position in July 2025.

His primary duties are to lead the institution and plan for it, while working with its board and overseeing all museum operations. This includes setting programs up for audiences and responsibility for the collecting work, exhibitions, and educational initiatives. "Ultimately," he said, "it's the job

of bringing together the talent, energy and interest of the staff, the board, volunteers and partners in the entire community."

In his conversation with Tekeyan Cultural Association Executive Director Aram Arkun, Terjanian may speak about topics such as the changing roles of museums, questions of provenance, the effect of government policies on museums, his own career, and the MFA's Armenian collection.

The talk at the Baikar Building will start at 7 p.m. sharp. A question-and-answer session will follow, as will a reception. The event is free and open to the public.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Clark Art Institute to Exhibit Priceless Art Donated by Tavitian Foundation

WILLIAMSTOWN, Mass. — The Clark Art Institute has announced details of its upcoming exhibition, “An Exquisite Eye: Introducing the Aso O. Tavitian Collection,” on view June 13 through February 21, 2027. The exhibition of approximately 150 works is the first public presentation of selections from the Tavitian Collection, one of the most significant private collections of European art formed in North America in the 21st century.

The presentation brings together a vibrant range of paintings, sculpture, drawings, and decorative arts from more than four centuries of artistic production (c. 1450-1850). “An Exquisite Eye” includes rare early Netherlandish painting, Italian Renaissance sculpture, Baroque portraiture, and eighteenth-century French works by artists such as Jan van Eyck, Jean-Antoine Houdon, and Elizabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun, offering a compelling view of the collection’s depth across mediums and geography.

A central interpretive element in the exhibition’s design is a large-scale map tracing the geographic origins of selected objects, inviting visitors to follow the circulation of artists, materials, and artistic traditions across regions and time periods.

Assembled by the late collector, philanthropist, and connoisseur Aso O. Tavitian, the collection comprises 331 paintings, sculpture, drawings, and decorative arts

“This exhibition marks a defining moment for the Clark,” said Olivier Meslay, Hardymon Director of the Clark Art Institute. “The Tavitian Collection represents an extraordinary act of generosity and vision, one that profoundly expands our ability to present the history of European art at the highest level.”

“One of the most exciting aspects of the Tavitian Collection as it will be presented in An Exquisite Eye is the way in which it brings to life how deeply interconnected artists and artistic traditions were in early modern Europe,” said Lara Yeager-Craselt, Aso O. Tavitian Curator of Early Modern European Painting & Sculpture.

Reflecting Tavitian’s deeply personal and discerning eye, the collection is distinguished by its intimacy and refinement. Portraiture is a particular strength of the Tavitian Collection, alongside religious and mythological subjects, landscapes, and still lifes. The collection invites close looking and sustained engagement, while offering a sweeping view of artistic production across Europe during a period of profound cultural transformation.

Highlights of An Exquisite Eye include:

\* Jan van Eyck, *Madonna at the Fountain*, c. 1440, a rare workshop replica that demonstrates the artist’s revolutionary approach to naturalism and the devotional function of small-scale painting, showing an astonishing range of optical effects through color, light, and detail

\* Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, *Little Bouquet in a Roemer*, c. 1619, an early example of floral still life painting that merges scientific observation with artistic invention

\* Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of Margaret Lemon*, c. 1638, an intimate and psychologically charged portrait that offers insight into the artist’s personal and professional relationships in seventeenth-century London

\* Jean-Antoine Houdon, *Little Lise*, 1775, a refined marble bust that exemplifies the artist’s stature as one of the most sought-after portrait sculptors of the French Enlightenment

\* Claude-Joseph Vernet, *Rhine Falls*, near Schaffhausen, Switzerland, 1779, a dramatic landscape inspired by the artist’s travels, capturing the wonder of a natural phenomenon that was a site of international fascination

land, 1779, a dramatic landscape inspired by the artist’s travels, capturing the wonder of a natural phenomenon that was a site of international fascination

\* Elizabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun, *Self Portrait in Studio Costume*, c. 1800, an arresting image painted in exile in which the artist—a favorite of Queen Marie Antoinette—presents herself both as painter and subject

Additional works by Andrea della Robbia, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Peter Paul Rubens, Jean-Antoine Watteau, and Louis-Léopold Boilly further underscore the collection’s breadth.



