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Armenian Opposition Groups Hint at 'Further Escalation' As Final Parliamentary Election Results Are Announced

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

YEREVAN — As the final results of Armenia's parliamentary elections were tallied, several leading opposition groups have issued a statement suggesting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government is illegitimate, accusing his administration for bearing full responsibility "for any further escalation of the situation."

According to the final results, the ruling Civil Contract party will hold 64 seats in parliament, while Strong Armenia secured 29 seats and the Armenia Alliance won 12. The opposition Prosperous Armenia party led by tycoon Gagik Tsarukyan has failed to pass the 4 percent threshold required to enter parliament, receiving only 3.9893 percent of the vote.

The final results followed recounts at several hundred polling stations, as well as decisions by the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) to invalidate the voting results at three polling stations.

Following the announcement, six opposition groups — the two which cleared the threshold, Prosperous Armenia, Bright Armenia Party, the Armenian National Congress, and the National Democratic Pole Alliance — issued a joint statement declaring that "the results recorded in such conditions cannot serve as a basis for the formation of a legitimate government."



Officials count votes after the polls close in the 7 June 2026 parliamentary elections (photo OC Media/ Mariam Nikuradze)

The statement accused Pashinyan's administration of bearing full responsibility "for any further escalation of the situation."

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Opposition supporters demonstrate outside the Central Election Commission building in Yerevan, June 14, 2026

Armenian Monitors Also Reject Election Results

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Independent vote-monitoring groups on Monday, June 15, joined the Armenian opposition in challenging official results of the June 7 parliamentary elections that gave victory to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Civil Contract party.

The Independent Observer, a Western-funded coalition of three such groups, accused the Central Election Commission (CEC) of illegally giving Civil Contract several more seats in Armenia's new parliament.

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MFA Director Terjanian Makes Big Impression at Tekeyan Talk

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Pierre Terjanian, the new director of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), sat down for a conversation with Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Executive Director Aram Arkun in front of a rapt audience on June 4, in an electric program, during which he shared stories about the museum, his life and his Armenian heritage.

Arkun devoted the main portion of the program, in a hall filled to capacity, at the Baikar Building, the site of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada and the Armenian Mirror-Spectator offices, to a question-and-answer format, before opening up the floor to the audience.

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Azerbaijani Presidential Aide Hajiyev Visits Armenia in Historic First

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Azerbaijani Presidential Aide Hikmet Hajiyev, one of the most influential figures in the Azerbaijani government, has conducted his first working visit to Armenia, meeting the Secretary of the Armenian Security Council Armen Grigoryan. This marks the second time a high-ranking Azerbaijani official has visited Armenia since the initialing of a peace deal in August 2025.

According to identical statements shared by both sides on Sunday, June 14, the two discussed the peace agenda between Armenia and Azerbaijan and exchanged views on confidence-building measures between the civil societies of the two countries.

> "THE IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINED BILATERAL DIALOGUE WAS UNDERSCORED IN THE CONTEXT OF EFFORTS AIMED AT PROMOTING LASTING PEACE AND STABILITY IN THE REGION"
>
> —ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN JOINT STATEMENT

"The importance of sustained bilateral dialogue was underscored in the context of efforts aimed at promoting lasting peace and stability in the region," the statement read.

The meeting took place in the resort town of Dilijan in Armenia's Tavush Province. After their discussions, the two also took a walk through the town, a video of which surfaced online.

The two sides also confirmed that the next meeting would take place in Azerbaijan.

Hajiyev's visit is among the highest-level visits by an Azerbaijani official to Armenia since the two countries initialed the peace treaty in Washington in August 2025. The agreement has yet to be signed as Azerbaijan continues to insist that the Armenian constitution first be amended, claiming that it contains territorial claims against Azerbaijan.

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Gerald Papasian's 'Wind In the Sassafras Branches' Opens in Yerevan

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ANNUAL SUMMER VACATION

The Armenian Mirror-Spectator will close for two weeks for its annual summer vacation.

The last issue will be that of June 27, while the first issue back is that of July 18. No newspapers will be published on July 4 or 11.

To our readers, please enjoy a safe and happy summer.

NEWS *from* ARMENIA

Prosecutors Seek Charges Against Kocharyan

YEREVAN (PanArmenian.net) — Former President Robert Kocharyan was banned from leaving Armenia on June 14 as Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan reaffirmed his pledges to imprison him and the leaders of other major opposition groups.

Kocharyan's office announced earlier in the day that he is leaving for Russia on a three-day private visit which it said had been planned beforehand. It said late in the evening that the leader of the opposition Hayastan alliance was "illegally and without any explanation" not allowed to board a flight to Moscow.

A news website controlled by Pashinyan's Civil Contract party was the first to report the travel ban. Pashinyan claimed shortly afterwards that Kocharyan and two other top opposition leaders will not be allowed to flee the country because he won a popular mandate to "bring to their knees" and "destroy" them.

Kocharyan's Hayastan, billionaire Samvel Karapetian's Strong Armenia alliance and the Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK) led by another wealthy businessman, Gagik Tsarukyan, were the ruling Civil Contract party's main election challengers. They refuse to recognize Civil Contract's victory in the polls, rejecting the official vote results as fraudulent. Several other opposition groups have also accused Pashinyan of rigging the elections.

Elections Were Not Fair, Opposition Says

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The opposition Wings of Unity political initiative will continue its activities following Armenia's June 7 parliamentary elections, expanding its presence in communities across the country, members of the group said at a news conference on June 16.

Armen Galstyan, of Wings of Unity, thanked voters who supported the initiative, as well as campaign staff, supporters and the leadership of the Shant alliance for their cooperation during the elections.

Addressing post-election developments, Wings of Unity member Liparit Drmeyan pointed out the group had rejected the election results in a statement issued on June 8. He said the initiative had challenged the voting results at all polling stations in Yerevan and submitted requests for recounts in several regions. According to Drmeyan, the group also plans to appeal to Armenia's Constitutional Court.

"Much is being said about the voting results, but we believe the election outcome does not reflect the genuine will of the voters," Drmeyan said. "Throughout the pre-election period, voters were subjected to measures by the Civil Contract party and the state institutions that prevented them from freely expressing their will."

