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Armenian Opposition Leaders' Homes, Offices Raided Ahead of Elections

By Naira Bulghadarian and Satenik Kaghzvantsyan

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was accused of intensifying a crackdown on his key election challengers on Friday, May 22, as law-enforcement authorities searched the homes and offices of two prominent opposition figures allied to Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK) leader Gagik Tsarukyan.

One of the oppositionists, Martun Grigoryan, was targeted the day after welcoming Tsarukyan in his hometown of Gyumri and organizing a BHK campaign rally there. The other, Andranik Tevanyan, is facing a high treason charge which Pashinyan personally announced on the campaign trail on Wednesday. Armenia's Investigative Committee claimed the following night that Tevanyan was recruited by a foreign, presumably Russian, intelligence service two years ago.

According to it, he was paid \$622,000 to supply state secrets, including confidential details of a closed-door hearing held in the Armenian parliament in April 2024. Tevanyan had resigned from the parliament in August 2023. The committee did not explain how he could have gained ac-



A banner displaying images of Gagik Tsarukyan and Martun Grigoryan at the entrance to BHK campaign headquarters in Gyumri, May 22, 2026

cess to such information.

The outspoken oppositionist, who is running in the June 7 elections on the BHK ticket and is known for his pro-Russian views, vehemently denied the espionage claims before masked officers of the National Security Service (NSS) raided his

office in downtown Yerevan early in the morning. They also broke into his nearby empty apartment to search for it. Earlier this week, the Armenian police arrested two individuals on suspicion of trying to burglarize the apartment.

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Ruben Vardanyan Slams Pashinyan, Warns Armenians

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Ruben Vardanyan, a prominent Armenian businessman jailed in Azerbaijan, has launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and claimed that Armenia risks becoming a Turkish province.

In his latest audio message communicated to his family by phone and publicized on Monday, May 25, Vardanyan branded Pashinyan a “liar” and again compared him to Kaj Nazar (Nazar the Brave), a satirically inept character from an Armenian fairy tale.

“First, I want to remind you once again: it is the people who elect Nazar



Ruben Vardanyan during his trial in Baku (Facebook photo)

the Brave as king; he does not become king by himself,” he said, appealing to Armenians two weeks before their crucial parliamentary elections. “Second, dear ‘Nazar the Brave’ Nikol, your luck ran out three times.”

Vardanyan revealed that during his two-and-a-half-year imprisonment in Baku he read a book written by Pashinyan more than a decade ago.

“After reading your book, I became convinced that you not only have serious problems with moral and ethical standards, with education and with other things but that you are also a liar, a fantasist, and a plagiarist,” he said, predicting “great punishment” for the Armenian premier.

Vardanyan went on to warn Armenians of an “extremely serious challenge” facing their country.

“This is not a question of elections,” he said. “It’s a question of the fact that the war is not over. The war continues not in the form of military action but in other forms.”

“If we don’t change our behavior, neither Russia nor the European Union awaits us. What awaits us is becoming a Turkish *vilayet* (province),” he added without elaborating.

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Turkish Rail Routes Open for Armenian Cargo

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

The Akhalkalaki–Kars railway between Georgia and Turkey “is now open” for Armenian exports and imports, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has announced. He added that despite the concession agreement with Russia over the management of Armenia’s railways, the Armenian government will soon begin the

renovation of the Gyumri–Akhurik–Akyaka and Yeraskh junction railway.

In 1993, Turkey unilaterally severed diplomatic relations with Armenia and closed its shared land border in solidarity with Azerbaijan during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. The border has remained closed since then, including for cargo transit by rail.

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Turkish journalists touring the route earlier in May

Russia Suspends Sales of More Armenian Goods Ahead of Election

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Russia has suspended the sale of alcoholic beverages from several Armenian producers, claiming they do “not meet mandatory requirements.” Separately, Moscow has fully banned the import and sale of Armenian Jermuk mineral water and launched additional inspections of Armenian fruit and vegetable exports weeks before Armenia gears up for their 7 June parliamentary elections.

Russia has repeatedly been accused of using trade restrictions as a form of economic coercion against neighboring countries, including Armenia.

On Saturday, Russian authorities announced that monitoring had found that alcoholic beverages produced by three Armenian factories “did not meet mandatory requirements.”

“To prevent the sale of products that do not meet mandatory requirements, retailers and importers have been notified of the suspension of sales and the withdrawal of substandard alcoholic beverages from circulation,” the statement read, adding that the situation was under their “strict” control.

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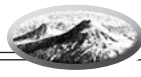


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Art and Politics Mingle in Armenian Cultural Festival

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Election Commission Revokes Alliance Party Registration

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia's Central Election Commission (CEC) has revoked the registration of the Alliance Progressive Centrist Party after the latter formally withdrew from the upcoming parliamentary elections.

In a statement released on Tuesday, the commission said it had received the party board's decision, confirming its refusal to contest the June 7 vote. Alliance Party representatives verified the decision at the emergency session of the CEC.

As a result, the party will not appear in the No. 13 slots on ballot papers for the elections.

Armenian Students Win Five Bronze Medals at Biology Olympiad

YEREVAN (Panarmenian.net) — Armenian high school students clinched five bronze medals at the second International Open Biology Olympiad held at the Sirius Federal Territory in Sochi. The competition drew more than 100 participants from 17 countries, Armenia's Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports reported on Tuesday, May 26.

The national team was represented by six students. Narek Ghazaryan, Mariam Galstyan, Nane Ananikyan, Edvin Shahinyan, Veronika Ohanyan, and Meri Nikolyan. The delegation was led by Syuzan Marutyan, a junior researcher at Yerevan State University's Institute of Biology and a teacher at YSU STEM High School.

The Olympiad unfolded across three rigorous stages — theoretical (individual), practical (individual), and project-based (team). Students from YSU STEM High School and Heratsi High School earned bronze distinctions, marking a remarkable achievement for Armenia.

Armenia Issues Stamp Dedicated to Alex Manoogian

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — On May 22, a souvenir sheet with one postage stamp dedicated to the theme "World Famous Armenians: 125th Anniversary of Alex Manoogian" has been put into circulation.

The postage stamp of the souvenir sheet with the nominal value of 500 drams depicts the prominent American-Armenian businessman, inventor, benefactor, long-serving president of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), public figure and the National Hero of Armenia Alex Manoogian (1901-1996).

The souvenir sheet depicts the inscriptions "Armenian Businessman, Inventor, Benefactor" and "125th Anniversary" in Armenian and English languages.



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio signs an agreement with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan

On Brief Stop in Armenia, Rubio Touts More Progress Towards 'Trump Route'

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — US Secretary of State Marco Rubio reported major progress towards opening a US-administered transit corridor for Azerbaijan through Armenia and reaffirmed Washington's commitment to deepen US-Armenian relations during an hour-long visit to Yerevan on Tuesday, May 26.

Rubio and Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan initiated a bilateral agreement on "strategic cooperation" regarding the planned Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) following short talks at Yerevan's Zvartnots international airport.

The agreement reaffirms the key terms of a joint "implementation framework" for the TRIPP signed by the two men in January. Those include the creation of a joint US-Armenian venture that will manage for at least 49 years a railway, a road, energy supply lines and other infrastructure to be built along the Armenian-Iranian border to connect Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave.

The US government will own 74 percent of the TRIPP Development Company (TDC). The Armenian side is to grant the company "exclusive land use rights, development rights, related permissions, and all other rights" necessary for the transit arrangement.

"Armenia agrees that the TDC shall be empowered to select third parties to support each TRIPP Project established by the SPVs (TDC subsidiaries), including the third parties serving as the concessionaire, sponsors, operators, contractors, and EPC (engineering procurement & construction) providers of such TRIPP Project," reads the agreement publicized by the Armenian Foreign Ministry.

"This agreement marks the biggest step to date on making this historic route a reality, on advancing peace, on increasing prosperity in Armenia and frankly in the region," said Rubio, who spent less than an hour at the Yerevan airport on his way back from a visit to India.

"Our relationship is not simply limited to TRIPP," he told reporters. "We are building upon that in so many different ways, and it's a top priority of this [US] administration."

Rubio pointed to a new charter of US-Armenian "strategic partnership" and a memorandum of understanding on the

extraction of "critical minerals" signed by him and Mirzoyan. The latter said the documents will open "unprecedented opportunities" for Armenia.

Rubio made the brief stop in the Armenian capital less than two weeks before Armenia's parliamentary elections. Some Armenian opposition leaders and commentators claimed ahead of his trip that it is designed to boost Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's reelection chances. Rubio praised Pashinyan but stopped short of explicitly endorsing him, unlike US Vice President JD Vance, who visited Yerevan in February.

happy and proud to be a part of that, and we can't wait to be more together," said the top US diplomat.

The three main opposition groups challenging Pashinyan's Civil Contract in the June 7 elections say that the TRIPP could endanger Armenia's vital border with Iran. Some of their leaders have also said that it amounts to the kind of an extraterritorial corridor that has been sought by Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Iranian leaders have likewise spoken out against the TRIPP. They fear that it could lead to US security presence along the Ar-



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio meets with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan

"Both yourself and the prime minister [Pashinyan] and your entire team here in Armenia are blazing the trail for the brighter and more independent future for Armenia, and we are very happy to be here to show my support for their courage, my support for their vision, my support for their dedication, my support for their willingness to see for the future of their country where it takes to get there. And we are very

menian-Iranian border. Some observers believe that Iran is even more opposed to the transit arrangement after its recent war with the United States and Israel.

Speaking at a news conference held after Rubio's departure, Mirzoyan said the US-Armenian agreement on the TRIPP will be signed after the two sides complete "some technical procedures." That should happen "within weeks," he said.



ARMENIA

Karabakh Man Jailed for Arguing with Pashinyan Continues Hunger Strike

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — An exiled activist from Nagorno-Karabakh arrested on May 18 right after publicly arguing with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan remained on hunger strike for the fifth day on Monday, May 25.

Pashinyan was approached by Artur Osipyan as he campaigned in Yerevan's northern Arabkir district for the June 7 parliamentary elections. Osipyan asked him questions and criticized his policies on Karabakh, sparking a furious reaction from him. Moments after his supporters and bodyguards dragged away Osipyan, Pashinyan picked up a megaphone and rushed towards the Karabakh Armenian man, shouting insults and threats also addressed to "Karabakh pseudo-elites."

"You should have died when there was the Karabakh issue. Why are you alive at all, you scumbag?" cried the premier.

Osipyan, who publicly campaigned against Karabakh's last leadership before the region's recapture by Azerbaijan, was arrested and indicted following the incident. Armenia's Investigative Committee claimed that he disrupted public order and

obstructed the ruling Civil Contract's election campaign. It also charged him with calling for a violent attack on Pashinyan in a social media post in March.

Osipyan, who denies the accusations, went on hunger strike to protest against his arrest and demand an apology from Pashinyan. His lawyer Davit Hovannisian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on Monday that he is continuing to refuse food. Hovannisian complained about his client's prison conditions, saying that he is held in a damp and dark cell.

Osipyan's arrest has also been condemned by more than a dozen Western-funded Armenian civic organizations. In a joint statement issued last Wednesday, they said he is prosecuted on "illegal, baseless and politically motivated" charges and demanded his immediate release. A Yerevan court ignored the appeal, allowing investigators to hold Osipyan in pretrial custody for the next two months.

During his campaign tour of Arabkir, Pashinyan also lost his temper after being confronted by several other disgruntled citizens. They included the sister of a senior military medic who went missing during



Karabakh activist Artur Osipyan argues with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Yerevan, May 18, 2026

the 2020 war in Karabakh. The woman blamed Pashinyan for her loss and accused him of having "stolen my fatherland."

Pashinyan responded by linking her to the leaders of Armenia's three main opposition groups and pledging to "take out"

them. His outbursts drew strong condemnation from the opposition contenders. One of them demanded criminal proceedings against Pashinyan. Law-enforcement authorities have essentially ignored the demand.

The Armenia Project Announces Largest-Ever Cohort for International Journalism Internship

YEREVAN — The Armenia Project (TAP) has announced its largest-ever cohort for its international journalism internship, selecting nine students from a highly competitive global applicant pool in a program that continues to grow in scale, ambition, and reputation.

Now in its fourth year, the internship has expanded steadily — from three interns in 2023 to nine in 2026 — while attracting an increasingly diverse and accomplished group of applicants from top universities in the United States and Europe, including Northwestern, the University of Southern California, the University of California at Berkeley, King's College London, London School of Journalism and others. This year,

more than 70 candidates applied, underscoring the program's rising profile.

The 2026 cohort reflects that momentum, drawing students from institutions including Harvard, Oxford, NYU, Amherst, and CUNY. The group includes Luan Rogers (CUNY), Olivia Law (Amherst College), Nicholas Castillo (Harvard University), Mohamad Rimawi (NYU), Isaac Stephenson (Oxford University), Anton Geissler (University of Oxford, St Catherine's College), Jan Limburski (Oxford University), Antonio Cardim Reis (Oxford University), and Lola Medina (Oxford Brookes University).

"This is exactly what we hoped to build," said Shant Petrossian, Global Director

of TAP. "We're proud to see the program steadily growing into one of the most dynamic journalism incubators in modern Armenian history — at a moment when Armenia itself is emerging as a young democracy making real inroads in the region and globally, whether in technology, business, or culture. Bringing talented young journalists here, and helping them tell those stories firsthand, is central to that mission."

Rather than a traditional classroom experience, the TAP internship embeds par-

porting and storytelling."

The program — which is open to journalism students of all backgrounds — is part of TAP's broader mission to connect Armenia with the international community by fostering informed, on-the-ground storytelling about a region often overlooked in global media. Participants report on topics ranging from geopolitics and post-Soviet transitions to technology, culture, and everyday life, gaining professional experience and regional fluency.



The TAP interns in Yerevan

ticipants directly within Armenia's leading English-language media outlets, including EVN Report, CivilNet, HETQ, Urbanista, and Life in Armenia. Throughout the rest of the year, interns will spend 8–10 weeks in Yerevan working full-time alongside editors and reporters, producing publishable work across digital, audio, and video formats.

"Hosting TAP interns at EVN Report has been a genuine privilege and a joy," said EVN Report Editor-in-Chief Maria Titizian. "Their curiosity, talent, professionalism, and fresh perspectives have enriched our newsroom. We're excited to welcome the next cohort of impressive interns, mentor them in meaningful journalism, and watch them discover Armenia through re-

Through TAP's partnership with The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), interns stay at the Vahe Karapetyan Center, where they engage with participants from other international programs, and experience local culture, creating a deeper and lasting connection to the country beyond their reporting.

Alumni of the program have gone on to publish in international outlets such as Newsweek, New Eastern Europe, and Il Foglio, building early-career portfolios grounded in real-world reporting.