Jan van Eyck, *Madonna at the Fountain*, c. 1440, Oil on panel. Clark Art Institute, gift of Aso O Tavitian Foundation



Image: Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Young Man* (detail), c. 1613–15, oil on panel. The Clark, Gift of Aso O. Tavitian Foundation, 2025.1.49

of exceptional quality and rarity. Featuring works by many of the most acclaimed artists of the early modern era — Jan van Eyck, Andrea della Robbia, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Peter Paul Rubens, Jean-Antoine Watteau, and Jacques-Louis David, among others — the gift significantly strengthens the Clark’s holdings, particularly in early modern European art, and more than doubles the size of the sculpture collection.

The collection will go on view in 2028 when the Clark opens the new Aso O. Tavitian Wing, designed by Selldorf Architects, adjacent to the current permanent collection galleries.

“An Exquisite Eye reflects both the extraordinary discernment of Aso O. Tavitian and the Clark’s commitment to presenting exceptional works that invite deeper understanding,” said Esther Bell, Deputy Director and Robert and Martha Berman Lipp Chief Curator, and incoming Hardymon Director of the Clark Art Institute. “This presentation offers an early glimpse of the collection’s depth while building anticipation for its future home in the Clark’s new Aso O. Tavitian Wing.”

Organized by the Clark Art Institute, An Exquisite Eye is curated by Esther Bell, Deputy Director and Robert and Martha Berman Lipp Chief Curator and incoming Hardymon Director; and Lara Yeager-Craselt, Aso O. Tavitian Curator of Early Modern European Painting and Sculpture. The presentation introduces the newly created curatorial role occupied by Yeager-Craselt, which affirms the institution’s long-term commitment to the study and stewardship of the collection. The Tavitian gift also includes more than \$45 million to support the ongoing care, study, and presentation of the collection, including the endowed curatorial position and the construction of the new wing.

An Exquisite Eye: Introducing the Aso O. Tavitian Collection is made possible

by Denise Littlefield Sobel. Major funding is provided by Hubert and Mireille Goldschmidt, with additional support from George W. Ahl III, Robert Dance and Robert Loper, Stuart Lochhead Sculpture, the Asbjorn Lunde Foundation, Inc., and Kathleen Morris and Robert Kraus.

In addition to An Exquisite Eye, the Clark’s summer 2026 program includes Giorgio Griffa: *Paths in the Forest* (June 13–October 12, 2026), marking the artist’s first solo exhibition in the United States; *CoastLines: American Prints and Drawings* (July 4–September 27, 2026), exploring representations of the American shoreline through works on paper from the Clark’s collection; and the ongoing presentation of *Ground/work 2025* (through October 12, 2026), an outdoor exhibition of six monumental sculptures positioned across the Clark’s campus.

The Clark, which has a three-star rating in the Michelin Green Guide, is located at 225 South Street in Williamstown. Its 140-acre campus includes miles of hiking and walking trails through woodlands and meadows, providing an exceptional experience of art in nature.

For information on these programs and more, visit [clarkart.edu](http://clarkart.edu).



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

**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 renowned, genre-blending ensemble Pink Martini. Symphony Hall, 7:30 p.m. For tickets and information, visit [FACSBoston.org](http://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.

**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.

**SEPTEMBER** – 24 Save the Date! Celebrating Contributions! Gala to benefit the Armenian Heritage Park at the InterContinental Boston. **NOVEMBER 21 and 22. Save the Date. America's oldest Armenian Church Celebrates 135 years. Banquet November 21. Divine Liturgy November 22. Details to follow.**

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.

## Irina Dzutsova: Exploring the Armenian Heritage of Georgia

IRINA, from page 13

short-sighted nationalist fervor, which, as history shows, can only lead into a deep abyss.

Everyone I have had the good fortune to know is a product of this cultural and ethnic diversity — for example, Sergei Parajanov: an ethnic Armenian, a native of Tiflis, Russian-speaking, who celebrated the Hutsuls, the great Georgian painter Niko Pirosmiani, trilingual Sayat-Nova and Lermontov's Ashik-Kerib, a hero of Caucasian and Central Asian epics.