Russia Calls Armenian Elections 'Questionable'

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

The head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Sergei Naryshkin has said Armenia's parliamentary elections were "in a certain sense, questionable." Russian President Vladimir Putin has yet to congratulate Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on his victory, breaking tradition as a longtime ally of Armenia.

"It's clear that it's complex. The elections weren't easy, so to speak. The results are relative and, in a certain sense, questionable. Therefore, these very, I would say, lively political processes will continue", Naryshkin told Russian state-run media TASS on Monday, the day after the final results of the elections were published.

According to the final results, the ruling Civil Contract party will hold 64 seats in parliament, while the opposition Strong Armenia party secured 29 seats and the Armenia Alliance won 12. Prosperous Armenia, another prominent opposition party led by tycoon Gagik Tsarukyan, failed to pass the 4 percent threshold required to enter parliament, receiving only 3.9893 percent of the vote.

The final results followed recounts at several hundred polling stations, as well as decisions by the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) to invalidate the voting results at three polling stations. The CEC further made a controversial decision not to organize repeat votes in those polling stations. Therefore, the ruling party has maintained the 3/5 majority necessary for appointing and dismissing key executive and judicial positions and changing constitutional law.

On Monday, June 15, Naryshkin further stressed the importance of maintaining bilateral "good relations", highlighting "that cooperation and collaboration develop across all areas — economics, humanitarian cooperation, military, and military-technical cooperation".

The remarks came amidst continued reluctance by Moscow to formally recognize the election's outcome, as ties between Armenia and its historic ally remain tense.

Instead, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said on 8 June that Moscow was monitoring reports of electoral violations and declined to comment on the vote, stating that Russia would wait for the final results.

Russian independent outlet Meduza has also reported, citing an employee of a major Kremlin-aligned media organization, that the Kremlin had instructed state-run and pro-government media to portray the outcome as a "loss" for Pashinyan, specifically using that wording. According to the report, officials also recommended highlighting alleged electoral violations in order to 'sow doubts about Pashinyan's legitimacy".

Ahead of the vote, Putin raised Russia's desire for "pro-Russian" groups to participate in the elections.

At the same time, Russia imposed a series of restrictions on Armenian exports, which many saw as economic pressure to influence the election outcome. Just days before the vote, Moscow recalled its ambassador to Armenia, Sergei Kopyrkin, for "consultations" over what Russian officials described as the Armenian leadership's steps toward rapprochement with the EU.

Kopyrkin returned to Yerevan only after the elections.

Following his return, during a reception marking Russia Day in Yerevan on June 12, Kopyrkin said that Armenian–Russian relations "have entered a phase of reassessment and adaptation to changing global and regional realities".

Kopyrkin also reaffirmed Moscow's readiness for "joint, constructive, and mutually beneficial cooperation based on the existing bilateral and multilateral mechanisms".

The event saw the attendance of several Armenian officials, including Parliamentary Speaker Alen Simonyan and Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan.

Despite Moscow's continued silence on the election outcome, Yerevan marked Russia Day with official congratulations, including a message from Pashinyan to Putin.

"I am convinced that the multifaceted ties between the people […] of Armenia and Russia […] as well as the mutual readiness for an open and constructive dialogue based on respect for each other's sovereignty and state interests, will continue to contribute to the strengthening of cooperation and the use of the full range of cooperation opportunities between our countries", Pashinyan's message read.

(This article originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on June 16.)

Armenian Opposition Groups Hint at 'Further Escalation' As Final Parliamentary Election Results Are Announced

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The opposition groups cited what they described as numerous violations, including the detention of opposition figures ahead of the vote, the authorities" use of administrative resources, and the invalidation of results at three polling stations.

At present, it remains unclear whether the two opposition blocs that entered parliament — Strong Armenia and the Armenia Alliance — will accept their mandates. Opposition representatives have indicated that their next step will be to challenge the results before the Constitutional Court.

In turn, the CEC defended its decision not to organize repeat voting in the three affected polling stations, noting that invalidated results do not automatically require a repeat vote. In particular, they highlighted that a partial repeat vote could encourage tactical voting, as voters would already be aware of the broader election results when casting their ballots.

Daniel Ioannisyan, a member of the Independent Observer alliance, criticized the decision. On behalf of the alliance, he called the CEC's choice not to launch a recount at the polling stations "clearly and manifestly unlawful."

Following the announcement of the results, opposition supporters staged a protest outside CEC headquarters. According to RFE/RL, one participant, Israel Hakobkokhyan, announced that he was beginning a hunger strike until new elections are held. Hakobkokhyan was wearing a T-shirt bearing a portrait of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Separately, Prosperous Armenia leader Gagik Tsarukyan has sued Pashinyan over remarks made during a press briefing in late May, in which the prime minister referred to him as a "criminal," 'spy," and "agent," among other accusations.

Tsarukyan is seeking 9 million drams ($23,000) in compensation for defamation and insult, as well as a public retraction.

Tsarukyan has also filed a lawsuit against the public broadcaster, seeking a total of 12 million drams ($31,000) in compensation over a report aired during the election campaign. The lawsuit argues that the broadcaster spread false information by suggesting that Prosperous Armenia had been created at the behest of another political force or individual.

At the same time, a number of opposition leaders, including Tsarukyan, Strong Armenia's Narek Karapetyan, and former President Robert Kocharyan have been barred from leaving Armenia for Russia following the elections.

On Sunday, June 14. a video showing Kocharyan undergoing a passport check at the airport began to circulate. Bagrat Mikoyan, head of Kocharyan's office, stated that Kocharyan had planned to travel for only three days on personal business and that authorities had "unlawfully blocked" his departure "without any justification."

"If any bootlicker of Aliyev can even imagine that President Kocharyan might flee the country, they are gravely mistaken. There is only one person who will flee Armenia, and that person is Aliyev's lapdog (if, of course, he is lucky enough to escape)," Mikoyan said, apparently in reference to Pashinyan.

In turn, Pashinyan published a video message calling on his political opponents not to "rush to pack your bags."

"I said during the election campaign that you would dream of having the opportunity to flee Armenia, and you would not have it," Pashinyan said.

Authorities have not publicly clarified the legal grounds on which the departures were reportedly prevented.