As Armenia continues to expand its international presence, TAP's internship is positioning itself as a rare bridge—connecting a new generation of global journalists with a country whose story is still being written.

Armenian Opposition Leaders' Homes, Offices Raided Ahead of Elections

OPPOSITION, from page 1

"This is nonsense," Tevanyan told reporters. "Nikol Pashinyan, I have presented what kind of treason you yourself have engaged in, and I will not forgive you for what you are doing."

Under Armenian law, election candidates cannot be prosecuted without the consent of the Central Election Commission (CEC). Prosecutors asked the CEC for such permission later in the day.

Meanwhile, another law-enforcement agency, the Anti-Corruption Committee (ACC) searched Grigoryan's house and campaign office in Gyumri. The ACC refused to immediately give any details of the criminal proceedings. Grigoryan, who is also high on the list of BHK's election candidates, said they looked for election-related documents but did not find anything.

"This means that our campaign is paralyzed today," he told journalists. "This is a way of obstructing, impeding it."

Investigators already raided Grigoryan's Gyumri home and arrested his father and son ahead of a municipal election held in Armenia's second largest city in April 2025. That did not prevent a local bloc led by Grigoryan from defeating the ruling Civil Contract party together with three other opposition groups.

"Nikol Pashinyan is turning this election campaign into an overt political vendetta," said BHK spokeswoman Iveta Tonoyan. "We assess what is happening as a targeted and coordinated attack on our opposition political force and election candidates carried out at the most heated stage of the pre-election processes."

Earlier this week, Pashinyan repeatedly pledged to "bring on their knees" and "take out" Tsarukyan and the leaders of two other major opposition forces challenging him in the June 7 elections. He also announced the impending nationalization of Armenia's largest cement plant belonging to the BHK leader.



ARMENIA

‘A Bridge, Not An Obstacle’: Is Armenia a New Crossroads Between East and West?

By Patrick Wintour

YEREVAN (*The Guardian*) — To describe Yerevan, a charming city of liberal values encased in imposing Soviet architecture, as the center of the world is a stretch, but Armenia’s claim that it can become the strategic crossroads of the landmass of Eurasia is becoming less and less fanciful. As the former Soviet Republic goes to the polls on 7 June for national elections, it finds itself in a five-way tug of war between Russia, the US, Turkey, Europe and Azerbaijan.

The interest has in part been sparked by the possibility of an end to Armenia’s conflict with its neighbour Azerbaijan — and the chance this represents for Armenia to end its physical isolation and become part of the middle corridor, a vital trade route linking western China and Europe, bypassing both Russia’s northern corridor and the Suez canal.

The opening of its borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan could transform not just Armenia but the South Caucasus, Armenia’s prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, has claimed. Once these borders were open and peace secured, he said, it would be as if the geographical position of Armenia itself had changed. The shortest route between east and west, he said, goes through Armenia.

Ararat Mirzoyan, the foreign minister, said the government’s aim was to turn Armenia’s geography into a strategic asset. “The challenge after decades is how to become a bridge rather than an obstacle. So this is what we are now trying to do in Armenia. Somehow we have come to understand that we can connect Europe with Central Asia, with the far east, with India, China, and this, in turn, can not only be a way to save our existence, our sovereignty, but also guarantee our further peaceful prosperity.”

The so-called Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (Tripp) linking Europe and Asia and built across Armenian territory as part of a peace deal with Baku would only be one part of this new connectivity jigsaw.

This geopolitical vision — the heart of what Pashinyan is offering for his third consecutive term — is also in part about Armenia’s future identity. It turns the election into a decision on whether to back Pashinyan’s call to support what he calls Real Armenia, as opposed to a historical Armenia obsessed with lost lands and historical grievances.

The Real Armenia doctrine requires

making a painful peace with neighbouring Azerbaijan, and a pivot away from Russia towards the EU — something Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party describes as a “more diversified foreign policy”. But it also involves controversy, such as sacking the director of the Armenian genocide museum for giving JD Vance a book on Azerbaijan massacres, or removing from Armenia’s passport stamps the image of Mount Ararat, a national symbol although it lies within present-day Turkey.

Early polls show Civil Contract may be on course to win, a remarkable achievement for a party that oversaw two successive humiliating military disasters at the hands of Azerbaijan in 2020 and 2023. The second defeat involved the overnight forced displacement of 100,000 Armenians from the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. The displaced refugees live in Yerevan and fear for their heritage. Nineteen prisoners from that war remain captive in Baku, including the region’s first minister, Ruben Vardanyan, who claims Pashinyan has abandoned their cause.

The election campaign promises to be wild.

With his near permanent Facebook presence and up-at-5am energy, Pashinyan pours out video content ranging from eating pastries to listening impassively to the Russian rock star Zemfira. He also has a tendency to become embroiled in volcanic rows with voters, accusing opposition leaders of being brainless foreign spies, and threatening to eliminate them.

Pashinyan is facing at least three pro-Russian nationalist parties, including Stronger Armenia, led by a Russian Armenian multi-billionaire, Samvel Karapetyan, the founder of the Tashir Group — a conglomerate with interests in Russia and ownership of Armenia’s electricity network. Last week Karapetyan accused Pashinyan of trying hallucinogenic mushrooms in China and enjoying them so much he imported a ton of them, which he has been consuming before government meetings. Pashinyan says he will sue over the claims.

Karapetyan has also promised a Ministry of Sex to address demographic decline. In a sign of how business and politics mix, he is fighting against the terms of the nationalisation of his electricity network.

Karapetyan was arrested last June after remarks that were interpreted as supporting a coup mounted by the Armenian church. As a result, he is now running his campaign from what might be described as house — or mansion — arrest. He is barred from becoming an MP due to owning Cypriot and Rus-

sian passports. Other members of Stronger Armenia have been arrested for allegedly offering bribes.

Human rights activists, such as Kenneth Roth, the former executive director of Human Rights Watch, have suggested Pashinyan’s populism borders on authoritarianism, and questioned whether European leaders such as the French president, Emmanuel Macron, should be showering him with so much support.

Karapetyan, meanwhile, accuses Pashinyan of betrayal by conceding so much to Azerbaijan, and has warned that if the prime minister is re-elected, “we will not become a province of Russia, but a province of Azerbaijan”. His model is clearly Georgian Dream, the pro-Russian group that has held power in Tbilisi since 2012.

Pashinyan’s allies, such as Maria Karapetyan, a member of the standing committee on foreign relations, argue that the pro-Russian nationalist opponents have no agenda to match Real Armenia.

She said: “They still entertain the idea that the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh might have a viable option of returning. They propose keeping the issue open on the Armenian foreign policy agenda. But this is a recipe only for returning to the dynamic of conflict. If you do not have a plan, that just means having an issue, and that means there will be a price to pay — and usually that price is Armenia’s sovereignty.”

The final hurdle to the ratification of the peace agreement initialled in the White House last August is Azerbaijan’s demand that Armenia remove a reference in its constitution to the country’s declaration of independence — a document that includes a call for unification with Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia says it has already renounced any territorial claims in the initialled peace treaty.

Knowing that this is Baku’s big red line, Civil Contract says it will rewrite the constitution, but insists this is not being done under duress. The aim is to put this to a referendum by the end of the year. That requires winning a constitutional majority of two-thirds of the parliament’s seats — a tall order. Asked if there is a plan B to secure a referendum, Pashinyan says: “We will not give up. Peace and open borders are the right path for Armenia and the whole region.”

Civil Contract’s chances would be improved if Azerbaijan were to make concessions to Armenia ahead of polling day. Yerevan has also been waiting for months for Turkey to reopen its border with Armenia,

which has been closed since 1993. It has not yet done so. The release of some of the 19 Armenian prisoners held in Baku would also affirm Pashinyan’s quiet diplomacy

Tigran Grigoryan from the Regional Center for Democracy and Security in Yerevan said: “It is very possible they cannot deliver the new constitution and then we have a period of ‘no peace, no war’ for a long time. At the same time, Armenian politics will have become more polarized between a pro-Russian opposition and increasingly authoritarian government.”

Grigoryan questions how far a weakened Pashinyan could pivot away from Moscow towards Europe without provoking Russian retaliation.

Vladimir Putin recently suggested that Armenia stage a referendum on whether it wants to be a member of the EU or the Russian-led Eurasian Union. The Russian president is raising this issue before the elections — knowing EU membership is still deeply theoretical — to inject a polarizing topic to the benefit of the pro-Russian candidates.

So far, Russia has toyed with only subtle signals of its disapproval of Armenia’s pro-European track, such as banning imports of Jermuk, Armenian mineral water. Grigoryan says a more structural threat to Moscow’s leverage in Armenia and a possible red line would be nationalizing the debt-ridden Russian-owned railways.

Once less distracted by Ukraine, Putin could for instance end subsidies on cheap Russian gas imports, or even as a last resort turn the taps off altogether.

Macron, who was in Armenia this month for a state visit and a meeting of the European Political Community, accused Russia of treachery not just in Ukraine.

Referring to Russia’s failure to come to Armenia’s help at the time of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, he said: “Russia was not there [for Armenia] — no more than it was for Venezuela, Syria or Iran.” Pashinyan even warmly shook the hands of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and the two men spoke in English, not Russian, a quiet declaration of independence that infuriated Moscow.

Maria Karapetyan denies her party’s turn to Europe is a mirage that misleads the electorate. She said: “We are just exiting a paradigm when we were looking to Russia as our savior. So we are not in a rush to enter a new dynamic thinking that the European Union is going to solve all our needs. My party thinks we do not look for saviors. It’s OK for us that no one wants to save us”.

Ruben Vardanyan Slams Pashinyan, Warns Armenians

VARDANYAN, from page 1

Armenian opposition groups running in the June 7 parliamentary elections regularly accuse Pashinyan of seeking to turn Armenia into a vassal state of Turkey and Azerbaijan and even end the independent Armenian statehood altogether. Pashinyan denies this, saying that he is bringing a final solution to the country’s long-running disputes with its Turkic neighbors.

Vardanyan, who held the second-highest post in Nagorno-Karabakh’s leadership from November 2022 to February 2023, was arrested at an Azerbaijani checkpoint

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

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

Pashinyan and other Armenian officials insist that Yerevan has been doing its best to try to secure the release of these and 11 other Armenians remaining in Azerbaijani captivity. Their critics dismiss these assurances. Vardanyan has likewise repeatedly accused the Armenian government of being indifferent to the fate of the prisoners.

“The defeated commander-in-chief does nothing so that these people may at least feel that a state stands behind them,” he charged in his latest statement from the Azerbaijani prison.

Correction

The print version of a story that appeared in the May 16 issue titled “America’s Oldest Armenian Church Seeks Descendants of Founding Families for Anniversary Celebration,” contained an incorrect email address.

The correct email address is: smigridichian@dandsrealtyllp.com. The online version of the story has the correct address.



INTERNATIONAL

Turkish Rail Routes Open for Armenian Cargo

CARGO, from page 1

Pashinyan announced the news on Sunday, May 24, describing the development “a major event in the economic life of our country” and expressed gratitude to Turkey and Georgia.

“Today, Armenia has a railway connection with Russia via the territories of Georgia and Azerbaijan, and further with China via the territories of Russia and Kazakhstan. Now, via the territories of Georgia and Turkey, it also has a connection with the EU,” Pashinyan stated.

Azerbaijan lifted restrictions on cargo transfer to Armenia in October 2025, following which Georgian and Azerbaijani railways are used for cargo transfer from Russia and Kazakhstan. Armenia also imports Azerbaijani petroleum.

During a pre-election campaign event in Shirak Province, Pashinyan described the latest developments as “historic.”

“I want to draw attention to the fact that the blockade is gradually being overcome step by step,” Pashinyan said. He added that Armenian business delegations and exporters would have business trips to Turkey, Syria, EU member and non-member states, “so that we can understand how to make use of these opportunities.”

During his campaign in Shirak, Pashinyan also elaborated that his government will begin the renovation of the Gyumri-Akhurik railway in Armenia’s Shirak Province which will be connected to Akyaka in Turkey, and the Yerashk railway junction in

Armenia’s Ararat Province.

“Although there is a concession agreement, the Armenian government will take responsibility and make investments. We will repair and restore the railway, and it will be opened,” Pashinyan said.

The government’s decision to directly finance the restoration of the two railway sections appears to signal that Yerevan and Moscow failed to reach an agreement on the issue.

In 2008, a 30-year concession agreement was signed stipulating the transfer of the Armenian railway system to the South-Caucasian Railway CJSC, created by Russian Railways.

Last December, Pashinyan revealed that he had asked Russia to “urgently address” the full restoration of railway sections adjacent to the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan and the Turkish border.

Two months later, in February, Pashinyan “welcome[d]” Russian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksei Overchuk’s statement that Russia had “decided to begin substantive negotiations” with Armenia on the restoration. Meanwhile, Pashinyan insisted that “there’s nothing to negotiate” considering that, according to him, the sections asked to be restored only covered a roughly 4 kilometer stretch of railroads. He further stressed the urgency of the restoration.

“By the time we do this, the alternative railway will be built, and we will say, “Oh, Armenia was bypassed again.” No, there’s nothing to negotiate — let us build it first,

then we can negotiate,” Pashinyan said at the time.

Aside from the request of restoration of these two railway sections, Armenia separately has raised the issue of a third-party takeover of the Armenian railways, insisting that Russian management means a loss of “competitive advantage” by having international routes pass through the country.

However, the sides failed to reach an agreement so far, instead the Kremlin stated there were “no objective reasons for selling” the concession to a third party.

Also on Sunday, Pashinyan announced that Armenia would soon sign the final agreement with the US on the implementation of the Trump Route.

Pashinyan further noted that the opening of the Armenia–Turkey, Armenia–Azerbaijan, and subsequently the Armenia–Iran railway via Nakhichevan would come in the future, claiming that in the recent years, “Armenia has moved from the periphery of the world and, in political and economic terms, has become the center of the world.”

“We will witness these developments soon as a result of the implementation of the TRIPP project,” Pashinyan said.

On Monday, it was announced that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will visit Armenia on Tuesday and that “bilateral documents are expected to be signed.” The exact documents were not specified.

(This article originally appeared on the website www.oc-media.org on May 25.)

INTERNATIONAL

Russia Aims Expanded Cooperation with Armenia, Zakharova Says

MOSCOW (Public Radio of Armenia) — Russia is committed to developing economic and humanitarian cooperation with Armenia, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova told journalists, TASS reported on May 26.

Zakharova emphasized Moscow’s intention to strengthen cooperation with Armenia while pursuing dialogue on regional security issues through a mutually respectful approach.

“We are focused on economic and humanitarian development. We are also committed to addressing security-related challenges in the region on the basis of mutual respect,” the diplomat said.

Shoigu: Armenia Did Not Seek CSTO Help in Karabakh

MOSCOW (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu this week stated that Armenia did not submit a request to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for assistance during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, according to RIA Novosti.