Many outstanding Armenian artists lived in Georgia — from Hakob Hovnatanyan and Alexander Bazhbeuk-Melikyan to such remarkable masters as Albert Dilbaryan and Gayane Khachatryan. Do you think they can be considered both Armenian and Georgian artists?

These eminent Armenians, natives of Tbilisi, absorbed currents, ideas, and, I would even say, entire worlds within the incredibly stimulating cultural atmosphere that took shape in Georgia in the 1970s–1980s. As the distinguished Pirosmiani scholar Erast Kuznetsov wrote, "in this city, where the need to express oneself creatively has almost equaled the need to eat, sleep, quench one's thirst, where every third person is an artist or a poet or a musician... artistic talent has come to be regarded as something natural, everyday, and art as an integral part of daily life" (Erast Kuznetsov, Pirosmiani, Leningrad, 1984, p. 202). One could hardly put it better.

Because of one or two Armenian inscriptions on the paintings of Niko Pirosmiani, the impression arose that he was Armenian; however, it is known that this is not the case. How do you explain the presence of Armenian inscriptions in his works?

Kakhetian Niko Aslanovich Pirosmianishvili was a true embodiment of multinational Georgia, interacting with representatives of all the peoples living in the country. Indeed, Armenian inscriptions can be seen on his oilcloth paintings. This can be explained by the fact that in his childhood, having been or-

phaned, he remained in the village of Shulaveri at the estate of the Armenian noble Kalantarov family, the last employers of his father. In the Kalantarov household — first in the village and later in Tiflis — Pirosmiani spent a total of 15 years working as a cook's assistant and helping with household duties. It was in this family that he learned to read, write and draw. I believe it was also there that he mastered Georgian, Russian, and, presumably, the Armenian alphabet.

You were friends with many prominent artists from different countries, including Minas Avetisyan and Sergei Parajanov. Could you share any memories from them?

So much has already been said about Minas and Sergei — almost everything... I can only add that Minas is one of those creators who has remained in my soul forever. Honest, selfless, a philosopher — one could trust him completely. To this day, I perceive his passing as a profound personal loss.

As for Seryozha, Serzhik, as he was called in Tbilisi, he had already become a legend in his lifetime — one of the chosen. I was friends with him for more than 20 years. I don't remember who introduced me — a 26-year-old correspondent of *Vecherny Tbilisi* — to his house on Kote Meskhi Street, but that is how we met. Later he invited me to the filming of "Sayat-Nova," offering me a small role. Thus, I appeared in a brief episode and received no criticism from him — which made me very proud, as Sergei was demanding, even strict, with his actors, constantly "educating" them. I then wrote a newspaper article about the filming. Endowed with a free spirit, he generously shared it with others. At the same time, he was kind, attentive, sensitive to people — and extremely perceptive. The pomegranate was his favorite cinematic poetic symbol. Today, pomegranates lie in a vase in my home as symbolic reminders of Parajanov. He is a unique phenomenon of world culture.

You are also the author of the book *Symbols and Images in Sergei Parajanov's Film "The Color of*

*Pomegranates*" (2012). Some believe that symbols should not be interpreted at all, as this supposedly "kills" them. Do you agree?

In the preface to the *French Dictionary of Symbols*, its compiler Jean Chevalier wrote: "All sciences, natural and human, and art in all its forms — everything that constitutes human culture — encounters symbols along its path. All must unite their efforts to decipher the mystery of symbols and release the energy concentrated within them. It is not enough to say that we live in a world of symbols — the world of symbols lives within us." For some, symbols are incomprehensible and inaccessible; for others, they are woven into the very fabric of life and perception. The "decoding" of a symbol — an entity that generalizes and concentrates knowledge, beliefs, and superstitions accumulated over centuries — does not deprive it of its symbolic power but helps us reach the essence of things in their most concise and authentic form.