Separately, Gohar Vardanyan, a local civil official in the border village of Kirants, said she was pressured to submit a resignation letter after publishing a Facebook post disputing claims that Civil Contract's strong result in the village reflected local support.

Presenting voting data, Vardanyan argued on June 8 that the outcome was influenced not only by local residents but also by border guards, conscript soldiers, and other voters who do not permanently reside in the village.

"Dear authorities, you don't give a damn about these people [residents of Kirants]. The only thing that matters to you is showing that the people of Kirants are satisfied and grateful. And it doesn"t matter what these people actually think or feel," Vardanyan wrote.

She published what she described as her forced resignation statement on 12 June, though the document itself was dated 10 June, two days after her original post.

According to Vardanyan, the main reason for the pressure was a previous Facebook post that she had refused to delete.

Kirants became a focal point in spring 2024 during Armenia's border delimitation process with Azerbaijan.

Under an agreement reached between Yerevan and Baku, Armenia returned control over several Soviet-era border areas in the Tavush region that had been held by Armenian forces since the early 1990s. The process resulted in the demarcation of sections of the Armenia–Azerbaijan border near Kirants and neighboring villages.

The decision sparked weeks of protests in Tavush and Yerevan, led by Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan and the opposition-led Tavush for the Motherland movement. Demonstrators accused the government of making unilateral territorial concessions and organized road blockades, marches, and rallies demanding Pashinyan's resignation.

(This article originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on June 15.)

ARMENIA

FAST and AMAA Launch Second Annual AI Careers Camp in Hankavan

PARAMUS, N.J. — More than 460 high school students from Armenia and the diaspora have gathered in Hankavan for the second annual AI Careers Camp, a first-of-its-kind initiative designed to help young people explore the rapidly evolving world of artificial intelligence and future careers.

Organized by the Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology (FAST) in partnership with the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA Armenia), the camp brings together participants ages 14 to 17 for an immersive summer experience that combines career exploration, speed networking with AI professionals and traditional camp activities.

The initiative builds on FAST's Generation AI High School Project, which integrates advanced AI education into Armenia's public school system and extends learning opportunities beyond the classroom. It offers students an opportunity to discover AI-related professions, explore real-world applications of AI across industries, identify their strengths and develop personalized pathways for academic and professional growth.

"Helping young people envision and prepare for their future is essential," said Suzanna Shamakhyan, executive director of FAST.

"The camp has a strong career-guidance focus. It takes participants on a journey from self-discovery and skills development to speed-dating sessions with AI professionals. We want participants to discover their strengths and explore new career pathways opening up with the advancement of AI."

As co-organizers, FAST leads the camp's educational content, while AMAA ensures a vibrant daily program filled with games, competitions, and recreational activities.



Participants in the Hankavan AI Careers Camp

"Education does not begin and end in the classroom," said Aren Deyirmenjian, AMAA Representative in Armenia.

"At Hankavan, we strive to create an environment where young people can discover their talents, build skills that will serve them throughout their lives, and develop new aspirations for the future. Our partnership with FAST enriches that mission with knowledge in the field of AI."

New this year is a three-day Entrepreneurial AI Camp, delivered in collaboration with Berlin-based IMPACT Week, an organization that has provided training for global companies including Lufthansa and Mercedes Benz. The program introduces students to design thinking, equipping them with skillset to transform ideas into real-world solutions.

This year's camp also welcomes ID-Bank as its Financial Literacy Partner, delivering interactive workshops that equip participants with financial knowledge and skills for the future. Complementing these efforts, Nairi Insurance has provided accident insurance coverage for all attendees, supporting student safety and well-being.

AMAA and FAST are founding members of the 405 Educational Alliance, a collaborative network of Armenia's leading educational organizations.

Armenian Village Official 'Forced to Quit' After Claiming Vote Manipulation

By Karine Simonian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A local government employee in a border village in northern Armenia claims to have been forced to resign after dismissing as misleading the official results of the June 7 parliamentary elections in her community.

They showed the ruling Civil Contract party winning 55 percent of votes cast in the village of Kirants that lost large swathes of land as a result of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's territorial concessions to Azerbaijan in 2024. Many local residents protested against the unilateral handover at the time, triggering massive anti-government demonstrations in Yerevan.

Pashinyan's political allies said the vote result demonstrates that most Kirants residents now support the Armenian government's appeasement policy towards Azerbaijan. Gohar Vartanyan, who has worked for years at the village administration, dismissed those statements in a June 8 Facebook post. The ruling party prevailed there only because of soldiers and border guards forced to vote for it in the local polling station, she claimed, urging opposition supporters in Yerevan to stop berating her fellow villagers.

"Dear government, you don't give a damn about our people," wrote Vartanyan. "For you, the important thing is to show that people in Kirants are happy and grateful. Never mind what these people actually think and feel. Dear opposition people, stop making ordinary people scapegoats and try to look for problems elsewhere."

The young woman, who has repeatedly criticized the government in the past, claims that she was ordered to resign after refusing to delete the post. In her resignation letter dated June 10, she said that she "can no longer be part of this morally corrupt system that violates my right to free speech."

"I know that they wanted to fire me before, but this [post] was probably the last straw for them," Vartanyan told RFE/RL's Armenian Service at the weekend.

"Their goal was to show that like in other border villages, people in Kirants are satisfied ... and voted for the authorities," she said. "But my post showed the opposite."

Vartanyan declined to specify who ordered her to quit her job. In her words, her immediate superior has also tendered resignation. She would say whether that superior is the village administration chief, Kamo Shahinian.

Kirants is part of a district comprising Pashinyan's hometown of Ijevan. The district administration headed by Civil Contract member Artur Chagharyan has not yet commented on Vartanyan's claims. Chagharyan did not answer weekend phone calls from RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

The Armenian opposition has rejected as fraudulent the nationwide election results giving victory to Pashinyan's party. Pashinyan has denied the fraud claims and accused his main election challengers of having bought hundreds of thousands of votes.

Armenian Monitors Also Reject Election Results

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"We didn't expect the CEC to break the law to such an extent," said the Independent Observer coordinator, Daniel Ioannisyan.

The CEC controversially scrapped last week's vote results in three precincts, preventing the opposition Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK) from clearing a 4 percent legal threshold for having parliament seats. The commission refused to order a rerun of the elections in those precincts when it approved the final results on Sunday.