“There was no request from Armenia regarding assistance within the framework of this conflict,” Shoigu told reporters after a meeting of the CSTO Security Councils Secretaries Committee.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has previously said that it is unrealistic to expect changes regarding Armenia’s return to the CSTO.

During a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on April 1, Pashinyan stated: “We have never concealed our position regarding the CSTO, because in 2022 we faced a specific situation. In my opinion, CSTO mechanisms should have been activated, but they were not, and this, of course, led to the current situation in our relations with the CSTO.”

POWs Remain Key Topic with International Partners, Mirzoyan Says

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan has said the issue of Armenian prisoners of war and detainees held in Baku remains a constant element of Armenia’s discussions with international partners, including the United States, expressing hope that renewed progress could be achieved in the near future.

Speaking at a press conference following the visit of US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Tuesday, May 26, Mirzoyan was asked whether he had discussed the issue of detainees with the US official and whether Washington had real leverage to influence the process.

Mirzoyan stressed that the issue has consistently remained on the agenda of Armenia’s diplomatic contacts.

Azerbaijan and Georgia Sign New Agreements

TBILISI (Caucasus Knot) — Tbilisi and Baku have signed a set of agreements covering natural gas and electricity supplies to Georgia, alongside a protocol envisaging the resumption of passenger rail service between the two capitals after a six-year suspension, the Georgian government administration said. The documents were signed following a May 18 meeting in Baku between Georgian Dream Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. The Georgian Dream government delegation was in Azerbaijan to attend the World Urban Forum (WUF13), organized in partnership with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). The agreements come one month after Aliyev’s visit to Tbilisi, where he met, among others, Georgian Dream founder and honorary chairman Bidzina Ivanishvili.

According to the Georgian government administration, the energy and transport package includes a 20-year intergovernmental agreement defining the main terms of electricity supply and transit between Georgia and Azerbaijan, as well as a 20-year extension of the 2003 agreement on the purchase and sale of Azerbaijani gas. The latter, the administration said, is intended to guarantee the security of Georgia’s social gas supply. The energy agreements were signed by Georgian Dream Economy Minister Mariam Kvrivishvili, Azerbaijan’s Economy Minister Mikayil Jabbarov, and Azerbaijani Energy Minister Parviz Shahbazov. The specific terms and conditions of the deals have not been made public.

The sides also signed what the Georgian government described as a “protocol of the bilateral coordination council”. Under this document, the new section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway is expected to become fully operational, while daily passenger rail service between Tbilisi and Baku

is set to resume on May 26 after a six-year break. The protocol was signed by Kvrivishvili and Azerbaijan’s Minister of Digital Development and Transport Rashad Nabiyeu.

Speaking to Georgian journalists after the signing ceremony, Kobakhidze described the agreements as “important,” placing particular emphasis on arrangements related to the Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa pipeline. He said the pipeline had effectively been inactive for the past three years, depriving Georgia of potential revenue. Under the new agreement, he said, its operation would be restored in cooperation with Azerbaijan. According to Kobakhidze, the pipeline will remain under Georgian ownership, while its proper functioning will be ensured jointly with the Azerbaijani side. He said this would allow Georgia to receive “tens of millions” in annual revenue.

Kobakhidze also framed the agreements within a broader regional connectivity agenda. He said Georgia and Azerbaijan were jointly linking the Caspian Sea with the Black Sea, and, by extension, Europe with Asia. He added that the further development of Georgian-Azerbaijani cooperation has “truly strategic significance,” describing the newly signed agreements as historically important and milestone-level documents.

The agreements followed talks between Kobakhidze and Aliyev, attended by ministers from both countries. According to the Georgian government administration, the meeting focused on the strategic partnership between Georgia and Azerbaijan and prospects for further deepening cooperation. The sides also discussed positive trends in bilateral trade and economic relations and underlined the importance of the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation. The Georgian delegation expressed readiness to host the commission’s next session in the near fu-

ture. Regional and global geopolitical challenges were also discussed, with both sides emphasizing the importance of peace for the sustainable and stable development of the region. The talks also covered regionally significant projects jointly implemented by Georgia and Azerbaijan and their role in strengthening connectivity. In its own statement, the Azerbaijani presidential administration said Aliyev recalled his April state visit to Georgia “with satisfaction,” noting that the visit had contributed to strengthening bilateral relations.

Prior to meeting Aliyev, Kobakhidze addressed the World Urban Forum. In his remarks, he said that alongside Georgia’s strong economic growth in recent years, balanced territorial development and modern urban planning had become key policy priorities. He said Georgia’s objective was not only to expand infrastructure and improve quality of life, but also to ensure that growth remains sustainable, regionally balanced, and centered on citizens’ needs.

Kobakhidze also held several bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the forum. During a one-on-one meeting with Tomáš Taraba, Slovakia’s deputy prime minister and minister of environment, the sides discussed what the Georgian government administration described as positive dynamics in bilateral relations and prospects for deepening cooperation across various fields. Kobakhidze emphasized the importance of protecting national interests and maintaining relations based on mutual respect, while thanking Slovakia for its support. In another meeting, with Kenyan President William Ruto, the discussion focused on Georgia’s geographic position and business environment. Kobakhidze spoke about the country’s economic growth and the opportunities Georgia offers investors, particularly in terms of access to large consumer markets.

INTERNATIONAL

CoE Human Rights Chief Urges Turkey to Protect Free Speech, Assembly Rights, Judicial Independence

ANKARA (Stockholm Center for Freedom) — The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Michael O'Flaherty called on Turkey to safeguard freedom of expression and freedom of the press, restore judicial independence and repeal laws used to prosecute journalists and silence dissent, in a memorandum documenting restrictions he said were incompatible with democratic standards.

O'Flaherty said Turkish authorities misuse criminal and counterterrorism legislation to suppress free expression, pressure journalists and target civil society organizations, while also restricting peaceful demonstrations through excessive use of police force and broad protest bans. He also raised concerns about the judiciary's lack of independence from the executive branch.

The memorandum, dated April 22 and made public on Tuesday, May 26, followed his visit to Turkey December 1-5, 2025.

The commissioner said a range of provisions in the Turkish Penal Code (TCK) and the Counterterrorism Law have been used by domestic courts to unduly restrict freedom of expression through accusations including insulting the president and spreading terrorist propaganda.

O'Flaherty said 29 journalists were in pretrial detention at the time the memorandum was prepared and said journalists in Turkey continue to face detention and prolonged pretrial imprisonment. He criticized what he described as arbitrary pressure by the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), Turkey's broadcasting and streaming regulating authority, on independent media outlets as well as blanket bans targeting websites and social media platforms.

The memorandum also recalled restrictions on freedom of assembly and association, pointing to the excessive use of police force during protests that erupted after the detention of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu in March 2025 and repeated bans on demonstrations on broad grounds such as "public order" and "morality."

İmamoğlu, a leading figure in Turkey's main opposition and widely seen as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's strongest political rival, was detained on March 19 and

arrested days later on corruption charges. Critics and international observers say the case is politically motivated, aimed at sidelining a major challenger ahead of the 2028 general election.

According to the commissioner, such restrictions disproportionately affect LGBT+ groups, women's rights advocates and environmental activists. He added that civil society organizations are increasingly subjected to judicial harassment, including closure cases and disproportionate administrative audits.

O'Flaherty expressed serious concern over the state of Turkey's judiciary, particularly the lack of independence of the Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK), which he said remains under significant executive influence. He said indictments are frequently of poor quality, often lacking sound legal analysis and treating lawful activities as evidence of criminal intent.

He also voiced concern that lower courts refuse to implement legally binding judgments of Turkey's Constitutional Court.

According to the commissioner, Turkey's 2021 withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, widely known as the Istanbul Convention, had created a "gap in protection" for women facing violence.

Turkey was the first country to ratify the convention but withdrew by presidential decree on March 21, 2021, a move that sparked criticism from rights organizations, which warned that it weakened protections and accountability mechanisms for victims of domestic violence.

The commissioner also pointed out that the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey (TİHEK) is only partially compliant with the UN Paris Principles, citing its lack of independence from the executive

and failure to engage constructively with civil society.

Among his recommendations, O'Flaherty called on Turkey to rejoin the Istanbul Convention, reform TİHEK to ensure full independence, repeal Article 299 of the TCK criminalizing insults to the president and amend counterterrorism legislation in line with European standards.

He also urged authorities to revise internet and broadcasting laws and establish judicial oversight, protect journalists and human rights defenders from reprisal and ensure that pretrial detention is used only as a last resort.

The commissioner further recommended reforms to ensure that the HSK operates independently from political influence, improve the quality of judicial decisions and fully implement judgments of both Turkey's Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights without delay.

Simon Abkarian Brings His De Gaulle to Cannes as Epic French War Drama Emerges as One of the Festival's Biggest Films

CANNES (news.am) — One of the most talked-about out-of-competition premieres at the 79th Cannes Film Festival has been "De Gaulle: Tilting Iron," a sweeping historical epic starring French-Armenian actor Simon Abkarian in the title role. In French cinema, the project is already being described as nearly unprecedented: the two-part saga about Charles de Gaulle runs close to five hours and has become one of the most ambitious and expensive national productions in recent years.

The premiere on the French Riviera arrived with the kind of spectacle usually reserved for major Hollywood studio blockbusters. Abkarian walked the red carpet alongside director Antonin Baudry and the film's cast. Among the evening's guests were Bella Hadid, Irina Shayk and Kevin Spacey.

The film centers on the events of June 1940, when France capitulates to Nazi Germany and the relatively unknown General de Gaulle flees to London, determined

to convince the world that France has not yet lost the war. No army. No real support. Almost no allies. Only an almost reckless belief in his own vision. Gradually, resistance fighters, soldiers, students and volunteers begin rallying around him, while the film itself shifts between war drama, adventure epic and political thriller.

Critics have paid particular attention to Abkarian's performance. Cineuropa called his portrayal one of the film's greatest strengths, noting that the actor managed to "make audiences forget the myth and see the man."

Reviewers stressed that Abkarian does not play de Gaulle as a bronze monument lifted from a history textbook. His version is stubborn, sometimes humorous, obsessive and occasionally almost reckless — qualities that ultimately make the character feel human. Critics also highlighted the actor's precise use of the general's distinctive voice and speech patterns without slipping into caricature.

The film itself, however, has sparked debate. Some critics compare it to classic large-scale war epics of the last century, while others see an almost comic-book energy in the project, describing it as "the French Avengers of World War II." Baudry has been praised for the scale, spectacle and battle sequences, while also drawing criticism for moments of excessive pathos and historical simplification.

Even skeptics agree on one thing: Cannes has not seen a French production this ambitious in years — one so openly trying to compete with major international cinema. With few large American premieres at the festival this year, many are already calling De Gaulle one of Cannes' defining crowd-pleasers.

The second part of the duology is set to arrive in French theaters just a month after the first, and judging by the early reactions, the project is shaping up to become one of the most talked-about French releases of the year.

Russia Suspends Sales of More Armenian Goods Ahead of Election

SALES, from page 1

The restrictions affect Armenian wine and brandy products manufactured by Vedia-Alco, Abovyan Brandy Factory, and Shahnazaryan Wine, and Brandy House.

After "temporary restrictions" on Armenian flower exports entered into force on May 22, Russian authorities announced that they were "recording problems" with imports from Armenia "not only with flowers, but also with vegetables and fruits."

Russia stated that inspections of Armenian businesses would continue for another week, after which a decision would be made.

Also on May 22, Russia imposed "temporary sanitary measures" fully suspending the import of Armenian Jermuk mineral water, claiming the product did not match the information provided on its label.

"The water was found to contain excess levels of bicarbonate ions, chlorides, and sulfates. Misleading information about the medicinal properties of products can lead to ineffective treatment and deterioration of health," Russian authorities claimed.



Bottles of Jermuk

Earlier in May, Russia suspended the sale of Jermuk over alleged regulatory violations amid renewed tensions between Yerevan and Moscow, while also reopening a criminal case involving the company.

The economic pressure on Armenia has

increased since the country took the unprecedented step of hosting two EU summits in Yerevan earlier in May, ahead of the country's parliamentary elections. During an April meeting, Russian President Vladimir Putin lauded Russia's desire for the

participation of "pro-Russian" parties in the elections.

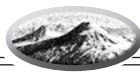
Alongside the latest restrictions, Russian officials have continued warning Armenia against deepening ties with the EU, including raising the prospect of higher gas prices should Armenia leave the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Armenia currently imports Russian gas at \$177.5 per 1,000 cubic meters, while European gas prices exceed \$600 per 1,000 cubic meters.

"And if Armenia has decided to move toward a military-political bloc hostile to Russia, which the EU is now becoming, then, of course, this situation does not satisfy us," Russian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksei Overchuk stated on May 22.

While Yerevan has never publicly expressed a desire to leave the bloc, it has repeatedly stated its interest in deepening ties with the EU, including the possibility of future EU membership.

(This article originally appeared on the website www.oc-media.org on May 25.)



Community News

A Spirit of Renewed Hope Animates Diocesan Assembly Gala Banquet

MILWAUKEE — The crown jewel of a memorable week in Milwaukee, WI, was the 124th Diocesan Assembly Gala Banquet, held in the grand Imperial Ballroom of the Pfister Hotel on Friday, May 1.

The host parish, Milwaukee's St. John the Baptist Armenian Church, ensured that the banquet was an elegant stage on which to honor church leaders for their contributions to the life of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan presided over the evening. Diocesan Legate Archbishop Vicken Aykazian delivered the invocation. Words of welcome were given by parish council chair Lyle Dadian, and Diocesan Assembly chair Herman Purutyan offered a toast. Host parish Assembly Committee Chair Harold Aghjian delivered warm remarks to the assembled guests and dignitaries.

Remarks by the host parish pastor, Fr. Guregh Hambarzumyan, connected listeners to the parish's deep Milwaukee roots. He spoke of the construction of the community's first sanctuary in the 1940s, and its consecration by Archbishop Karekin Hovsepian — the great churchman who would later become Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia. This historical link has served the parish as a powerful reminder of its strength and continuity.

The evening's celebratory atmosphere was enhanced by a stunning musical program, featuring a melodic performance on the traditional Armenian instrument, the Qanun, played by sisters Lilia and Alexandria Yarialian, accompanied by Dimitri Glarus on the piano.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of Diocesan awards to three distinguished honorees: "Armenian Church Members of the Year" Ara Cherchian and John Kaishian, and "Friend of the Armenians" Dr. Robin Darling Young.

Ara Cherchian was honored for his generosity and dedication to the St. Vartan Cathedral Renovation Project and numerous vital projects in Armenia. In his remarks, Cherchian reflected on his upbringing in Iran, and his arrival in America to pursue education at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and the University of Chicago — which eventually led Ara and his wife Valerie to Milwaukee, beginning their deep and abiding devotion to the city's Armenian community. He extolled the church for preserving Armenian identity and the virtues that have allowed Armenians to prosper in the U.S.