You are also the author of the book *Hakob Hovnatanyan. Portraits — Memories of the Artist* (2022). I recall a story that in a Tbilisi gallery, upon seeing a portrait by Hovnatanyan labeled "Unknown Georgian artist," Parajanov remarked: "This unknown Georgian artist is a well-known Armenian artist!" It is known that Hovnatanyan did not sign his paintings. You have discovered several works from his Persian period. Do you think many such works still exist, and are they still presented in Tbilisi as "unknown Georgian artists"?

Indeed, as a result of many years of research, I managed to discover several new works by Hakob Hovnatanyan created during his long stay in Persia. I am convinced that in Iran — in museums, storage collections, Armenian churches, and private collections — there are works by Hovnatanyan. I believe they are catalogued as "unknown artist" or "unknown Persian artist." In the storage collections of the Tbilisi National Museum there are works by an "unknown artist" which, in my 2022 book, I attribute to Hakob

Hovnatanyan.

Do you have any new projects related to Armenian artists or poets?

The life and work of Hakob Hovnatanyan continue to inspire me — this is a vast field of research. Much remains to be done, and this is a task for the younger generation of historians and art historians.

Please also tell us about your husband. Was a shared love of art part of your relationship?

My husband, Konstantin Varosovich Yengoyan (1927–1999), was born in Gyumri, but a few weeks later his mother (Nazik Aleksandrovna Hayrapetyan) returned with her firstborn to Tbilisi, where their family lived. His father, Varos Barsegovich Yengoyan, moved to Tiflis in the 1910s from Akhaltsikhe, where his ancestors had resettled from Turkey in the 1840s. After graduating from school with a gold medal, in 1945 Konstantin (Kotik, as we called him at home) went to Moscow and entered the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, founded by Stalin's decree in 1944. In winters, his parents sent him crates of fruit from Tbilisi — a rarity in Moscow at the time — and he shared them with his fellow students. After returning to Tbilisi with a degree as an international lawyer specializing in France, he worked as an international journalist for the newspapers *Vecherny Tbilisi* and *Zarya Vostoka*. He spoke French fluently and became an Honored Journalist of Georgia. He wrote on a wide range of topics. Highly erudite and perceptive, he enjoyed great respect in society and in his profession. He was repeatedly invited to work for central Soviet newspapers in Moscow, but refused, not wanting to leave his mother alone or his native city. Over the course of his career, he wrote more than eleven thousand pieces. We met in the editorial office of *Vecherny Tbilisi* in 1966 and soon married. Our daughter Alda was born, who in many ways followed in her father's footsteps — she became a Doctor of Economics and is also engaged in journalism and the history of France.

## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**  
SINCE 1932



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# What Did Putin Mean by a ‘Civilized Divorce’ between Armenia and Russia?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In recent days, the number one topic of discussion in Armenia has been European integration, and therefore there has been no shortage of analyses and debates on the issue. It is not surprising that Russian President Vladimir Putin also addressed the issue in one of his recent interviews. In this interview, he suggested that the Armenian authorities should consider holding a referendum to choose between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the European Union (EU). Putin said that he raised this issue more than once in discussions with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, saying that Russia will support anything that is beneficial to the Armenia. He mentioned what he termed Russia’s special relations with the Armenian people for centuries, and declared that if a particular decision is beneficial for the Armenian people Russia will not be against it.

At first glance, Putin’s statement may seem surprising given the hostility between Russia and the European Union, the strained relationship between them, and Russia’s broader attitude toward EU policies, particularly in what Moscow traditionally considers its sphere of influence. Of course, the statement can also be interpreted as diplomatic language, behind which there may be meanings other than those explicitly expressed by the Russian president. I believe the picture is somewhat complex.

It is important to understand that all the facts, especially the developments of recent weeks, demonstrate that Armenia has no intention of moving toward EU membership, and Moscow is clearly well aware of this. It is already evident that Yerevan does not have the strategic objective of joining the European Union, and this is understood in Moscow, Brussels, Washington, and Yerevan alike. Moreover, Armenia’s potential EU membership would not be particularly welcomed in Moscow, Brussels, Washington, or even parts of Yerevan. Therefore, when making such a statement, the Russian president appears to be fully aware that Armenia has neither such a goal nor such an intention.