As a result, the ruling party will have a more comfortable parliamentary majority required for enacting key laws and installing senior law-enforcement officials and judges. Armenian opposition leaders accused the CEC of deliberately making sure that the BHK is not represented in the National Assembly.

Vahagn Hovakimyan, a longtime Pashinyan collaborator heading the CEC, did not deny that when he explained the decision in a statement issued on Monday. Hovakimyan said that a repeat election in the three precincts would have led to "tactical voting," presumably by supporters of other opposition forces eager to help the BHK enter the parliament. He claimed that this would have given then an unfair advantage over other voters who did not know on June 7 "what impact their vote would have on the final outcome."

Ioannisyan brushed aside the explanation, arguing that the BHK already won on June 7 enough votes in the three polling stations to clear the 4 percent threshold. He insisted that the CEC decision runs counter to the Armenian Electoral Code. The new parliament will lack legitimacy unless the Constitutional Court will overturn the decision, added Ioannisyan.

The BHK as well as the opposition Hayastan and Strong Armenia blocs, which did much better in the polls, are planning to appeal to the court. Their leaders seem skeptical about the outcome of their appeal, mindful of the fact that eight of the court's nine justices have been installed by Pashinyan's party.

A representative of another vote-monitoring group, Akanates (Eyewitness), also criticized the CEC for not re-running the elections in the three rural precincts.

"I find that decision very controversial first and foremost in terms of public trust in the electoral process and in terms of the legitimacy of the elections," Meri Minasian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

ARMENIA

INTERNATIONAL

Pashinyan Says Conflict with Azerbaijan Over

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on June 16 that Armenia's long-running conflict with Azerbaijan has come to an end, declaring that peace between the two neighbors is now firmly established.

The year "2025 was the year when we fully recognized that peace had been achieved — the end of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan," Pashinyan told lawmakers in parliament.

He added that Armenia's June 7 parliamentary elections gave legitimacy to that peace.

Armenian and French Defense Ministers Meet

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan met French Minister for the Armed Forces and Veterans Catherine Vautrin in Paris on June 16.

According to Papikyan, Vautrin congratulated him on the victory of the Civil Contract party in Armenia's parliamentary elections. In a post on Facebook, the Armenian defense minister said the two sides praised the current level of Armenia-France cooperation and stressed the importance of further strengthening and expanding the established partnership.

Lavrov, Fidan Discuss Peace Process

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan discussed the situation in the South Caucasus and the ongoing peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan during talks in Moscow on June 16.

According to a statement by the Turkish foreign minister, the issue was among the key topics addressed during the meeting.

Rubinyan: Armenia Will Be Able to Trade Directly With Turkey

YEREVAN (ARKA) — Armenia will now be able to trade directly with Turkey and use the Akhalkalaki (Georgia) – Kars (Turkey) railway, stated Ruben Rubinyan, Deputy Speaker of the Armenian Parliament and Armenia's envoy to Turkey.

"Indeed, very important events have occurred. First of all, direct trade between Armenia and Turkey has become possible. Previously, such an opportunity was absent between the two countries in a customs sense," Rubinyan said at a briefing on June 16.

According to him, import procedures from Armenia to Turkey and from Turkey to Armenia will now be significantly simpler and faster.

"Armenia will also be able to use the Akhalkalaki-Kars railway." Business entities will be able to use it for both bilateral trade and transit. This creates conditions for the transportation of goods to Europe and Syria," Rubinyan noted.

EP Lawmakers Push to Harden Turkey Report over Human Rights Violations And Pressure on Opposition

ANKARA (Stockholm Center for Freedom) — European Parliament (EP) lawmakers from several political groups are seeking sharper criticism of Turkey's rule-of-law and human rights record before a vote this week on an EP report expected to say Ankara's European Union accession path remains blocked by democratic backsliding, judicial interference and pressure on the opposition.

According to the Bianet news website, the proposed amendments would toughen the report's language on prosecutions of opposition figures, the removal of elected mayors, media freedom and Turkey's ties with Hamas.

They also show that criticism of Ankara comes from different political directions: liberal, socialist and green lawmakers focus heavily on democratic backsliding and judicial pressure, while right-wing groups emphasize issues including EU funding, migration, Hamas, Cyprus and ending accession talks.

The push came on June 16, one day before the scheduled vote on the European Parliament's "Report on the 2025 Commission report on Türkiye," a nonbinding text prepared by the parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee in response to the European Commission's annual assessment of Turkey, on June 17. However, the report carries political weight because it sets out the EP's position on Turkey's long-stalled EU membership bid and on whether closer EU-Turkey cooperation should remain tied to democratic reforms.

Turkey rejected the European Commission's underlying 2025 report as biased, saying its criticism of the judiciary, fundamental rights and domestic political developments was prejudiced and unfounded. Turkish officials have also criticized parts of the European Parliament process, including proposed sanctions language targeting senior officials.

The core report says Turkey's accession process cannot move forward under current conditions, citing continued deterioration in the rule of law, fundamental rights and judicial independence. Several amendments seek to sharpen that language, arguing that EU-Turkey relations cannot be normalized outside a framework based on democracy, rights and the rule of law.

Amendments from Renew Europe and the Socialists and Democrats criticize what they describe as state interference in the internal affairs of Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). They cite a May 21 ruling by an Ankara regional appeals court that removed the party's current leadership, annulled its 2023 congress and restored former party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's previous leadership.

The amendments also refer to a May 24 police raid on CHP headquarters and warn that such actions could mark a shift from already limited political competition toward full authoritarian rule.

The draft report and proposed amendments also focus on jailed Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, a leading opposition figure and the strongest presidential challenger. Lawmakers cite a roughly 4,000-page indictment prepared under former Istanbul chief public prosecutor Akın Gürlek, which seeks up to 2,430 years in prison for İmamoğlu on 142 charges.

The text also condemns the annulment of İmamoğlu's university diploma and a separate indictment accusing him of "political espionage." The case has become one of the main examples cited by European lawmakers who accuse Turkish authorities of using the judiciary to weaken the opposition.

One proposed amendment calls for targeted sanctions on Gürlek, who was later appointed justice minister. The amendment describes him as responsible for the indictment against İmamoğlu and refers to him as "notorious."