John Kaishian was celebrated for his visionary gift providing his property for over 30 years to host Hye Camp, the foundation upon which generations of Armenian youth in the Midwest have built their identity. John Kaishian's son, Fr. Sahak Kaishian, accepted the award on behalf of both his parents, recalling the foundational role several generations

see DIOCESE, page 9



Dr. Toros Kapoian receives an award from Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan

A Splendid Centennial Celebration for St. Mary Church

LIVINGSTON, N.J. — The faithful of St. Mary Armenian Church of Livingston, NJ, gathered on May 16-17 for a joyful weekend celebrating the parish's 100th anniversary: a milestone marked by worship, remembrance, gratitude for generations of faithful service — and optimism for the future.

Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan presided over the centennial celebration, which drew parishioners, former members, clergy and friends from across the region, filling both the gala banquet on Saturday evening and Sunday's anniversary luncheon to capacity.

Throughout the weekend, the atmosphere was one of reunion and shared history, as old friends reconnected and generations gathered to honor the parish's enduring legacy.

Beautifully decorated for the occasion, the church's Haroutune and Siranoush Toufayan Hall provided an elegant and festive setting worthy of the parish's century-long history and ideal for welcoming the visiting Primate to the milestone celebration.

The weekend's events were coordinated under the leadership of Centennial Committee Chair Kristine Casali, whose efforts helped bring together a celebration that balanced festivity with heartfelt reflection on the parish's century-long journey.

A highlight of the celebration was a narrated slideshow presentation of the church's history, created by Martin Dalakian and Samantha Burgraff. It traced the story of St. Mary parish from its origins in Irvington, NJ, through its relocation to Livingston, the destructive church fire of 1980 and the years of growth that followed — leading to the present day of renewal under parish pastor Rev. Fr. Voskan Hovhannissyan.

Honoring Faithful of the Past Century

The presentation recalled many of the faithful figures and clergy who shaped parish life over the decades, including beloved former pastors like Patriarch Shnork Kalustian, who served the parish as a vartabed in the 1940s, years before becoming Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople; and Bishop Houssig Bagdasian, the first American-born bishop of the Armenian Church.

see CENTENNIAL, page 8



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan with three honorees at St. Mary Armenian Church in Livingston, NJ

Armenians Take Part In First UN Forum

By Emma Arakelyan

NEW YORK — On May 15, more than 30 Armenian professionals serving within the United Nations system gathered at Fordham University for a landmark forum: the first of its kind to map the full extent of Armenian engagement across the vast machinery of the UN.

The gathering was convened around a simple question: "How are Armenians involved with the United Nations today?" In practice, it opened a door to an extraordinary, largely hidden story. Beyond Armenia's permanent Mission to the UN, established in 1992 upon independence, more than 100 talented Armenians are now dispersed across the UN's sprawling ecosystem: its secretariat, its specialized agencies such as UNICEF and the World Health Organization, and among the 6,657 non-governmental organizations holding consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The four-part forum began with welcome messages by three experts. Bryan Ardouny, executive director of the Armenian Assembly of America, spoke of his new leadership role with the UN Conference on Non-Governmental Organizations (CoNGO) at the UN, a position that places Armenian civil society voice at the heart of global governance. Ardouny then introduced Peter Preziosi, the incoming president of CoNGO, who addressed the gathering on civil society's expanding role in shaping global policy. Zhirayr Ananyan brought a further perspective, describing his years of diplomatic work with the Mission representing the Republic of Armenia at the UN, a team whose contributions to human rights and peace continue.

A second panel brought forward voices from across the NGO community: Emma Arakelyan, Houry Geudelekian, Ani Kalayjian, Souren A. Israelyan, Talin Daghlian, Harold Takooshian and Anahid Ugurlyan, each describing the breadth of their work across fields from behavioral science to the Commission on the Status of Women, from international law to humanitarian relief.

Arpine Korekyan provided a perspective of the Armenian staff at the UN, shared her observations on different roles the NGO community, the Armenian diplomatic mission and the UN staff play within the UN ecosystem.

During the third part of the forum, attorney Bryan Ardouny received the Outstanding Achievement Award for 21 years of leadership of the Armenian Assembly of America, steering the community through revolution, invasion, and upheaval with distinction.

see FORUM, page 12



COMMUNITY NEWS / OBIYUARY

A Splendid Centennial Celebration for St. Mary Church

CENTENNIAL, from page 7

Historic photographs and personal recollections prompted both laughter and emotion from the audience, underscoring the deep bonds shared by generations of parishioners.

As a tribute to that generational aspect, families active in the church's early years were asked to stand up and be recognized. Later, a procession of young adults was ap-



The celebrations included a birthday cake for Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan

plauded as the next generation to bless St. Mary Church.

A touching video segment focused on the eldest living members of the St. Mary community, who reminisced about earlier days and shared their warm good wishes for the emerging generation.

During the banquet, Bishop Mesrop bestowed the Diocesan "St. Vartan Award" on three longtime parishioners in recognition of their exceptional devotion and service to the Armenian Church: Berç Araz, Deacon Martin Dalakian and Dr. Toros Kapoian. Presenting the medals, the Primate commended the honorees for their steadfast dedication and years of faithful leadership

and he thanked all of St. Mary's faithful for their devotion to the church and the Armenian heritage.

An impressive centennial keepsake booklet, skillfully designed by Joseph Casali, was a thick compendium of people and events that have made St. Mary's history.

In his remarks, parish pastor Fr. Voskan Hovhannisyan said: "Without this church, many of us may have forgotten our roots. But because of St. Mary, generations learned to pray in the language of their ancestors, to sing the sharagans of our holy church and to carry proudly the unshakable faith of the Armenian people. This church became more than stone and walls. It became our spiritual home. It became the heartbeat of our community. It became the place where Armenian faith and identity were preserved, protected and passed from one generation to the next."

He added: "May the Lord who guided this parish for one hundred years continue to bless and protect St. Mary Armenian Church. May the prayers of the Holy Mother of God, to whom this church is dedicated, always intercede for us. And may future generations one day gather, just as we do tonight, giving thanks to God for the faith we preserved and the love we passed on."

Bishop Mesrop, in warmhearted words congratulating the parish on its centennial, highlighted the power of faith that the parish has embodied for the unknown future: "Faith does not always see the full road ahead. Faith takes the next step with God. It plants seeds whose shade we may not sit under. Faith builds for children who are not



The celebration included Armenian music

yet born. It says, 'We may not know what the future holds, but we know Who holds the future.'"

He concluded: "My prayer tonight is that St. Mary Armenian Church will continue to be a home of faith for generations to come. May it be a place where young people discover their calling, families are strengthened, the lonely are welcomed, the grieving are comforted and all people encounter the living presence of Christ."

Ordaining New Altar Servers

On Sunday morning, Bishop Mesrop celebrated the Divine Liturgy before a crowded sanctuary and in his sermon focused on the spiritual significance of the centennial observance.

The service also featured the ordination of several altar servants from the parish community: Subdeacon Robert Sarkisyan and newly ordained acolytes Mihran Mal-

djian, Armen Hallajian, Hagop Dishoyan, Hrach Hovhannisyan and Vincent Diacheysn.

A Sunday luncheon program featured remarks, musical performances and presentations by parish organizations and students, celebrating the spiritual and cultural life of St. Mary Church across its first century. Master of Ceremonies Deacon Roy Stepanian and pastor Fr. Voskan Hovhannisyan introduced Livingston Mayor Shawn R. Klein, who presented an official citation honoring the church's centennial anniversary and its longstanding contributions to the township.

As the celebration concluded, the prevailing sentiment was one of gratitude—not only for the accomplishments and sacrifices of past generations, but also for the intense feeling of spiritual renewal that continues to define St. Mary Church.

OBITUARY

Zovic (Tossounian) Majarian Beloved Childcare Provider, Devote Mother

Zovic (Tossounian) Majarian, devoted wife, mother, grandmother, sister and cherished member of her local Armenian community, passed away peacefully after a courageous battle with cancer.

Born in Lebanon, Zovic built a life centered on family, resilience, and care for others. In 1988, she and her husband immigrated to Watertown, Massachusetts with two young children, where she would go on to create a warm and welcoming home that became a the center for her growing family.

Zovic was the beloved wife of Shahe Majarian. She was a proud mother to Sarin Barsoumian and her husband Albert Barsoumian, Siroun Majarian and her husband Sebastian Vergara, and Sebouh Majarian and his wife Colleen Majarian. Nothing brought her more joy than her role as a grandmother to Sam, Christian, Zabel, Nairi, and Lucine, each of whom she adored deeply and cared for with boundless affection. She was the sister of Mary Soukiasian and Mary Prentzas and is also survived by many nieces and nephews, extended family and friends.

An exceptional cook, Zovic expressed her love most powerfully through food. Her kitchen was always overflowing, and her meals brought family and friends together.

For many years, Zovic opened her home to local families through Petit Pas Family Daycare, where she cared for countless



children. Her patience, warmth, and nurturing spirit left a lasting impact on the lives of the families she served. After retiring, she devoted the majority of her time to her grandchildren, creating unforgettable memories filled with love, laughter, and tradition.

Funeral Services were held at Saint Stephen's Armenian Church, Watertown on May 15. Interment followed at Ridgelawn Cemetery in Watertown. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made in Zovic's memory to St. Stephen's Armenian Church, 38 Elton Ave., Watertown, MA 02472 or St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School (SSAES), 47 Nichols Ave., Watertown, MA 02472.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

A Spirit of Renewed Hope Animates Diocesan Assembly Gala

DIOCESE, from page 7

of his family have played in the life of the Milwaukee Armenian Church community, and thanking the Diocese for recognizing his father with the award.

(NOTE: In the days following the assembly, the Diocese received the sad news that John Kaishian had passed away, on May 14, 2026.)

A Beacon of Faith

The distinguished scholar from Washington, DC, Dr. Robin Darling Young, was honored as this year's "Friend of the Armenians" for her profound contributions to the study of Classical Armenian and Armenian theology. In her remarks, Young recalled the moment in her life when she first encountered the writings of Movses Khorenatsi, and was introduced "to a civilization as compelling as it was fascinating." She thanked the Diocese and the entire Armenian community for welcoming her and embracing her scholarship, and looked forward to continuing a lifetime of study, bringing the intellectual and spiritual treasures of the Armenian heritage to the global audience.

As the banquet concluded, Diocesan

Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan shared a poignant closing reflection. Inspired by a visit to Milwaukee's North Point Lighthouse, Bishop Mesrop noted its unique status as a beacon situated on land rather than at the sea's edge. He drew a powerful connection to the Assembly's theme, "Renewed in Hope," stating that the church serves as an "inland lighthouse" a steadfast guide that leads the faithful through life's uncertainties while remaining anchored in the firm ground of tradition.

The Primate went on to praise Fr. Guregh and Yn. Silva, the host parish committee leaders and volunteers, and all the parishioners for extending their warmth and hospitality to the visitors from across the Diocese.

The spiritual energy of the event spilled out into the city itself, as Milwaukee's iconic Hoan Bridge was illuminated in the Red, Blue, and Orange colors of the Armenian flag throughout the evening hours of May 1, as a tribute saints, martyrs, and survivors of the Armenian Genocide. As the bridge glowed against the city skyline, it stood as a symbol of a community that remains a radiant and unshakeable source of light in the world.



Scholar Dr. Robin Darling Young is honored as this year's "Friend of the Armenians" for her contributions to the study of Armenian theology. She is shown here with Fr. Hovsep Karapetyan, Fr. Guregh Hambarzumyan, and Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan.

St. John Church's Diocesan Assembly executive committee, under the presidency of pastor Fr. Guregh Hambar-

zumyan, included Harry Aghjian (Chair), Maritza Armagan (Vice Chair), and Gary Seabrook (Treasurer). Subcommittees were led by Mary Keutelian (Website & Social Media; Commemorative Booklet), Yn. Diana Keutelian (Registration), Yn. Silva Hakopyan (Yeretzgins' Breakfast), Laurie Dadian (Welcome Desk), Nancy Seabrook (Gala Banquet), Ramelann Kaglagian (Badarak Luncheon), David Luhrssen (Publicity), Donald Rask (Photography), and Larry Dadian (Transportation).

Organizing Committee Members included Casey Aghjian, Alina Atayan, Joanie Baylerian, Michelle Baylerian, Marissa Baylerian, Lisa Boyadjian, Bryan Boyadjian, Lyle Dadian, Nicole Dadian, Sandy Densmore, Knarik Fasulyan,



Ara Cherchian accepts his award flanked by Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan and host parish pastor Fr. Guregh Hambarzumyan



John Kaishian is congratulated by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan during the Diocesan Assembly's concluding liturgy. Sadly, Mr. Kaishian passed away shortly after the Diocesan Assembly, on May 14, 2026.

Kristina Faryants, Larisa Feriyans, Jan Gred-Hammer, Kerrie Kashian, Russell Kashian, Sue Kashian, Noubar Kazazian, Rev. Fr. Nareg Keutelian, DeAnn Kokott, Jan Kopatich, Inna Petrosyan, Donald W. Rask, Anastasia Vasilyeva, EvaSophia Vasilyeva, Angelina Weitzer, and Arpik Weitzer.



Tekeyan Cultural
Association Boston
Chapter presents

*A Conversation with
Director of Boston's
Museum of Fine Arts*

**Pierre
Terjanian**

The Ann and Graham Gund Director of
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Thursday

June 4

7 p.m. SHARP

Baikar Building

755 Mt. Auburn Street

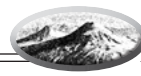
Watertown, MA

(use Norseman Ave. entrance)

Free admission, reception to follow.

RSVP tcadirector@aol.com





COMMUNITY NEWS

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Spiritual Revival Foundation Addresses What Comes After Survival at Harvard Talk

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — At a recent global summit at Harvard Medical School, held on May 14-15, one Armenian presentation raised a question that remains under-addressed in much of the humanitarian and mental health field: what comes after survival?

The presentation, delivered by Armenian Spiritual Revival Foundation (SRF) Executive Director Dr. Hovhannes Nikoghosyan, introduced an Armenian psycho-spiritual approach to collective trauma — one designed not for moments of acute crisis, but for the more difficult stage that follows, when people have survived yet still struggle to imagine how to live again.

Among those attending the session were SRF Founder Dr. Noubar Afeyan, Anna Afeyan, trustee and co-chair of the Afeyan Foundation, Lord Ara Darzi, co-founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, and Dr. David H. Rosmarin, president of American Psychological Association Division 36.