During his regular contacts with Pashinyan, Armenia’s broader vision regarding the European Union is almost certainly discussed, and the Russian president is well informed about Armenia’s actual strategic objectives. Consequently, Putin’s remarks should be viewed more as an attempt to publicly reinforce the idea that Armenia itself does not truly seek EU membership and that, if such an intention genuinely existed, the Armenian authorities would inevitably hold a referendum on the issue.

Putin likely understands that the Armenian authorities do not wish to organize such a referendum and is probably confident that even if one were held, it would not necessarily produce the required results, either in terms of voter turnout or the final outcome. Therefore, through his statement, Putin is effectively affirming that if Armenia genuinely wanted to move toward Europe, it would already be taking concrete steps in that direction, including organizing a referendum.

The broader purpose of the statement seems to be to reinforce within public consciousness the notion that Armenia neither truly

wants nor realistically can move toward the European Union. At the same time, Putin outlined the reasons why Armenia cannot simply decide to move toward the European Union. The primary reason, of course, is the deep economic relationship between Armenia, Russia, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), as well as the scale of Armenia–Russia trade turnover. In this context, the numbers are extremely important.

It is clear that EU integration is currently unrealistic for Armenia due to the significant differences between the economic systems, the absence of common borders with the European Union, and the broader limitations of economic integration prospects. If the Armenian–Turkish border was open and either Turkey or Georgia were EU members, it would naturally be much easier for Armenia to move toward EU membership. However, under current conditions, such a scenario appears unlikely.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the European Union’s bureaucratic and institutional process for accepting new



members is highly complex. In this regard, Georgia and Ukraine serve as good examples, as both have spent nearly two decades attempting to move closer toward EU membership but never gained it.

Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine that the EU is currently prepared to create another major point of tension with Russia in the South Caucasus, where peace remains highly fragile. Therefore, all these factors have likely been carefully considered in Moscow, leading to the conclusion that Armenia is unlikely to become an EU member in the foreseeable future. It is precisely on the basis of this assessment that Russia appears to be shaping its current approach.

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

## When Armenians Ignore Their Own Voices

By Vic Gerami

For the last six years, much of my life and career has revolved around one mission: fighting for Artsakh, Armenia, and the Armenian people during one of the darkest chapters in our modern history.

Over the last six years, I devoted much of my work to advocacy for Artsakh and Armenia through journalism, documentaries, public education, coalition building, and community organizing. During that time, I worked with elected officials, activists, media outlets, and others to raise

awareness about the humanitarian crisis and the broader information war surrounding Armenia and Artsakh.

But throughout those years, one reality weighed heavily on me.

Too often, Armenians undervalue or overlook the work of their own people while instinctively elevating outside voices as more legitimate, prestigious, objective, or worthy of attention.

This is not written out of bitterness, nor is it a request for praise or validation. I do not advocate for Artsakh because I expect applause. I do it because it is morally nec-

essary and because our people were being ethnically cleansed while much of the world looked away.

Yet I repeatedly found myself confronting a broader issue that extends beyond my own experiences. I often saw greater enthusiasm, support, and access extended to outside voices while Armenians who had dedicated years of work, sacrifice, resources, and emotional energy to the same cause frequently struggled to receive the same level of engagement or acknowledgment.

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## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Will Nikol Pashinyan Remain in Office After June 7 Parliamentary Elections?

Armenians around the world are closely following Armenia's parliamentary election campaign to see whether Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's party will retain its majority in parliament, allowing him to remain in office for another five years.

These elections could have two major consequences: One for Armenia's future and the other for Pashinyan himself.