Local democracy is another central issue. The amendments say 39 mayors have been removed since March 2024, including 29 from the CHP and 10 from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party). They also cite the appointment of state trustees to 13 municipalities and a requirement for presidential approval of municipal companies as signs of the erosion of local autonomy.

Turkey has previously defended trustee appointments by citing terrorism-related investigations, particularly in municipalities won by pro-Kurdish parties. Rights groups and opposition parties say the practice overrides voters' choices and undermines local democracy.

Media freedom and freedom of expression also feature prominently. The transfer of broadcaster TELE1 to a trustee is described in the amendments as an attack on media freedom. The detention of Deutsche Welle reporter Alican Uludağ, the arrest of journalist Merdan Yanardağ on espionage charges and the arrest of BirGün reporter İsmail Arı on disinformation charges are cited as examples of pressure on the press.

Several amendments also address religious freedom. Lawmakers criticize the deportation or denial of re-entry of hundreds of Christian pastors, missionaries and their families who were labeled national security threats under N-82 and G-87 codes.

Amendments from the European Conservatives and Reformists group also refer to what they call the genocide of 3.5 million Christians in the last century.

The report welcomes steps toward the possible reopening of the Halki seminary, an Orthodox Christian theological school near Istanbul that has been closed since 1971, and calls for the remaining obstacles to be removed.

Foreign policy disputes remain another major part of the debate. Conservative amendments describe killings, rapes, enforced disappearances and mass displacement during Turkey's 1974 military intervention in Cyprus as war crimes.

The amendments also refer to allegations that Turkish forces harassed an aircraft carrying Greek, French and Dutch ministers to EU meetings in Cyprus. Turkey has previously denied similar allegations involving its military activity around Cyprus and the eastern Mediterranean.

The text also criticizes Turkey's warning that any Greek move to extend its territorial waters to 12 nautical miles would be considered a cause for war, calling such a threat unacceptable between allies.

Turkey's "Blue Homeland" doctrine is also criticized. The doctrine refers to Turkey's maritime claims in the Aegean, Mediterranean and Black Sea, a policy Greece and Cyprus view as expansionist.

EU funding is another target for right-wing groups. The Europe of Sovereign Nations group says Turkey will have received more than 24 billion euros in EU support through pre-accession and migration funds by 2027. It calls for accession talks to be formally closed and replaced with a strategic partnership. The far-right Patriots for Europe group also calls for cuts to pre-accession funding.

The Europe of Sovereign Nations group also accuses Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs, known as the Diyanet, of building a religious, educational and social influence network in Europe by training Turkish youths in Turkey for activities in EU countries.

Turkey's relations with Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood-linked networks are also cited. Amendments from Renew, the European Conservatives and Reformists and Patriots for Europe accuse Turkey of active support for Hamas, which is on the EU's terrorist list, and of providing financial, media and logistical support for Muslim Brotherhood networks.

But the amendments also show that criticism of Ankara does not come from one shared ideological position.

The Europe of Sovereign Nations group proposes removing several criticisms of Turkey's record on women's rights and LGBTI+ rights. The group argues that Turkey is a culturally and socially conservative country and says the EU should respect its national identity. It also wants the report to treat bans on Istanbul Pride and restrictions on gender-transition treatment as domestic matters.

Renew Europe proposes that the European Commission work with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Council of Europe to establish a stronger monitoring mechanism for Turkey's 2028 general election.

The group says the findings should be used to assess whether Turkey's formally frozen accession process can continue or whether it has effectively come to an end.

The Left group, meanwhile, opposes treating Turkey as a safe country of origin for asylum purposes, arguing that widespread human rights violations, political repression and arbitrary arrests mean Turkey does not meet the required criteria.

Such a designation could make asylum claims by Turkish citizens subject to accelerated procedures and a presumption that claims are unfounded, though cases must still be individually assessed.

The report also recognizes Turkey's growing role in European defense. It notes that Turkey is one of the world's leading drone producers and that Turkish drone companies have expanded industrial and technological cooperation with firms across the EU.

The vote comes as EU institutions continue to seek cooperation with Turkey on migration, security, trade and regional conflicts, while the EP remains one of the bloc's sharpest critics of Ankara's domestic rights record.

For Turkey, the report is unlikely to change the legal status of accession talks. But it is expected to reinforce a political message that has become increasingly dominant in Brussels: Ankara's path toward EU accession remains blocked as long as democratic backsliding, judicial interference and pressure on opposition politics continue.

INTERNATIONAL

Azerbaijan: Exiled Critics Convicted in Absentia

BERLIN — Azerbaijani authorities are prosecuting critics in exile, often based on social media posts and online commentary, Human Rights Watch said on June 10. Those targeted, often convicted in absentia with long sentences, are at risk of extradition, detention during travel, and other forms of cross-border pressure.

"These trials of government critics abroad lack all credibility and due process, and are simply intended to silence them," said Giorgi Gogia, deputy Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Azerbaijani authorities appear to manufacture criminal cases from online speech so they can use them to pursue critics far beyond its borders."

Human Rights Watch reviewed eight verdicts issued by the Baku Courts for Serious Crimes between July 2025 and March 2026 in trials held in absentia. The courts convicted and sentenced Azerbaijanis living in Europe and the United States to between 6 and 16 years in prison in proceedings that relied heavily on the opinions of government-appointed forensic experts and involved state-appointed lawyers who had no contact with the absent defendants.

The cases reflect a broader shift in Azerbaijan's efforts to silence dissent beyond its borders. Amendments to the Criminal Procedures Code adopted in December 2023 introduced in absentia criminal proceedings for the first time. The new framework has enabled courts to turn online speech into criminal convictions that can later serve as the basis for extradition requests, detention during international travel, or asset seizures.

Azerbaijani law formally allows a person convicted in absentia to request a new trial if they return to the country or are extradited. However, this offers little practical protection to exiled critics, who would face immediate detention and the prospect of challenging their convictions before the same judicial system that convicted them on dubious evidence in their absence.

For more than a decade, Azerbaijan has systematically imprisoned independent journalists, civil society activists, and political opposition figures.