This is the problem the SRF (revival.am) has spent the last few years trying to address. Many mental health and psychosocial support programs are built to reduce distress, stabilize people and help them endure war, displacement and other forms of mass adversity. That work is indispensable. But survival is not the same as revival. Once the immediate danger has passed, many people are left with a more existential challenge: not simply how to cope, but how to recover coherence, agency, belonging and a future worth moving toward. SRF's psycho-spiritual approach was developed for precisely that post-survival layer of recovery.

The group's first central idea is that Armenians have been doing this, in one form or another, for generations. Through the Armenian Genocide, the 2020 Artsakh war and the 2023 ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh, survival stories have continued to be retold around family tables, in churches and in classrooms. But these stories are not preserved simply to keep the wound alive. They are also retold to preserve what was achieved within and after the wound: endurance, rebuilding, continuation and early stages of revival. This is where SRF locates the Armenian DNA of the method. The foundation's work has been to translate that deeply-rooted generational practice into a teachable, replicable and scalable psycho-spiritual model, relevant not only in Armenia, but also beyond.

That is why one of the defining concepts of the approach is “chosen revival.” In trauma studies, much attention has been given to how communities organize identity around pain, injustice and unresolved loss. SRF's work takes another viewpoint. “Chosen revival” does not deny trauma or minimize catastrophe. It asks what happens when collective memory is used not only to remember suffering, but to retrieve examples of courage, rebuilding and forward movement, to lean on in the present. In the Armenian case, memory becomes not only a repository of pain but also a resource for action.

A second major strand of the model comes from the vision of Dr. Noubar Afeyan, who has spent his career at Flagship Pioneering applying a four-step journey — survive, revive, strive and thrive — to



Dr. Hovhannes Nikoghosyan

the creation and development of nearly 100 paradigm-shifting biotechnology companies. In the SRF context, that logic is translated from venture-building into post-trauma recovery. Two ideas are especially important: the leap of faith and future-back thinking. The leap of faith, in SRF's formulation, is not optimism for its own sake. It is the choice to act before certainty is available — the moment when a person takes a first concrete step toward a future they cannot yet fully see. Future-back thinking complements it: rather than extrapolating forward from present limitation, the person begins by imagining a future worth living for, then works backward from that future to orient present action. Together, these ideas give Armenian ancestral memory a structured therapeutic logic. The past becomes usable because it supports movement toward a chosen future.

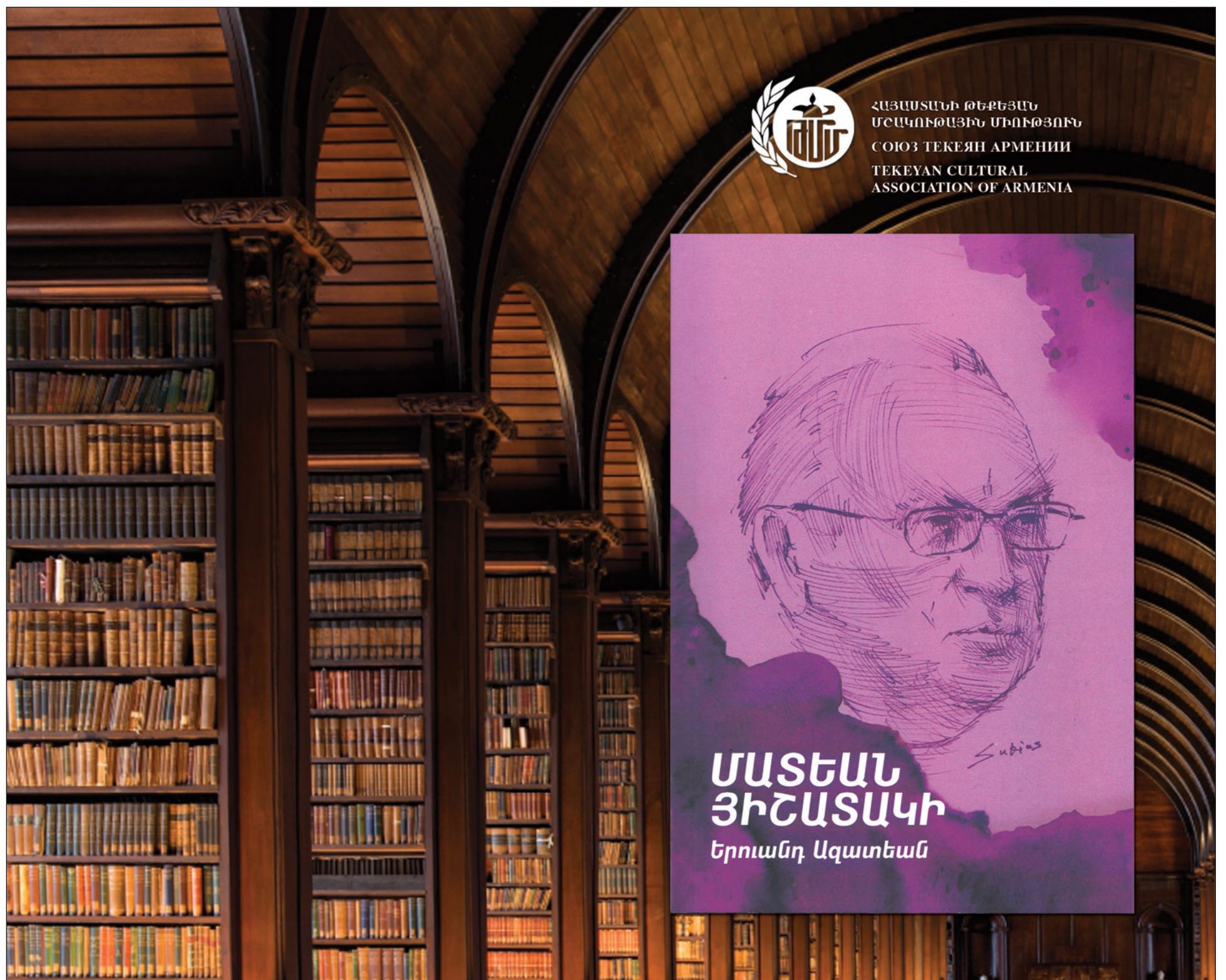
SRF has translated these ideas into a structured, group-based, non-clinical pro-

gram called the Armenian Revival Journey. The program unfolds in three phases — Revive, Strive and Thrive — and is designed to help restore four faculties often fractured by collective trauma: coherence, agency, belonging and future orientation. The model draws on narrative therapy, Active Historical Thinking, culturally grounded reflection, and future-oriented exercises. Its contribution lies not in inventing entirely new therapeutic ingredients, but in organizing them into a psycho-spiritual architecture rooted in Armenian ancestral memory and oriented toward the post-survival stage in life, namely revival.

Early findings suggest that the approach merits serious attention. The Armenian Revival Journey has already reached thousands of participants in Armenia and shown encouraging signs of improvement in pro-future mindset, social bonding, and trauma-related outcomes. These early results are expected to be further tested through a more rigorous research phase, including a planned randomized controlled trial with McGill University.

One reason the approach drew attention at Harvard is that, while it is Armenian in essence, its logic is not limited to Armenia. The Armenian historical archive supplies SRF's local content, but the underlying structure is adaptable across cultures. Any community with a usable past — a living memory of endurance, rebuilding, and continuation — may be able to adapt the same logic to its own history and culture.

The Armenian Spiritual Revival Foundation is supported by the Afeyan Initiatives for Armenia Foundation (AIFA).





COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenians Take Part in First UN Forum

FORUM, from page 7

Unity Across the System

The open discussion, the forum's fourth part, revealed a striking consensus: while Armenians within the UN system know about each other and often communicate, there is a room for greater involvement and exchange among each other and with the diaspora community. The diaspora's talent is real; its collective coordination is a work in progress. Participants called unanimously for a follow-up session. The second forum is to be held in early June 2026 and will focus on how Armenians across the UN can build lasting networks of collaboration.

Harold Takooshian, who edits a scholarly book series in partnership with the United Nations, announced an open call for contributions to a forthcoming volume dedicated to Armenians and their work within the UN system.

The forum was jointly organized by seven community associations: the Armenian Assembly of America, the Armenian Bar Association, the Armenian Behavioral Science Association, the Armenian International Women's Association, the Armenian Relief Society, Meaningful World and Orion Worldwide Innovations.

Small Nation, Large Legacy

It is tempting, in the corridors of the UN, to view Armenia as a small and struggling



Participants in the UN Armenian Forum

state dependent on the goodwill of larger powers. The evidence assembled at Fordham on May 15 suggests a very different reality. Armenia is not merely a fragile republic of fewer than three million people. It is the living expression of a civilization that has endured four and a half millennia: one now

building something new and powerful, a unified presence at the table where the world's most consequential decisions are made.

As the world order reshapes itself and small nations discover new leverage through soft power, intellectual capital, and diaspora networks, Armenia's moment

may finally be arriving. The gathering at Fordham was a beginning: a signal sent across the New York and global Armenian community that it is time to act together and with intention.

For more information on the forthcoming June forum, contact takoosh@aol.com

Manoogian-Demirdjian Students Turn National Academic Title into a Community Victory

By Paul Chaderjian

CANOGA PARK, Calif. — A team of students from AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School has won the 2025-26 United States Academic Decathlon Small Schools Virtual National Competition, giving the Armenian school its first national championship in the program and turning months of quiet study into a public celebration.



Several of the AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian students who were competing

The Canoga Park school said its students competed in eight events in the small school category against teams from Arizona, Texas, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Alaska, Idaho and Wisconsin. The United States Academic Decathlon listed the 2026 national results and separate online competition categories for large, medium and small schools.

For the students, the win reaches beyond

medals and test scores.

"I think I can say that we all feel proud as a team to be able to represent the Armenian community at a national level," senior Sevag Markarian said.

Markarian said he and teammate Sevag Vakian joined Academic Decathlon as freshmen. Four years later, they leave with a national title. He said the team had already felt proud last year when it advanced

to state competition. This year, the students went further.

The competition tests students across a wide range of academic subjects. The United States Academic Decathlon says the program covers 10 categories: art, economics, essay, interview, language and literature, mathematics, music, science, social science and speech. Students take multiple choice tests, write essays, deliver

speeches and sit for interviews.

Vakian described the contest as a mix of school subjects, public speaking and disciplined study.

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"Academic Decathlon is 10 subjects, including speech, interview, math, science, social science, art, music, basically the whole range of subjects you might learn in school and you might not," Vakian said.

He said some study guides run about 100 pages and the questions can go deep into details most students would never encounter in a regular class.

At nationals, he said, the pressure shifts heavily to multiple choice testing.

"Every sentence matters," Vakian said. "You might have to know what the price of soybeans were in 1928. Very random information. You kind of just have to know

it."

That kind of preparation shaped the team's season.

Markarian said students spent part of winter break at school, studying in their coach's room and preparing for the competition. He said the team covered concepts that younger students may not have studied yet in their regular courses, including economics topics usually taught to seniors.

"This year is the most amount of work we've ever put into it, and I think it really paid off," Markarian said.

The school said several students earned individual medals. Andrew Gharibian won medals in essay, art, economics, science, social science and music. Sevag Markarian won silver in economics. Sevag Vakian won silver medals in essay, art and math and bronze in economics. John Mazedzhyan, Bedros Oruncakciel, Mateos Celik and Mina Kajoukian also earned medals. The school said Isabella Shagmirian and Ani Tokadzhyan made significant score contributions.

The school also said Gharibian, Vakian and Mazedzhyan placed first, second and third among all competitors.

The students' reaction showed how much the title meant. The trophy became more than hardware. It marked a rare academic victory that students could celebrate the way other schools celebrate championships in sports.

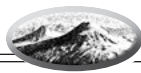
For seniors, the win also arrives at a turning point.

Markarian said Academic Decathlon teaches students how to pace themselves, study difficult subjects and teach themselves new ideas. He said those skills will follow them into college and future jobs.

The speech and interview sections also changed the way students carry themselves.

"That's public speaking skills that we may not have learned in a traditional classroom setting that Academic Decathlon made possible," Markarian said.

For AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School, the national title gives the campus a new academic milestone. For the students, it gives them something simpler and harder to measure.



Arts & Culture

Oud Masters John Berberian and Antranig Kzirian To Perform Live at Armenian Museum Of America

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Museum of America will present “Music in Color: Oudlections” on Thursday, June 11 at 7 p.m., an intimate and dynamic evening celebrating the rich traditions and contemporary evolution of Armenian music with two generations of oud players. This program is sponsored by Nancy R. Kolligian.

This special duet performance brings together legendary oud virtuoso John Berberian and acclaimed



John Berberian (right) and Antranig Kzirian will perform together at the Armenian Museum of America in Watertown for an evening of storytelling, Armenian folk traditions, and improvisation

contemporary musician Antranig Kzirian for a unique “East meets West” musical experience blending storytelling, classical compositions, Armenian folk traditions, improvisation, and modern interpretation.

Among Armenian-American communities, the oud remains an important symbol of heritage and identity, connecting diasporic families to Western Armenian culture through performances, celebrations, and the continuation of traditional music practices.

A pioneering figure in Armenian and Middle Eastern music, Berberian is widely recognized as one of the foremost oud masters of his generation. A graduate of Columbia University, Berberian has performed internationally at renowned venues including Lincoln Center and the Town Hall (New York City) and has recorded with major labels such as RCA and Verve. Celebrated for his groundbreaking fusion of Armenian folk music with jazz, rock and global influences, Berberian plays a vital role in expanding the reach and appreciation of Armenian musical traditions worldwide.

Kzirian is an innovative contemporary oud artist known for pushing the boundaries of the instrument through genre-crossing collaborations and experimental performance. Influenced by rock, jazz, classical, and folk traditions, Kzirian has collaborated with internationally recognized

see OUD, page 17



Painting by Archi Galentz

Art and Politics Mingle In Armenian Cultural Festival

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

“Though it may sound paradoxical, underlying every tradition is the capacity for renewal. It is the basis for keeping tradition alive and comes about through creative dialogue and contact with other cultures in the rest of the world.” This is the concept that provided the impetus for the Festivals of Armenian Culture (Armenische Kulturstage) that take place annually in three major centers of Armenian life in Germany. Cologne was the first, in 2005, to host a festival, followed by Stuttgart in 2011, the 20th anniversary of independence and Berlin in 2015. And the intention is to spread such activities to other cities.

Whether organized by Armenian communities including the church, as in Cologne, the seat of the diocese in Germany, or by professionals, like the Association of European and Armenian Experts (AEAE e.V.) in Berlin, or by the Baden-Württemberg Armenian Community e.V., in Stuttgart, the festivals aim at presenting Armenian culture, from the Republic and the diaspora, in an interactive, dynamic dialogue with Germany as a form of international cooperation and understanding.