### 1) Consequences for Armenia

Given Pashinyan's disastrous record over the past eight years, many Armenians fear that if he remains in power, Armenia's very survival could be at risk. Here are some of his major failures:

- a) Mismanaging the 2020 war with Azerbaijan which resulted in the loss of most of Artsakh and the deaths of thousands of Armenian soldiers;
- b) Allowing the Azeri army to invade and continue occupying parts of the territory of the Republic of Armenia since 2021 and 2022;
- c) Declaring in 2022 that Artsakh is part of Azerbaijan, despite previously proclaiming that "Artsakh is Armenia, period";
- d) Failing in 2023 to prevent the forced displacement of 120,000 Armenians from Artsakh;
- e) Treating the Artsakh issue as closed and referring to Artsakh refugees as "escapees";
- f) Claiming that surrendering Artsakh strengthened Armenia's independence;
- g) Interfering in the internal affairs of the Armenian Apostolic Church in violation of the Constitution and imprisoning several senior clergymen;
- h) Failing to secure the release of Armenian detainees and Artsakh leaders held in Baku;
- i) Repeatedly complying with Pres. Ilham Aliyev's demands for concessions on major Armenian issues.

### 2) Consequences for Pashinyan personally

Pashinyan's future may depend entirely on the outcome of these elections. Because of his violations of Armenia's laws and Constitution, he could face arrest and persecution if he loses power. For that reason, he will do everything possible — legally or otherwise — to secure victory in the June 7 elections and avoid imprisonment.

Despite, widespread dissatisfaction, Pashinyan may still remain in office because incumbents typically benefit from extensive resources of the state during election campaigns. In addition, because of the concessions he had made, he has gained support from Azerbaijan, Turkey, the European Union, and the United States. They understand that if the opposition forces win, many of Pashinyan's policies and concessions could be reversed.

Nevertheless, Pashinyan's political standing has declined dramatically. His approval rating, which stood at 82% in 2018, has fallen to slightly over 10% in 2026. This sharp decline could create an opportunity for opposition parties to take power.

However, the opposition faces several serious obstacles.

### Fragmented Opposition

1) Armenia, despite its small size, has an astonishing 123 registered political parties, many consisting of little more than a founder and a small circle of followers. Fortunately, not all of them are participating in the June 7 elections. Still, 19 political entities have officially registered: 17 individual parties and 2 coalitions. This fragmentation benefits the ruling party because the opposition becomes divided among numerous competing groups.

### Coalition Possibilities

If opposition parties collectively secure slightly more than 50% of the vote and successfully form a coalition in parliament, they would have the power to nominate their Prime Minister and remove Pashinyan from office.

### Armenia's Complex Electoral System

Armenia's electoral system combines elements of Israeli-style proportional representation, German-style stability mechanism, and post-Soviet Eastern European reforms.

### Under current law:

- 1) A political party must receive at least 4% of the vote to enter parliament.
- 2) Coalitions of two or three parties must receive at least 8%.
- 3) Coalitions of more than three parties must receive at least 10%.

Votes cast for parties that fail to meet these thresholds are redistributed proportionally among the successful parties.

### The Opposition's Biggest Problem

The most controversial aspect of this system is that if Pashinyan's party receives the largest share of the vote, it will also receive a significant portion of the redistributed votes from failed opposition parties. Ironically, voters casting ballots against Pashinyan could unintentionally help strengthen his parliamentary majority. For that reason, many smaller parties with little realistic chance of crossing the threshold should not have entered the race. By doing so, they risk splitting the anti-Pashinyan vote and indirectly benefiting the ruling party.

### One Unusual Safeguard

One unusual feature of Armenia's electoral system is that parliament must contain at least three political parties. Therefore, if only one party crosses the required threshold, the next two highest-performing parties may still receive representation even if they failed to reach 4%. In such a case, those additional parties collectively would receive one-third of the parliamentary seats regardless of their actual vote totals.

### What the Opposition Must Do

If opposition parties want to improve their chances, they should focus less on persuading loyal Pashinyan supporters to switch sides. Many government supporters benefit from state employment, large bonuses, and privileged contracts and are therefore unlikely to abandon the ruling party. Instead, opposition groups should concentrate on mobilizing the large number of eligible voters who currently say they do not plan to vote.

If opposition forces succeed in gaining a parliamentary majority, one of their first priorities should be reforming Armenia's electoral laws and replacing the current system with a more conventional voting structure similar to those used in many other countries.

In the meantime, every registered Armenian voter should participate in the June 7 elections to avoid leaving the country's future in the hands of others.