Human Rights Watch reviewed in absentia convictions involving individuals living in France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. While the facts varied, they shared strikingly similar hallmarks. Prosecutors relied heavily on often years-old social media posts, YouTube broadcasts, and other online commentary. Courts accepted conclusions by government-appointed forensic experts purporting to determine whether the content was criminal; and state-appointed lawyers provided little or no meaningful defense.

One of the clearest examples is the case of Altay Goyushov, a historian and academic living in France. On February 18, the Baku Court for Serious Crimes convicted him under article 281.2 of the Criminal Code of publicly calling for the violent seizure of power and sentenced him to six years in prison. The prosecution's evidence consisted of a YouTube livestream broadcast in 2020, and two Facebook posts published in 2024 and 2025, discussing popular uprisings in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine, with political commentary and historical comparisons, and criticizing the Azerbaijani government.

The same day, the court also sentenced a political analyst Arastun Oruclu, who lives in New York, to eight years in prison on similar charges. Prosecutors cited YouTube videos in which Oruclu said that citizens should continue their struggle for accountability and that the government should either respond to public demands or leave office.

First Shipment of Armenian Flowers Reaches Ukraine

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The first shipment of Armenian flowers has arrived in Ukraine. A truck carrying 9,500 flowers was exported to the country, and a second truck loaded with approximately the same quantity is expected to arrive in Ukraine soon.

Marat Hakobyan, a political analyst based in Kyiv, said the importer of the Armenian flowers is an Armenian businessman living in Ukraine, Armenpress reports.

According to Hakobyan, the first shipment of Armenian flowers delivered to Ukraine has already been almost completely sold, while the second truck is expected to reach the country in the coming days.

He also noted that videos have already begun circulating on social media in which flower shop owners showcase the Armenian flowers they received and announce the start of sales.

Against the backdrop of Russia's ban on imports of Armenian flowers, Armenia is continuing to diversify its export markets. The country has already exported another shipment of 5,500 flowers to Latvia.

On June 7, Dutch Foreign Minister Thom Berendsen stated that the world's largest international floriculture marketplace had opened its doors to Armenian flower producers by connecting them with buyers across Europe and beyond.

The Dutch foreign minister wrote that his country supports the European Union assistance package for Armenia announced on June 4 by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

"We examined how we could practically support affected sectors such as Armenian flower production. As a result, Royal FloraHolland — the world's largest flower marketplace — is now opening its market to Armenian flower producers and connecting them with buyers in Europe and beyond," he wrote.

Azerbaijani Presidential Aide Hajiyev Visits Armenia

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Following the initialing of the treaty in August 2025, the two countries have conducted several reciprocal visits involving officials, civil society representatives, and analysts.

The highest-level exchanges before Hajiyev's trip were the mutual visits by Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan and Azerbaijani Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev, who each chair their country's border delimitation commissions.

The first mutual visits came in September 2025, shortly after the Washington summit. This was followed by meetings firstly in Azerbaijan's Gabala in November 2025 and then in Aghveran, Armenia in April 2026.

Aside from Grigoryan, Andranik Simonyan, the Chief of the National Security Service (NSS), visited Azerbaijan in September 2025 and participated in the third iteration of the International Security Forum in Baku.

At that time, the Armenian tabloid media Hraparak cited an unnamed "trusted source" as saying that during his visit to Baku, Simonyan handed the Azerbaijani side a list of 10 Armenian detainees whom they requested to be released "within the framework of the normalization of bilateral relations."

Hraparak also published the names of those allegedly on the list, highlighting that the former leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh were not included.

In turn, Azerbaijan reportedly demanded the release of two Syrian nationals, Muhrab Muhammad al-Shkheir and Yousef Alabed al-Hajj, who were captured during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

The release of four Armenians and the Syrian detainees took place months later, in January 2026.

Currently, Azerbaijan holds 19 Armenians in custody, among them former Nagorno-Karabakh political and military leaders.

(This article originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on June 15.)



Azerbaijani Presidential Aide Hikmet Hajiyev (left) and Armenian Security Council Secretary Armen Grigoryan (right) meet in Armenia on June 14, 2026 (official photo)

Georgian Dream's Youth Branch Joins Azerbaijani Ruling Party Conference in Karabakh

By Mikheil Gvadzabia

Members of the ruling Georgian Dream party's youth organization have travelled to the city of Shusha (Shushi) in Nagorno-Karabakh to participate in a conference organized by Azerbaijan's ruling New Azerbaijan party. During the conference, the organization's head, a judoka-turned-MP Varlam Liparteliani, gave a speech in a panel discussion.

Referring to the event on Monday, June 15, as an international conference, the Azerbaijani state news agency Azertac reported that it was titled "Regional Contribution to Global Security: Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus." Aydin Karimov, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's representative in Shusha, noted during the opening that life is returning to the "liberated territories" and that "children's laughter can be heard in schools and kindergartens."

The panel discussion in which Liparteliani participated focused on "Post-conflict Reconstruction: Modern Challenges in Urban Planning."

"Georgia's objective remains unchanged: the peaceful de-occupation of our territories and the creation of a safe, inclusive, and sustainable living environment for all citizens, including those who lost their homes and native communities as a result of the conflicts", Liparteliani said, as quoted by the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB).

According to Azertac, other speakers at the session included representatives of Tajikistan's ruling People's Democratic Party, Serbia's ruling Serbian Progressive Party, Belarus's major pro-government party Belaya Rus, and the Democratic Party of Turks of Macedonia — a small, Turkish minority-oriented party in North Macedonia.

Liparteliani, 37, retired from judo in 2021 and entered parliament on behalf of Georgian Dream following the disputed parliamentary elections of October 2024.

In February 2025, amidst the opposition's boycott of parliament, he was one of three ruling-party MPs who formally left Georgian Dream and announced plans to form a "healthy opposition" within the legislature. However, he returned to Georgian Dream in June of the same year and, in December, was appointed chair of the party's youth organization.

Georgian Dream's youth organization and actions of its members has been the subject of controversy on several occasions, with its members accused of engaging in violence against government critics.

In one of the most recent incidents, in September 2025, Giorgi Shukvani, a youth leader of the ruling party, was filmed spitting at female protesters, as well as a female journalist, during an anti-government rally in central Tbilisi.