Art and Artists Show the Way

The mission of the AEAE, which organized the festival, is to bring together people from Germany, Europe, the Republic of Armenia, Artsakh and the Diaspora, for intercultural understanding. And the event this year stands under the motto, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Spiritual nourishment is needed, to provide hope, love, and spiritual wealth; salvation from war, destruction, and evils deeds can come only from a harmony between mind and soul, which is provided by divine protection. The festival, held at the House of Culture in Karlshorst, in the borough of Lichtenberg, therefore was dedicated to spiritual themes, in the art exhibition, in a film

see FESTIVAL, page 16



Archi Galentz, “Drawings from 1994”

Tagharan Celebrates Its 45th Anniversary

By Marianna Gevorgyan

YEREVAN — This year, the Tagharan Ancient Music Ensemble is celebrating its 45th anniversary, under the direction of artistic director and conductor is Sedrak Yerkanyan.

With nearly half a century of history behind it, this unique ensemble, through its sacred and temple music, leaves even the most discerning audiences deeply impressed. At every concert, Tagharan appears with renewed spirit, keeping pace with the times and presenting, from the academic stage, the exceptional values of Armenian national culture from the 5th to the 15th centuries — sharakan chants, tagh songs, spiritual and secular gems, as well as ancient world music.

In the past 45 years, Tagharan has preserved, protected, popularized and passed on both national and universal cultural heritage to future generations.

The organization’s story began in 1981, when Grigor Danielyan — also known as Daniel the Musician — founded the ancient music ensemble Sharakan, leading it until 1985. The name of the ensemble was suggested by his teacher, musicologist Robert Atayan. He was guided by the idea that if countries with only 200–300 years of cultural history could have ancient music ensembles, then the Armenian nation, with its millennia-old history and culture, undoubtedly deserved an ensemble that would professionally perform and promote its ancient musical creations.

In 1985, the ensemble Sharakan recorded at the Aram Khachaturian Concert Hall under the “Melodiya” label. In 1986, the ensemble’s record was released.

Vazgen I, Catholicos of All Armenians, recognizing the importance and role of the ensemble, decided to include it in church events, giving his blessing. Later, upon the suggestion of the leadership of the Communist Party, the ancient music ensemble Sharakan was renamed Tagharan, since the original name had a religious and spiritual character.

From the very beginning, the mission of Tagharan has been to rediscover and popularize the ancient music of the Armenian people. In 1987, the leadership of the ensemble was taken over by composer Yervand Yerkanyan. In 1988, Tagharan was granted state status. During these years, the ensemble flourished, reaching new artistic heights and gaining renewed quality and expression.

Yerkanyan arranged more than 350 Armenian spiritual, folk, national, and patriotic works for Tagharan, distinguished by refined taste and his uniquely delicate artistic signature.

During those years, Tagharan presented, for the first time to Armenian audiences, concert versions of Claudio Monteverdi’s opera “The Coronation of Poppea,” Christoph Gluck’s “Orpheus and Eurydice” and Armen Tigranian’s “Anush.”

see TAGHARAN, page 16



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Wendy Bazilian's Super Spice Snack Mix

FRESNO — “One quarter cup serving of California Raisins is equal to one serving of fruit. And, California Raisins are economical, ready to eat, never bruise and easy to take with you — no washing, peeling or chopping required. California Raisins are a naturally sweet, dried fruit with no added sugar. An underlying premise of the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines is that nutritional needs should be met primarily with nutrient-dense foods and beverages. And, one of six food groups that make up a healthy dietary pattern recommended by the Dietary Guidelines includes fruits, especially whole fruit. Unfortunately, the average person eats far less fruit than is recommended by the Dietary Guidelines.”

“California Raisins are a plant-based food you can feel good about snacking on — they come without added sugar, are fat-free, low in salt, gluten-free and a source of fiber, too. Plus, they will supercharge your diet with valuable vitamins and minerals. For example, they give us a natural hit of potassium to support a healthy nervous system and help our muscles work normally while providing vitamin B6, copper and selenium — all vital for immunity. Plus, manganese for robust bones, as well as iron to help reduce tiredness and fatigue. A small handful of mixed California Raisins and nuts makes a great snacking combo by providing a valuable mix of protein, healthy unsaturated fats and fiber, as well as essential vitamins and minerals to support satiety and nourishment.”

Nutrition professionals such as Elizabeth M. Ward, M.S., R.D., Nutritionist/Author of Boston are singing the praise of California Raisins. U.S.A. Today and Men's Health magazine asked Ms. Ward this question, what's one of the best fruits you can eat? Ms. Ward responded, “Raisins. They deliver fiber (7% DV) and potassium (6% DV). They are portable, available year-round, are good for boosting energy and they may help with weight control. Pack healthy snacks such as plain popcorn, dried fruit, whole grain crackers, or nuts into small containers or baggies. They make great snacks on busy days.”

This Super Spice Snack Mix is from Dr. Wendy Bazilian who says, “This is my go-to snack mix personally and with my clients because it's easy to make, portable, nutritious and delicious. Full of flavor, this snack mix is high nutrition for boosting energy as a pick-me-up at snack time or as an easy breakfast sprinkled over Greek-style yogurt, apple sauce, or fruit.”

“Make this nutritious, delicious spice snack mix. It's packed with spices like ginger, cayenne and cinnamon and delicious nuts like almonds, walnuts, pistachios, and raisins. Many spices and herbs have antioxidant levels comparable to fruits and vegetables, and they add great flavor to a variety of foods and can take the place of adding sugar, fat or sodium.”

INGREDIENTS:

1/4 cup firmly packed brown sugar
2 teaspoons cinnamon, ground
2 teaspoons ginger, ground
2 teaspoons paprika
1/2-1 teaspoon cayenne—Optional ‘heat’
1 cup rolled oats
1 cup unsalted whole almonds
1 cup unsalted walnut halves
1 cup roasted salted pepitas (shelled pumpkin seeds)
1 cup salted shelled pistachios
1/4 cup thawed apple juice concentrate
1/2 cup golden raisins
3/4 cup dried cherries (or dried cranberries)
1 cup cereal (favorites include Kashi® Heart to Heart Cinnamon, Kashi® Island Vanilla Wheat Biscuits, Kashi® Dark Cocoa Karma Wheat Biscuits, Kashi® Go Peanut Butter Crunch)

Serves: 24 | Serving Size: 1/4 cup

PREPARATION:

Preheat oven to 250°F.

Mix brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger and paprika in small bowl. Cayenne—optional, too. Set aside.

Place oats, almonds, walnuts, pepitas and pistachios in large bowl. Add thawed apple juice concentrate; toss until nuts are evenly coated. Sprinkle with spice mixture, tossing to coat well.

Spread evenly on two 15x10x1-inch baking pans. Bake 30 minutes, stirring half-way through cook time.

Cool completely on the same or another baking pan on a wire rack. Stir in raisins, dried cherries and cereal. Store in airtight container.

Wendy Bazilian is a writer, educator, food enthusiast and award-winning journalist. She graduated summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa with a B.A. from Tufts University, received her M.A. from UC, San Diego, and completed her Doctorate in Public Health and Nutrition from Loma Linda University summa cum laude where she was awarded the prestigious Chancellor's Award, the top university honor. She is a registered dietitian nutritionist and American College of Sports Medicine Certified Exercise Physiologist. Dr. Bazilian is author of Eat Clean, Stay Lean series (Rodale), The SuperFoodsRx Diet (Rodale), and has contributed to several books including the James Beard- and IACP-nominated Golden Door Cooks at Home, and the original New York Times bestseller SuperFoodsRx. She maintains a busy private practice with individuals from CEOs, artists, and actors, to professional athletes, parents and children seeking to improve their and their family's nutrition, fitness and health. Wendy is an expert consultant to the spa industry, to start-up and established food and commodity groups, and to the health care industry. She is on the Board of Directors for the California Academy Foundation, and active advocate for students and others pursuing scholarships, fellowships, research and educational grants, and paid internships—and becoming part of mentoring relationships. She was honored nationally as Nutrition Entrepreneur of the Year for 2022. In 2023, she was awarded the prestigious 2023 Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Distinguished Lecture Award “in recognition of [her] exemplary career and remarkable contributions to the nutrition and dietetics profession.” A frequent nutrition and wellness presenter at scientific, medical, corporate, culinary and public conferences and festivals, Dr. Bazilian's expertise is featured in and she also writes for a variety of national print and digital media. She has been an expert contributor and returning guest on NBC's TODAY show and GMA for many years. She is a frequent guest and nutrition expert on Live with Kelly and Mark.

See her medical advice and delicious (easy) grain bowls for California Walnuts at: <https://walnuts.org/delicious-and-easy-grain-bowls/>

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2445 Capitol Street, Suite 200
Fresno, CA 93721-2236
Phone: (559) 225-0520
Fax: (559) 225-0652
Website: <https://www.raisins.org/>

For this recipe: <https://calraisins.org/recipe/super-spice-snack-mix/>

Also:

<https://livewithkellyandmark.com/recipes/wendy-bazilians-super-spice-nutty-snack-mix>

<https://californiaraisinscandinavia.com/california-raisins-make-for-a-healthy-snack/#:~:text=A%20small%20handful%20of%20mixed,to%20support%20satiety%20and%20nourishment.>

https://www.kelloggs.com/content/dam/NorthAmerica/kelloggs/en_US/images/articles/education-opportunities/Wendy%20Bazilian%20Recipes.pdf

Donations

The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada has supported the Vahan Tekeyan School of Beirut through the following donations:

\$2,500 from the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter for the faculty of the school;

\$6,050 in memory of Helen Sherbetjian Makhian.



ARTS & CULTURE

‘Convergence’: An Exhibit That Keeps The Conversation Alive

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GLENDALE — “Convergence,” the group exhibit showcasing the work of more than 20 contemporary diasporic artists of Armenian descent, running from March 21 to August 9 at the Forest Lawn Museum, makes a strong statement about contemporary art, often dismissed as elitist and removed from social realities, as a powerful force in addressing societal inequities.

The featured works, ranging from paintings to conceptual installations, invite reflection on issues such as the inhumane carceral system in the US, gender inequalities, the abuse of the environment as a threat to the future of the planet and the survival of the human species, as well as issues endemic to the human experience. The exhibit is conceived of and curated by artists Alina Mnatsakanian and Kaloust Guedel, in collaboration with Forest Lawn Museum Director James Fishburne.

The relevance of the artwork on display to our current reality is impossible to miss. With “Earth Kids” (2025), a thought-provoking installation of wheatpasted figures of peaceful young women, Sophia Gasparian (born in Yerevan, currently residing in Los Angeles) “challenges the macho hegemony of graffiti culture and emphasizes the feminine spirit.” Gasparian’s art addresses equal human rights issues worldwide. Ara Oshagan’s “A Poor Imitation Death,” an installation of photographic prints and handwritten texts is a scathing indictment of the broken US carceral system. The photographs of handwritten letters from young men and women incarcerated in prisons across California prompt the viewer to ponder the horrifying realities of the system. These letters underscore the inmates’ sense of being “tired of feeling. Because the only feelings that I am capable to feel are betrayal, hurt, pain, misery (sic), and lonely. . . . I don’t think this is the way it’s suppose (sic) to go.” “When the days have been stripped of their meaning and we exist only in physicality life becomes a poor imitation of death,” writes 20-year-old Liz, an inmate at the Chowchilla State Prison.

Even as they highlight the pain and the abuse, however, the artists also showcase the more positive and restorative aspects of the culture they grew up in. “Objects of Her” (2026), conceived by She Loves Collective, an alliance of female artists based



She Loves Collective, “Objects of Her” (2026)

in Glendale, “dedicated to elevating the voices and talents of women in the arts,” recreates the everyday ritual of a woman, whose life revolves around her domestic responsibilities, in an extremely appealing and aesthetically pleasing installation. A sewing machine, a rolling pin, trinkets, jugs, knives, spoons, articles of clothing, a console table with a mirror where the housewife beautifies herself (one of her essential “duties”), lace, crocheted rugs, framed embroideries with expressions of endearment in Armenian — *Gyanke, Tzavet danem, Yes kez siroom em* — all put together with infinite care, evoke household duties perceived as quintessentially feminine. However, rather than reject a role that has defined a woman historically, perceived by many as exclusionary, the artists celebrate the nurturing aspects of the role. They embrace the traditional responsibilities of a woman, yet extend them to include the creativity and the intelligence of the women the exhibit showcases. Theirs is a subtle, yet powerful, critique of the stance that would reduce a very complex role to an either/or formula. Whoever said that running a household did not require creativity?

While they give voice to the individual concerns of artists in a diverse diaspora, the works also give their past relevance. Designs that

incorporate the letters of the iconic Armenian alphabet or signature motifs from ancient Armenian rugs recall common cultural roots. Even as it hails the creation of a new home in an adopted “homeland,” an installation blending the Armenian and the American flags highlights a history of displacement and the violence that uproots a people from their millennia-old ancestral lands. These works are defined by the honesty and the openness of the artists as they struggle to understand their complicated identities, in an effort to come to terms with their endlessly evolving realities. In the words of Micah Owens, winner of the 2026 USC Dornsife Creative Writing Contest,

So I will plant myself anew
again,
until the unknown becomes
home,
and my children
have a history
to write themselves into.
“Genealogy”

What ultimately jumps out at the viewer is the participating artists’ genuine desire to create a more humane, a more harmonious and peaceful world. The concepts they explore all have tremendous appeal. By painting fragile goose and quail egg shells, in her words, “powerful symbols of strength and life,” Larisa Safaryan highlights the “profound strength found within vulnerability.” With “Communal Exhale” (2019), Aroussiak Gabrielian promotes care and

respect for the environment. The exhibit does indeed put the viewer in touch with the disparities and awakens her to the transformative role art can play.

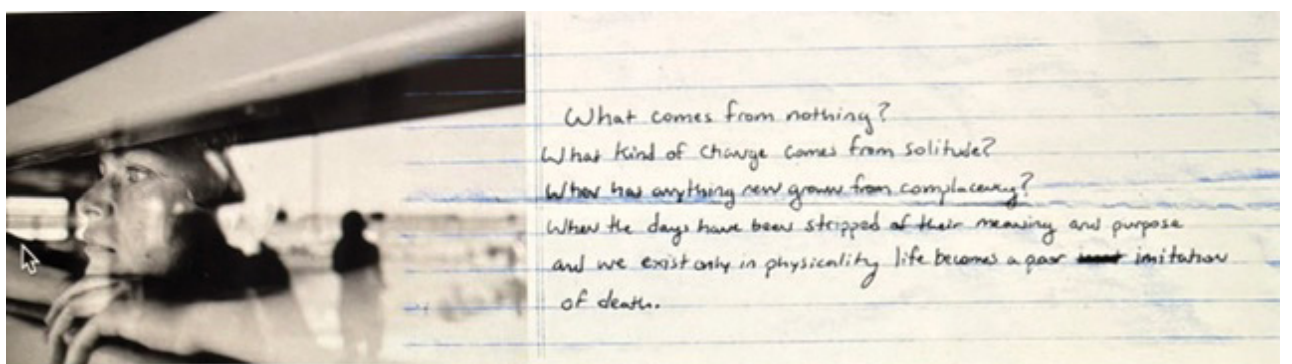
What the viewer is offered, however, is not a simplistic “solution” or an “optimism.” “Convergence” is not a stepping-stone to reform, yet the courage of these creatives to keep up the fight imbues the viewer with a sense of urgency and helps keep the conversation alive. As the celebrated novelist and essayist Virginia Woolf reminds us, the attempt to build a better world must be made even if it takes the millennia. This fight is, arguably, the driving force behind all artistic endeavor.