Armenian citizens living abroad who retain voting rights should also make every effort to travel to Armenia and cast their ballots. Those unable to travel should encourage their relatives and friends in Armenia to vote on June 7.

from previous page

One experience in particular stayed with me. While producing my first documentary on the Artsakh Genocide during Azerbaijan's genocidal attack and the forced displacement of Armenians from Artsakh, a project that ultimately required multiple trips to Armenia for interviews, footage, and research, I repeatedly reached out to the Armenian and Artsakh governments. My goal was not simply access for the sake of access. I wanted to ensure the documentary included Armenian and Artsakh voices and perspectives directly from those involved.

Over the course of the film's year-and-a-half production, I sent emails, made calls, and followed up persistently. My multiple requests to conduct interviews, either in person or via Zoom, went unanswered. It was a confusing experience because, at the same time, I had been able to secure interviews with seven members of Congress, a senior member of the British House of Lords, and other elected officials and public figures, many of whom were not Armenian.

Later, after my documentary had already been completed, I came across what had been presented and promoted as a documentary film about the attack on Artsakh by a relatively unknown foreign journalist. After watching it, I felt it was a watered-down and euphemistic piece

with little substance that, in my view, largely whitewashed Azerbaijan's crimes against humanity and failed to accurately reflect the gravity of what had happened. Several of the same Armenian officials I had unsuccessfully attempted to reach had participated in that project. I later learned that some of those interviews had taken place while I myself was in Armenia making my film.

I do not share this example out of resentment or to question another journalist's opportunity. Every journalist deserves access and support. What stayed with me was something broader: why did it seem easier for outside voices to gain engagement than for Armenians who had devoted years of work, advocacy, and personal investment to the same cause?

I am not referring solely to interviews or formal collaborations. I mean something broader: support, engagement, willingness to work together, acknowledgment and investment in one another within our community.

This is not about whether any individual owes another person an opportunity or platform. It is about whether we unintentionally create a culture where outside validation carries greater weight than our own voices.

Communities survive and grow not only through activism, but through collective support, solidarity and acknowl-

edgment of those who step forward during difficult times. Recognition is not about ego. It is about building a culture where people feel encouraged to continue contributing, creating, advocating, and leading.

Sometimes it seems that a non-Armenian repeating our story can receive greater enthusiasm than Armenians who have spent years immersed in that work and those struggles themselves.

This dynamic does not strengthen us. It weakens us.

Over the years, I have also come to recognize that some of the resistance, distance, or lack of support I encountered was likely connected to the fact that I am openly gay. That reality was communicated to me directly and indirectly through social media attacks, community gossip, private conversations, and feedback from others who observed it themselves.

I do not raise this point to seek sympathy, nor to divide. I raise it because honesty matters. If we are going to have meaningful conversations about justice, dignity, prejudice, and collective growth, those conversations must also begin within our own communities.

A people who ask the world to recognize their humanity should also strive to ensure that every Armenian willing to fight for the nation, its history, and its

survival is valued equally, regardless of personal identity or background.

The tragedy of Artsakh did not happen solely because of violence on the ground. It also happened because of global indifference, failed institutions, propaganda and the inability of truth to compete with power and money. Armenians cannot afford to replicate smaller versions of that indifference within our own communities.

If there is one lesson I have learned from these years, it is that we must do better at standing beside one another while the work is still being done, not only after history has already been written.

Despite everything, I remain hopeful. I remain committed. I still believe in the power of advocacy, journalism, coalition building, education, and truth. I still believe narratives can change. I still believe people can grow.

And I still believe that if Armenians truly learn to value, support, and uplift one another with the same passion we often reserve for outside validation, we will emerge stronger, wiser, and more united than before.

(Vic Gerami is an award-winning journalist, documentary filmmaker, and founder of Truth And Accountability League (TAAL), working at the intersection of media, human rights, and public accountability.)



## Ruben Vardanyan Nominated for 2026 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize

(Last week, a group of activists nominated Ruben Vardanyan, who is currently languishing in an Azerbaijani prisoner along with 18 other Armenians from Artsakh (Karabakh), for the 2026 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize. Their letter appears below in full.)