(This article originally appeared on the website www.oc-media.org on June 15.)

Community News

East Coast Armenian Community Gathers To Support Armenian EyeCare Project's Sight Saving Mission

LEXINGTON, Mass. — In May, more than two dozen supporters gathered at the Lexington home of Harry Glorikian and Katrina Menzigian for an intimate event highlighting the ongoing impact of Armenian EyeCare Project (AECP). Hosted in a warm and welcoming setting, guests enjoyed traditional Armenian cuisine and fine wine donated by the Khachen Wines before hearing a presentation from AECP Vice President, Dr. John Hovanesian.

The evening opened with a video from AECP Founder and President Dr. Roger Ohanesian, who welcomed the guests and paid special tribute to longtime supporter Leon Semonian, who is celebrating his 95th birthday this year. Adding a touch of humor, Hovanesian noted that he and the host Harry Glorikian proudly belong to the "exclusive club of BABE: Bald Armenians with Blue Eyes."



Dr. John Hovanesian (left), Leon Semonian (middle) and Paul Semonian (right)

In his remarks, Hovanesian reflected on the organization's 33-year journey, beginning with volunteer physicians traveling to Armenia at their own expense to provide urgently needed care. Over time, AECP's work evolved into a comprehensive, capacitybuilding model that has trained Armenia's ophthalmologists to become national leaders in their field.

He highlighted several milestones, including:

* The Mobile Eye Hospital, which has delivered free, highquality care to rural and underserved communities for more than two decades.

* The nearelimination of retinopathy of prematurity in Armenia under the leadership of Dr. Tom Lee.

* The establishment of ten regional eye clinics and diagnostic centers, bringing advanced ophthalmic services closer to patients who previously traveled long distances for specialty care.

* A sustainable financial model in which regional centers are operated by local physicians, allowing revenue from paying patients to support care for those who cannot afford it.

The evening concluded with a video featuring one of AECP's young patients whose sight and future were restored through timely intervention. The story served as a powerful reminder of the human impact behind AECP's mission to fight blindness

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Marc Toureille visiting Armenia with his mother Diane Kupelian

Floortime USA Expands to Armenia to Help Children with Special Needs

By Haykaram Nahapetyan
Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent

BETHESDA, Md. — Jake Greenspan began working with children with special needs while he was still a high school student. As the son of Dr. Stanley Greenspan, who developed the Floortime methodology for treating children with autism and developmental disabilities, Jake said that he was involved from an early age "working with interns and doing direct research."

In 2010, together with a colleague, Jake established the Floortime Center in Bethesda, Maryland. Today, Floortime is expanding its reach to Armenia.

"We founded the Floortime Center and we were providing Floortime therapy every day, often for eight hours at a time, we began bringing in more therapists. One of them is Marc Toureille, who is Armenian and has recently been working to make Floortime more accessible in Armenia," Jake noted.

Marc Toureille is perhaps better known as the hip-hop artist Marc 2Ray. He has written and performed songs about the Armenian Genocide and the resilience of the Armenian people, including appearance at Armenian Genocide commemoration event in Times Square, New York. While his music has brought him public recognition, Toureille's every-day job is that of a therapist. He has been working with Floortime for the past 12 years.

"In 2024, during a visit to Armenia, I had the opportunity to give a presentation at the Emili Aregak Center for Children with Special Needs in Gyumri and work with their staff," Marc said, recalling how his cooperation with colleagues in Armenia began.

Over time, that cooperation expanded. Marc donated part of the proceeds from his Honoring the Hye music video to Emili Aregak "to support the important work they do."

Jake also visited Armenia in 2024 to attend the wedding of an Armenian friend. As he recalls, he fell in love with the country and its people, "who are so friendly and warm." Upon returning to the United States, he began seriously considering ways to support Armenia's professional community in the field of developmental therapy.

Now Jake is preparing for another visit. Next week, he will travel to Armenia to work with the ArBeS Pediatric Rehabilitation and Development Center in Yerevan.

"We are trying to spread my father's work as far and wide as possible," Jake said.

As part of this effort, the team is working on translating Jake's "The Floortime Manual" into Armenian.

"I hope this will lead to additional trips to Armenia. My goal is not to turn this into some big business in Yerevan. My goal is to hand this off to passionate and caring professionals in Armenia," Jake summarized.

An accompanying video segment at mirrorspectator.com includes footage from the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*'s interviews with Jake Greenspan and Marc Toureille.

Society for Armenian Studies Spring 2026 Graduate Research And Conference Grants Recipients

FRESNO — The Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) announced recently the recipients of its Spring 2026 Graduate Research and Conference Grants. The recipients are Armen Manuk-Khaloyan, for his paper on "Whose Empire? Late Ottoman Armenian and Greek Cultural Discourses and the Reshaping of Empire," presented at the 6th Mid-Atlantic Ottomanist conference held at Rutgers University in April 2026 and Diana Yayloyan, for her archival and library research for her dissertation, "Fugitive Ecologies in the Ottoman Borderlands: 1870-late 1930."

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

SAS President Barlow Der Mugrdechian congratulated each of the awardees. "SAS is continuing in its mission to support such promising young scholars. Their fields of research demonstrate the multi-disciplinary aspect of Armenian Studies," said Der Mugrdechian. "We encourage other young scholars to join SAS."

Recipients expressed their thoughts on their awards.



"I am deeply grateful for being awarded the Society for Armenian Studies travel grant. For years, the Society has made it possible for scholars to share their findings at conferences and other professional venues, and I am delighted that I was afforded the opportunity to present my latest research regarding Ottoman Armenian history. As the field of Armenian Studies continues to grows in stature and importance, so it remains incumbent upon us not only to maintain support but to expand such initiatives," said Manuk-Khaloyan.



"I am very grateful to the Society for Armenian Studies for awarding me the Graduate Research Grant and enabling me to conduct archival research in Paris, which is essential for my dissertation 'Fugitive Ecologies in the Ottoman Borderlands, 1870–late 1930s.' The dissertation asks how contests across the Ottoman-Transcaucasus borderlands over terrain, mobility and property regime shaped both the everyday lives of communities, and the broader processes of imperial and post-imperial transformation across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries," said Yayloyan.