The Forest Lawn exhibit also affirms the artists’ stated belief in the value of the aesthetic as social and political commentary. By challenging established norms these creatives encourage meaningful dialogue. Their art is no longer simply decorative.

It might be worth adding that the show asserts the diaspora as a viable force in getting our voices heard. An exhibit that can bring together more than twenty innovative voices to explore contemporary concerns and still convey a unified vision could inspire Armenians of all geographies and genealogies to come together and to fight together to defend Armenian interests and preserve our cultural legacies. This sentiment is clearly expressed in the exhibit’s Curatorial statement: “‘Convergence’ celebrates connection and understanding without necessarily sharing a uniform sense of identity or heritage.”



Sophia Gasparian, “Earth Kids” (2025)



Ara Oshagan, “Liz, 20 years old, Chowchilla State Prison, Chowchilla” (2021)



ARTS & CULTURE

Art and Politics Mingle in Armenian Cultural Festival

FESTIVAL, from page 13 showing which featured “Gate to Heaven” by Jivan Avetisyan, and in a concert of spiritual music performed by pupils of the Hekimian Music School of Yerevan. The vernissage was interspersed by music performed by Danilo Mičić und Milutin Marjanović, who sang Serbian spiritual songs A-cappella.

Mikayel Minasyan, President of the AEAE, welcomed visitors to the vernissage with brief remarks. He addressed the issue head on: In view of the chaos pervading the world today, which is characterized by destruction, loss, and war, we ask ourselves, where will the madness end? It is artists who offer us guidance, he said, in that they provide a link to contemporary reality through their impressions, as depicted in their art.

The exhibition, entitled, “Archi Galentz – Narine Zolyan – Prophecies,” presents works relating to current and recent episodes of the emotional life of Armenia and its people. It is a life of dramatic upheavals, from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the process of creating the Republic; two Artsakh wars, expulsions, all unfold-

an’s unique feature: “Her art expresses an evocative passion about the problems of our era.” He stressed that “this year is a year of decisions for Armenia: will one become a soldier, a volunteer? What will become of our own children?” And it is decisive politically; “we must elect a new head of state. To regain our bearings, we have to reflect on our views and reevaluate them.”

For his own part, Galentz chose from among his most emotional works to display. Some are well known, others, from his early works, have never been exhibited before. He has also experimented with AI-generated works that distort or rearrange reality — a church without a cross, Yerevan with Aragats, not Ararat. As he said in discussion with the Prague-based Armenian publication, ORER, he again addresses the theme of war and seeks to view it as a lesson. His contribution is “to change something in my country.”

A Note of Optimism

The Berlin festival was sponsored by the Department of Culture and Education of the district of Lichtenberg, its mayor Martin Schaefer, and Prof. Dr. Martin

inherited this political awareness through her parents from her grandfather Gevorg Melik Karagyozyan, who in 1918 came to Berlin as a member of the Delegation of the Armenian National Council. They had come “hoping to defuse the chaos in Transcaucasia and to discuss their problems.” But in meetings with members of the Imperial Diet, “the Germans only talked nonsense and did nothing — that was a very special experience for me.” Her mother “dedicated her entire life to Artsakh and achieved the impossible... Now I am fighting in the same struggle.”

The Gate to Heaven

Artsakh is a theme that runs through the art exhibition, discussions among the visitors, and in a film viewing on May 9 — not coincidentally, the day of the liberation of Shushi in Artsakh. “Gate to Heaven” It is an international drama that takes place during the Artsakh wars. Leading roles are played by Richard Sammel, Tatiana Spivakova, Sos Janibekyan, Leo Pobedonoscev and Naira Zakaryan.

Director Jivan Avetisyan, born in Gyumri, grew up in Artsakh and lives in Yerevan. In 2014 he co-founded the Fish-eye Art Cultural Foundation and later, in 2021, he founded “LifeTree Pictures LLC.” The film tells the story of a German journalist Robert Sternvall, age 50, who

returns to Artsakh in 2016 to report on the newly erupted conflict. In the course of his research, he meets a young opera singer, Sophia Marti, who is 15 years his junior. Sophia is the daughter of a press photographer who went missing—and who Robert, after the fall of the village Talish in 1992, had left behind in prison. The two fall in love, and the truth of Robert’s vile deed comes out. Robert confesses to his career-oriented behavior, his silence about Edgar’s death, his exploitation of Edgar’s photos, and begs for forgiveness.

In the course of a long discussion with viewers, Avetisyan drew the lesson of his film. Silence, as in the case of Edgar’s death, is a crime. “Nowadays so many people are silent about Artsakh. Precisely this criminal silence was the concept that appealed to me and that I developed in the film.”

The Armenian Cultural Festival in Berlin broke the silence about Artsakh and presented the complex reality of Armenia, through the lens of art and dialogue, to a grateful public. One visitor, cited in a press report, described the exhibition as “overwhelming — not because it was loud, but because it strikes you. Because the pain lying in the pictures, cannot be kept at a distance. You have to get close, you have to look, you have to participate.”



Karlshorst Art show

ing within the process of loss of identity and the search for a new national self-consciousness. The artists raise profound questions: where can one find moorings, a source of confidence? Who will be their partners in a dialogue about the future?

The exhibition also marks an inflection point in a decades-long dialogue between the two artists, both from intellectual families. Zolyan, born in 1957 in Yerevan, and Galentz, born in 1971 in Moscow, are both active in Germany as curators of shows and project spaces. Galentz, who studied at the State Art School in Yerevan (1976-1981) and University of the Arts in Berlin (1992-2000), came to Berlin in 1992 as a guest student and has been working at his atelier and exhibition room, InteriorDASEIN since 2008.

Narine Zolyan, who began painting at the age of nine and was fascinated with Vincent van Gogh, studied at the Yerevan State Art Institute (1976-1981) and the Surikov Art School in Moscow (1981-1985). She moved to Germany in 2012, and heads KunstAsyl (Art Sanctuary), a project in cultural integration in Quedlinburg, Saxon-Anhalt. The two artists met in 2002 in Moscow at the Forum of Artistic Initiatives and that same year, held their first joint exhibition, entitled “Children’s Fears.” Several others have followed since, in Berlin and Chemnitz.

Galentz commented on “Prophecies” as the title of the exhibition. Referencing the large number of talented artists in Germany and Europe, he singled out Zoly-

Pätzold, former Bundestag (Parliament) member and member of the Berlin House of Representatives since 2021. Addressing the gathering, Pätzold lauded the Armenian Cultural Festival as an occasion for people from different backgrounds to discuss culture and debate ideas, a place where visitors, including children, can engage with artists and “everyone can learn something.” The exhibit, he said, would generate interest in Armenian themes. “I studied the Bible,” he went on, “and it is written there that the darkest hour comes before the dawn. Therefore, we dare not lose confidence that in Armenia this dawn awaits us.” Recalling his experiences in the country, he said, “As a German with Armenian roots, I was always impressed by the warmheartedness and willingness to help on the part of Armenians everywhere.”

In her own address at the vernissage, Zolyan lamented the endless wars throughout the world which are destroying our spiritual balance. As an artist, she deals with the fate of Artsakh and Armenia. “We find ourselves in a constant battle. With the works I am presenting here, I would like to draw the viewer’s attention to something important: that we must remember our history, learn about it, and draw lessons from it.” She envisioned a future in which “children live happy lives, where children do not lose their parents, and parents do not lose their children.” In discussion with ORER, she recalled how important it was in her family to talk about Armenia. She

Tagharan Celebrates 45th Anniversary

TAGHARAN, from page 13

Under Yerkanyan’s leadership, in 1990, the ensemble recorded in Moscow under the “Melodiya” label and released another record.

Since 1994, the ensemble has been led by Yerkanyan, one of the finest conductors and pianists in Armenia, who received the Honored Cultural Figure of Armenia, designation.

Under Yerkanyan’s direction, Tagharan has carried out extensive artistic activity, presenting a wide repertoire ranging from Armenian medieval sacred music to European pre-classical and Baroque works. Alongside Armenian cultural treasures, audiences hear American Gospel spirituals as well as ancient Spanish, French, Italian, German and Chinese music.

As the only ensemble of its kind for nearly half a century, distinguished by its unique stylistic character, high professionalism and the harmonious unity between soloists and orchestra, Tagharan has consistently remained at the artistic forefront.

Remaining faithful to his artistic “genetic code” and guided by the legacy of Komitas, the maestro has created a monumental

body of work during his leadership of the ensemble. He has mapped, arranged, and enriched Tagharan’s repertoire with a series of horovel work songs, kochari dances, Armenian musical mosaics, as well as well-known and lesser-known wedding songs and dance melodies.

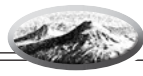
The ensemble has also presented the epic “Karos Khach” and the musical play “Varq Himarats,” (The Behavior of Idiots) based on the tales of Hovhannes Tumanyan (composer: D. Sakoyan).

During its important and fruitful 45-year history, the Tagharan Ancient Music Ensemble has participated in numerous international festivals, recorded with renowned studios, released albums, produced music videos, and consistently received attention from prestigious television and radio programs, as well as coverage in both international and local media. The ensemble has performed concert programs in many countries around the world, presenting Armenian culture and proudly carrying the name of Armenia onto the global stage.

(This article was translated from Armenian to English by Yeva Grigoryan.)



Members of Tagharan perform



ARTS & CULTURE

Examining History Through Clothing at Glendale Gallery

By Karine Armen

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GLENDAL — Poet Tina Demirdjian showcased 19th-century Armenian dresses at the Litavie Art Gallery in Glendale during May. The opening event on Saturday, May 2, included a presentation by Dr. Sofi Khachmanyanyan on how to dress an Edwardian woman in Constantinople and a demonstration of the remaking of Victoria Telfeyan's gown using a live model.

The Armenian Dress & Textile Project (ADTP), in collaboration with Litavie Art Gallery and with partial funding from the City of Glendale Arts & Culture Commission, presents "Timeline of Our Ancestors: Costumes, Textiles & Stories," a compelling exhibition and series of free public programs running from May 2, through Saturday, May 30.

These treasured garments, textiles, photographs and stories serve as the foundation and inspiration for the Armenian Dress & Textile Project (ADTP). An opportunity for Armenian and non-Armenian community members to explore one family's journey from 1893 Turkey to present-day Los Angeles. The exhibit uncovers artifacts that survived genocide, migration, and time — and allows the public to reflect on their own family's story of migration and survival.

The exhibition is dedicated to "keepers" Victoria Demirci (née Dilsizian) and Nazelie Elmassian, honoring their role in preserving cultural memory through generations.

Tina Demirdjian said, "I found my ancestors, and I didn't want to give them away" were the words that fell out of my mouth as I sat on my grandmother's bed in Queens, NY, in 1998. My mother, Vicky, and I found bundles called "bocja's" in the home my grandmother had lived in since 1937, when she came to NY from Istanbul

Demirdjian explained how the eastern clothing and embroidery from Gesaria/Kayseri, Turkey, and the Edwardian clothing and embroidery from Constantinople survived genocide, migration, and time. Some belonged to her grandmother's aunts, who took responsibility for caring for these items because their immediate families weren't interested. Another reason is that her great-grandmother brought much of it over in a large steamer trunk on the first boat leaving Europe and Turkey (Istanbul) after WWII. Her sister, Demirdjian's other great-grandmother, Victoria, died at age 27, so the family had preserved all her clothes. Since her great-grandmother Mannik was one of the last remaining in her family to

symbolized who they were, and showed their legacy, and that they were well-to-do people." She continued, "These costumes reflect that they were well-educated and kept their belongings for more than 100 years, running from one country to another." Dr. Khachmanyanyan explained the importance of preserving and sharing cultural heritage through the Telfeyan family.

On May 9, Shago spoke about and led an interactive embroidery-making activity. Shago, founder of Folk Lounge, said, "I met Tina through Maggie Mangassarian Goschin of the Ararat-Eskijian Museum. Tina is a poet. I am an artist and a designer, and we just think the same about a lot of things, and I feel really inspired to see women in my lineage, which is Armenian."

More than an exhibit, Demirdjian stated, "Timeline of Our Ancestors' is a reflection on rediscovery — an opportunity to re-evaluate and re-value the lives of our ancestors through the clothing they wore, the embroideries they created, and the stories they left behind." It calls on visitors to become ac-



From left: Dr. Sofi Khachmanyanyan, Tina Demirdjian, and Shago (Karine Armen photo)

tive culture bearers, preserving and sharing family histories.

"The act of rediscovery reminds us that we are alive," said Demirdjian. "It affirms that our stories still have a place in the world — waiting to be uncovered, documented, and shared."

For more information and to RSVP, contact Litavie Art Gallery at <https://litavieart-gallery.com/>



Some of the costumes on exhibit (Karine Armen photo)

leave Istanbul, it was all she had left of her former life. She was privileged to have been able to keep it and bring it over. During 1915, they had already moved to Constantinople from Gesaria/Kayseri, having survived the Hamidian massacres, and having heard of a coming massacre, fled to Plovdiv, Bulgaria, for three years. They took very little clothing and belongings, thus preserving the material culture they left behind until their return.

Khachmanyanyan has been working on the project since 1998. She said, "These women, despite running for their lives from massacre and genocide, didn't leave their belongings behind because that actually



Tina Demirdjian (Karine Armen photo)

after marrying my grandfather, Sarkis." She added, "Grandma Shahine was the 'keeper' of the stories she told me over and over when I was a little girl. But I found out she was also a 'keeper' of all her mother's, grandmother's, and aunts' clothes and embroideries. 'Shahine, toon ge hasgenas' was what they'd tell her."

Oud Masters John Berberian and Antranig Kzirian to Perform Live at Armenian Museum Of America

LOUD, from page 13 artists including Serj Tankian and performs extensively around the world. He is co-founder of TAQS.IM, teaches at UCLA, and continues to redefine the role of the oud in contemporary music.

"It's an honor to perform with John at the Armenian Museum of America for such a special occasion to celebrate the richness of the Armenian oud. It is in this context that traditions are performed, interpreted, and renewed together across our generations," said Kzirian.

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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, 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 & Kheyra 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

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 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.stjames-watertown.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 or alin.gregorian@gmail.com. You can also visit our website, 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.