We, the undersigned, advocates for human rights across the globe, hereby announce that we have nominated the Armenian humanitarian Ruben Vardanyan for the 2026 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize.

This nomination recognizes Ruben's significant contributions to the protection of human rights worldwide through the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, as well as his dedication to the rights of his compatriots in Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh). We firmly believe that Ruben Vardanyan is deserving of this award.

The Aurora Prize, which was co-founded by Ruben Vardanyan, Noubar Afeyan, and the late Vartan Gregorian, has empowered laureates to continue their vital work in the field of human rights, literally saving thousands of lives across various countries and continents. Ruben believes that goodness is eternal and immortal,

and that it gains strength whenever a kind deed is performed. Through his vision and support, it has been possible to protect the rights of individuals in dire circumstances, providing them with a second chance at life.

For Ruben, the protection of human dignity and human rights stands above all else. For this reason, his decision to stand by his compatriots in Nagorno-Karabakh by moving there during their time of extreme hardship resonated deeply with all of us. In Nagorno-Karabakh, Ruben served as a defender of the rights of indigent people.

A pacifist by nature and conviction, Ruben risked his personal safety and a comfortable future to pursue pathways for dialogue, negotiation, and mutual understanding in one of the world's most complex and sensitive conflict zones.

In 1995, at the inauguration of the new headquarters of the European Court of Human Rights, Václav Havel voiced the hope that "human reason, decency, solidarity and preparedness to seek understanding and to live together in fairness will triumph over everything which threatens them." Ruben is a carrier and follower



of this very same ideology and these enduring values. Therefore, we firmly assert that his exceptional activities are entirely in line with the spirit of this award and the principles espoused by Václav Havel.

By a cruel irony of fate, Ruben Vardanyan, a humanitarian and advocate for human rights, now finds himself in need of the very protection he championed for others for decades. He has been sentenced by an Azerbaijani military court to 20 years

in prison on fabricated charges and is currently being held in a Baku prison alongside several other notable figures from Nagorno-Karabakh.

We believe that awarding Ruben Vardanyan the 2026 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize would be a fitting tribute to Ruben's exceptional efforts and a vital step toward securing his release, as well as the release of the other Armenian prisoners held in Baku.

Nominating Group:

Vahan Zanyan, Author, anti-trafficking advocate, and global energy consultant.

Marguerite Barankitse, Burundian human rights activist, founder of Maison Shalom.

Tom Catena, American physician and humanitarian, founder of Mother of Mercy Hospital in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan.

Julienne Lusenge, human rights defender and humanitarian from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, co-founder of Female Solidarity for Integrated Peace and Development (SOFEPADI) and director of the Congolese Women's Fund.

Mirza Dinnayi, Yazidi human rights defender and activist, co-founder and director of Luftbrücke Irak (Air Bridge Iraq).

## Khachaturian International Competition to Bring Together 24 Cellists from 11 Countries

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The Khachaturian International Competition will begin in Yerevan on June 6, coinciding with the birthday of Armenia's most celebrated composer, Aram Khachaturian. This year's edition focuses on the cello, drawing 24 competitors from 11 countries, including Armenia, Russia, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Denmark, the United States, South Korea, China and Hungary.

The opening gala at the Aram Khachaturian Concert Hall will feature Khachaturian's iconic Cello Concerto performed by French soloist Victor Julien-Laferrrière with the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra under conductor Sergey Smbatyan. Excerpts from Khachaturian's celebrated ballets will also be performed.

The competition, organized by the Aram Khachaturian Cultural Foundation with support from Armenia's Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, has for over two decades united young musicians around Khachaturian's legacy. A mandatory requirement is the performance of his works.

The jury includes distinguished figures from the global music scene, including Denis Severin (Switzerland), Martti Rousi (Finland), Mihee Rhee (South Korea), Josephine Knight (UK), Levon Mouradian (Armenia/Portugal), Gregorio Nieto (Venezuela) and Victor Julien-Laferrrière (France).

Early rounds will be held at the Khachaturian House-Museum from June 7-10, with the finals returning to the Concert Hall. The winner will be announced on June 13 during the awards ceremony.



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