COMMENTARY

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Foreign Influence and Political Forces in Armenia

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

As elections approach in Armenia, the political landscape becomes increasingly filled with discussions about whether different political forces are under the influence of various external political centers. This is, in some sense, a natural and expected phenomenon, since in any country, especially in small states, global actors consistently have interests, and these interests are often expressed through local political forces that align with their agendas.

As a result, in recent days a rather heated debate has emerged over which political forces in Armenia are considered pro-Russian and which are pro-Western. These classifications are often used as a tool to influence public opinion and steer voters' choices in a certain direction.

For example, the ruling party sometimes emphasizes that certain opposition forces have closer ties or influence from Russia, while presenting its own political course as more pro-European and oriented toward integration with the West. Conversely, the opposition often makes similar claims in the opposite direction, accusing the authorities of excessive dependence on different external powers or of serving foreign agendas.

In reality, such labeling is a common tool of political communication, but it does not always provide a complete or objective picture of the actual foreign policy positions of each political force. As a result, certain perceptions have indeed been formed among Armenian voters, and the authorities have managed to promote the narrative that in the event of their defeat, Armenia would become a Russian governorate. The opposition advances the narrative that in the case of the ruling party's re-election, Armenia would turn into a Turkish vilayet.

However, the reality is naturally not as simple as it is being presented. The main share of responsibility here should be placed on the authorities, because ultimately it is the government that is responsible for forming an atmosphere of public unity and tolerance, which in the case of Armenia, does not currently exist.

In the case of the opposition, in recent years it has failed to properly engage with the authorities and political forces of the European Union and the United States. As a result, it essentially does not receive support from EU and Western players. This is, in general, the fault of the opposition, and there is no need to go deeper into this issue.

It is extremely important to understand how the authorities position themselves as a pro-Western political force, oriented toward Europe, supporting European integration and deepening relations with Europe, while periodically accusing Russia of conducting hybrid warfare against Armenia and its authorities. However, the reality is that since 2018, the Armenian authorities have not taken any serious steps against Russia's vital interests in the

South Caucasus and Armenia or harming Russia.

They have not seriously moved away from the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) or the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). A Russian military base continues to be present in Armenia. The Armenian nuclear power plant, which is under Russian control, continues to operate in Armenia. Russia remains Armenia's largest trade partner, and trade turnover reaches billions of dollars annually. At the same time Russia hosts the biggest Armenian diaspora in the world, which is almost equal to the current population of Armenia.

Accordingly, hopes that Armenia's primary goal is to detach itself from Russian influence and move toward Europe are, at the very least, not consistent with reality, and such developments cannot take place given the abovementioned circumstances. The narratives introduced into the domestic political debate by the authorities, that they are a pro-European force leading Armenia



toward Europe and that a referendum on joining the European Union will be held in Armenia, are, at least at this stage, surprising, since they currently have neither a theoretical nor a practical possibility of being implemented.

Therefore, these discussions in the domestic political arena are false. They do not correspond to reality, so that they are an attempt to mislead the public during the pre-election period in order to pursue the path of political power reproduction for the next 5 years.

(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.)

Armenia's Political Reality on the Eve of the 2026 Parliamentary Elections: Revolution, War, Polarization and the Search for the Future

By Avedis Bakkalian

Since the Velvet Revolution of 2018, Armenia has undergone profound political, security and social transformations. In the years that followed, the country experienced soaring democratic expectations, war, severe territorial and humanitarian crises, major shifts in foreign policy and growing domestic polarization. Together, these developments have shaped Armenia's current political landscape as the country approaches its next parliamentary elections.

For the Armenian diaspora, these issues are not merely political. They touch upon questions of national identity, collective memory, security, hope and disappoint-

ment. As a result, political developments in Armenia continue to resonate deeply within Armenian communities around the world.

The 2018 Revolution and New Expectations

The peaceful mass protest movement that emerged in Armenia in the spring of 2018, later known as the Velvet Revolution, brought an end to a political system that had dominated the country for many years. Following the resignation of former Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan, opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan came to power.

The snap parliamentary elections held later that year provided Pashinyan's political movement with broad public support.

Many viewed this period as a new beginning, marked by hopes for democratic reforms, anti-corruption efforts and the modernization of state institutions.

Yet Armenia's post-revolutionary period was not defined solely by reform. The country soon entered a new era of security and regional challenges that would fundamentally alter its political trajectory.

The 2020 War: A Turning Point

The 44-day war that began on September 27, 2020 over Nagorno-Karabakh became one of the most traumatic national shocks in Armenia's modern history. The conflict resulted in thousands of casualties, widespread destruction and significant territorial losses

continued on next page



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

If Pashinyan Bans Any Opposition Party, The Rest Should Boycott the Election

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is proceeding with his electoral campaign amid countless violations of Armenia's laws.

We have been witnessing Pashinyan's rude, insulting, hysterical, and aggressive reactions whenever a citizen dares to criticize him during his campaign stops. This is not the normal behavior of a sane person, let alone the behavior expected of a Prime Minister.

There have been plenty of videos posted on social media during the past few weeks that show Pashinyan's abnormal behavior towards those — mostly gutsy women — who courageously tell him to his face about the disastrous results of his policies, which have led to the loss of Artsakh, thousands of soldiers, parts of the Republic of Armenia, and perhaps soon all of Armenia. When citizens confront him to express their disagreement, they are viciously attacked by Pashinyan or pushed and shoved by his brainwashed supporters.

Those who have been following Pashinyan's irrational behavior and senseless statements can see that he is increasingly exhibiting signs of mental disorder: screaming, threatening to jail, or even kill (“sadgeetsnel”) his political opponents.

In recent months, Pashinyan's subservient National Security Agency has accused his critics of being foreign agents, going as far as disseminating obviously fake documents. Pashinyan claimed that his major opponent in the election, Samvel Karapetyan, is a Russian agent. Karapetyan was arrested and charged with planning a coup d'état simply for saying that he supports the Armenian Apostolic Church. By releasing another fake document, Pashinyan falsely accused Karapetyan's nephew, Nareg, of not disclosing his Russian citizenship — which would be a violation of electoral laws, since he is a parliamentary candidate. In addition, Pashinyan continues to interfere in Armenia's judicial system by directing judges, who are supposed to be independent.

In the last two months, dozens of supporters of his political opponents have been arrested and imprisoned under the false accusation of giving bribes to voters. This is a ridiculous charge. Who is so foolish as to give a bribe to potential voters months before the election, hoping that they would vote for their party in the future?

Pashinyan has also imprisoned several high-ranking clergymen under the false pretext of committing various crimes. Furthermore, he regularly posts on Facebook obscene accusations against the Catholicos of All Armenians and meddles in internal Church affairs — a blatant violation of the constitutional provision on the separation of Church and State.

For years, Pashinyan has falsely claimed that his party's previous two election victories, in 2018 and 2021, were fair and free of fraud. However, his actions tell a different story: he has violated numerous electoral laws, such as using governmental resources for his campaign, threatening his opponents, and employing illegal fundraising methods.

During the 2023 Yerevan City Council election, Pashinyan's Civil Contract political party raised \$1.3 million to ensure the victory of Tigran Avinyan, its candidate for mayor. An independent investigation revealed that some of the campaign funds donated by several individuals used fake names to hide their true identities. Violations included making large donations under others' names. A woman whose ID card was fraudulently used was outraged and firmly denied making such a donation. In another case, donations were made in the names of eight employees of a prominent businessman — without their knowledge. Despite such blatant violations of fundraising laws, the courts failed to take any legal action against Pashinyan's party.

Continuing the Civil Contract's questionable fundraising practices, a new independent investigation by Infocom revealed that at least 23 directors of hospitals and medical centers from various regions of Armenia made almost simultaneous donations to the ruling party in March 2025. These directors of government-owned facilities are beholden to the authorities for their positions. More than \$15,000 was transferred to the ruling party within a few days — between March 4 and 11, 2025. During the entire year, directors of 31 medical centers contributed about \$22,000 to Pashinyan's party. Even the Health Minister donated around \$2,000 in 2025 to the ruling party. Infocom also revealed that Pashinyan's party and the “My Step” Foundation, led by his partner Anna Hakobyan, received contributions totaling \$300,000 in the past three years from business owners or officials whose companies were granted government tax exemptions.

After making repeated threats to imprison his political opponents and warning that the opposition parties will not win any parliamentary seats in the upcoming election, Pashinyan may now cross all red lines and ban one or more opposition parties from the June 7 elections to guarantee his Civil Contract party's victory.

If that happens, all opposition parties must boycott the parliamentary elections in protest. The result will be a parliament consisting exclusively of Pashinyan's party after June 7 — reminiscent of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR where only the Communist Party was represented. This would confirm that Armenia is not a democratic country, but an autocracy.

So far, the West — out of self-interest and to the detriment of Armenia's national interests — has ignored major violations of democratic rule. But if only one party remains in parliament, the West could no longer pretend that Armenia is a normal democracy. A concerted diplomatic effort should be launched to push foreign governments to refuse recognition of the illegitimate election results.

New parliamentary elections must then be organized, excluding Pashinyan's party from participation.

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The trilateral ceasefire statement of November 9, 2020, brokered by Russia and signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, not only ended the fighting but also created deep political and societal divisions both within Armenia and throughout the Diaspora.

Following the war, Armenia entered a prolonged period of political uncertainty. Despite public dissatisfaction and continuing protests, Prime Minister Pashinyan's party secured victory in the snap parliamentary elections of 2021, renewing its mandate.

The result demonstrated that although Armenian society had become deeply divided, it had not yet coalesced around a unified political alternative.

The Prague Meeting and a New Phase of the Karabakh Question

One of the most debated political developments of recent years occurred on October 6, 2022, during a meeting in Prague. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev reaffirmed mutual recognition of each other's territorial integrity based on the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration.

Many in Armenia and across the diaspora interpreted this statement as a political acceptance of Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory.

Following this development, conditions in Nagorno-Karabakh continued to deteriorate. Beginning in December 2022, Azerbaijan blocked the Lachin Corridor, the only route connecting Artsakh to Armenia. The ten-month blockade created a severe



humanitarian crisis marked by shortages of food, medicine and fuel.

In September 2023, following Azerbaijan's military operation and the collapse of local Armenian authorities, nearly the entire Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh fled the region and relocated to Armenia.

These events also reignited debate re-

garding Russia's role and the effectiveness of Russian peacekeeping forces. While some criticized Moscow for inaction, others argued that Russia's political and legal position had fundamentally changed once Armenia formally recognized Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

New Geopolitical Directions

In recent years, Armenia's foreign policy

has become increasingly diversified. Amid growing tensions with Russia, Yerevan has sought to strengthen relations with Europe, the United States and other regional actors.

Political discussions increasingly focus on new economic and transportation initiatives, including regional connectivity projects and various international agreements.

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Armenia's Political Reality on the Eve of the 2026 Parliamentary Elections

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These developments are interpreted differently across Armenia's political spectrum. Some view them as opportunities for economic growth and regional stability, while others express concern about emerging security dependencies and strategic risks.

Armenia's Current Political Landscape

Today, Armenia's political system remains deeply polarized.

The ruling Civil Contract party continues to emphasize democratic reforms, modernization of public administration and the pursuit of a long-term peace agreement with Azerbaijan. Its supporters argue that negotiations and a more flexible foreign policy are necessary to reduce the risk of renewed conflict.

The principal opposition forces, particularly the Armenia Alliance and the Republican Party, place greater emphasis on national security, military reconstruction and a more cautious foreign policy. They frequently accuse the government of making excessive concessions in matters affecting national security.

Alongside these major forces, smaller reform-oriented and pro-Western groups advocate strengthening democratic institutions, judicial independence and closer cooperation with Europe.

At the same time, new political and economic initiatives are emerging that seek to present themselves as systemic alternatives, focusing on economic development, investment and effective governance.

The Diaspora's Role and a Complex Relationship

Relations between Armenia and its diaspora have become both more emotional and more complex in recent years.

The war, the displacement of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian population and shifts in Armenia's foreign policy have generated diverse — and at times contradictory — responses throughout diasporan communities. Some believe the diaspora should assume a more direct political role, while others maintain that key decisions re-

garding Armenia's domestic affairs should primarily be made by Armenia's citizens.

This debate remains unresolved and continues to be a sensitive subject, particularly in discussions concerning national strategy, security and identity.

On the Eve of Elections

The upcoming parliamentary elections will take place at a moment when Armenian society continues to search for a renewed vision of security, stability and national development.

Among the key issues likely to shape the electoral debate are national security and military reform, economic development and social welfare, the direction of foreign policy, the continuation of democratic reforms and the restoration of public trust in state institutions.

Armenia's political future stands at a complex crossroads where the legacy of the 2018 revolution, the consequences of war and evolving geopolitical realities continue to shape the country's path forward.

Conclusion

The political developments of recent years — from the 2018 Velvet Revolution to the 2020 war, the events in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia's evolving foreign policy orientation — have brought the country to a decisive and challenging

moment in its history. Armenian society continues to search for a renewed vision of security, stability and the future.

The forthcoming elections represent more than a political contest. They are also a broader conversation about the direction Armenia should take in matters of governance, national security and international relations.

In this context, several fundamental questions deserve reflection. Did the 2018 revolution achieve its principal objectives? How did the 2020 war reshape Armenia's political and strategic outlook? What continues to fuel the country's deep political polarization? What role should the diaspora play in Armenia's future? And can Armenia pursue a more independent foreign policy under current regional conditions?

Ultimately, what factor will prove decisive in the upcoming elections: security, economic performance, or public trust in government?

The answers to these questions may well determine Armenia's political direction for years to come.

(The above editorial has been translated from the original Armenian published in *Abaka* weekly.)

Appeals Launched By Armenian Prisoners in Baku

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) —Appeal hearings in the cases of Armenian detainees began in Baku on May 26.

Proceedings were launched following appeals filed in the cases of former Artsakh presidents Arayik Harutyunyan, Arkadi Ghukasyan and Bako Sahakyan, former Artsakh parliament speaker David Ishkhanyan, former Foreign Minister David Babayan, former Defense Army commander Levon Mnatsakanyan and others.

The case will be reviewed at the Baku Court of Appeal under the chairmanship of Judge Elmar Rahimov, according to APA.

Under the ruling of the Baku Military Court, Arayik Harutyunyan, Levon Mnatsakanyan, David Manukyan, David Ishkhanyan, and David Babayan were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Arkadi Ghukasyan and Bako Sahakyan received 20-year prison sentences, while Madat Babayan and Melikset Pashayan were sentenced to 19 years in prison.

Garik Martirosyan received an 18-year sentence, while David Alaverdyan and Levon Balayan were sentenced to 16 years in prison.

Vasili Beglaryan, Gurgen Stepanyan, and Erik Ghazaryan each received 15-year prison terms.



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