The Society of Armenian Studies is an international body, composed of scholars and students, whose aims are to promote the study of Armenian culture and society, including history, language, literature, and social, political, and economic questions; to facilitate the exchange of scholarly

see GRANTS, page 7

COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Bar Association Hosts NY Public Servants Dinner, Commemorates Genocide

NEW YORK — The Armenian Bar Association hosted its annual Public Servants Dinner at the historic Yale Club of New York City on April 23, honoring the courage, endeavors, and sacrifices of all public servants. This year's Public Servants Honorees were the prominent civil rights attorney, Armen H. Merjian, and Administrative Judge of the New York State Unified Court System Joseph A. Zayas. The event brought together the leadership of the New York Courts, administrative and supervising judges, appellate and trial court judges, members of the federal judiciary, distinguished public servants, leaders of bar associations, and prominent attorneys.

Judge Frank (Hagopian) Caruso and Judge Deborah H. Karalunas served as the masters of ceremony. Following the national anthems performed by Hasmik Mekanejian and Anahit Zakaryan, Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, the Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, led the opening prayer.

Karalunas set the stage by delivering the opening statement, noting that the event is held on the eve of the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day and that "[f]or the Armenian people, public service is more than a professional calling; it is a moral one, reflective of our belief that the world will prosper when we stand united to promote justice and compassion, and protect one another's dignity."

Robert H. Tembeckjian, administrator and counsel to the NYS Commission on Judicial Conduct, delivered remarks recalling his native Armenian dialect from Tigranakert, and remembering the survivors of the Genocide who rose "up from the ashes of mass prosecution to write poetry, compose operas, build enterprises, churches, and schools all over the world."

Souren A. Israelyan spoke on behalf of the organizing committee, acknowledging the prior honorees of the Public Servants Dinner and the sponsors of the event, whose generosity made the event possible.

The remarks on behalf of the New York State Bar Association were delivered by its immediate past president Kathleen M. Sweet. She congratulated the honorees whose "work while challenging and undervalued, and more often than not thankless, is recognized here tonight."

Mekanejian, a mezzo-soprano, and Zakaryan, a soprano, with the piano accompaniment of Diana Gabrielyan, treated the audience with a stellar performance of classical Armenian, Italian, and Broadway songs.

At the presentation of the Public Servant Awards, Judge Claire Chadirjian Cecchi introduced Merjian. He is one of the leading civil rights attorneys in the United States, and likely the most significant advocate for those who suffer from HIV/AIDS. In 2025, Amelia Hanibelsz, an award-winning filmmaker, produced a documentary short about Merjian titled "The Good Fight." The film has won 10 awards in international film festivals. With the filmmaker's permission, a segment of the film was shown during the event.



The Public Servants Dinner



From left, Judge Deborah H. Karalunas, Judge Joseph A. Zayas and Souren A. Israelyan

During his remarks, Merjian shared that all four of his grandparents were orphans of the Armenian Genocide, and his Armenian heritage shaped who he is. He declared: "I am lawyer because I am an Armenian." He added: "To be an Armenian and conscious of your history is to be in a constant quest for justice for those who have nothing."

Karalunas introduced Judge Zayas. He is the chief administrative judge of the State of New York, the highest-ranking administrative position within the New York State Judiciary, overseeing the day-to-day administration and operations of 3,300 state and local judges and 17,000 non-judicial employees in over 300 locations across the state.

During his remarks, Zayas expressed that he "wanted to understand the reasons why Armenians place such a high value in public service." His enquiry elucidated that Armenians are deeply connected with their heritage, and the history of their own suffering creates a "moral bridge" with the struggles of others. "The 'moral bridge' that is 'uniquely Armenian' is aligned with our country's highest ideals and embodied in our constitutions, the rule of law, and judicial precedents. Armenians understand, as much as anyone, how quickly these ideals and principles can collapse into authoritarianism and tyranny if not vigorously guarded." He underscored: "I can only hope that our democracy and the rule of law are as resilient as your great heritage."

Jenny Rivera, an associate judge of the New York Court of Appeals, delivered the closing statement. Judge Rivera shared that because of her Puerto Rican heritage and her family's experiences, "I really do appreciate the Armenian concerns of maintaining identity, preserving culture and language; your commitment to justice, to human rights, to the rule of law, and of course, to the norms of international law speaks very deeply to me."

The event was closed by a benediction delivered by Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, the Prelate of the Eastern Armenian Prelacy of the United States.

On the following day, April 24, both New York Governor Kathy Hochul and New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani commemorated the Armenian Genocide. Governor Hochul proclaimed April 24, 2026, as Armenian Remembrance Day.

East Coast Armenian Community Gathers to Support Armenian EyeCare Project's Sight Saving Mission

ACEP, from page 6
and deliver compassionate, sightsaving care across Armenia.

The Lexington gathering underscored the commitment of the ArmenianAmerican community and friends of Armenia who believe in expanding access to sightsaving care. AECP welcomes all who wish to join this movement.

For more information about AECP's programs or to support its mission, visit www.eyecareproject.com.



Dr. John Hovanesian (left, standing) and Mrs. Tanya Hovanesian (right, sitting) with event attendees

Society for Armenian Studies Spring 2026 Graduate Research And Conference Grants Recipients

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information pertaining to Armenian studies around the world; and to sponsor panels and conferences on Armenian studies.

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

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

OBITUARY

IN MEMORIAM

Wolfgang Gust

Noted German Scholar of Armenian Genocide



By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The German journalist, genocide researcher, author, and valued friend Wolfgang Gust died peacefully on June 9, surrounded by his family at his home in Hamburg. He was 91. He embodied a rare combination of intellectual curiosity and rigor with a compassionate commitment to historical truth and justice. With the fruits of decades-long research conducted together with his wife Sigrid, he educated specialists as well as the general public and contributed decisively to the 2016 recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the German Bundestag (Parliament).

He was born on April 9, 1935, in Hanover, just two years after Hitler's seizure of power and grew up during the traumatic



Wolfgang Gust and his wife in 2017

period of World War II, his city ravaged by extensive bombardments. On completion of his secondary education, Wolfgang, who was an exceptional athlete, decided against a career in professional sports, and entered university. He studied Business Administration in Bonn and Hamburg, then Romance Languages and Culture (Romanistik) in Freiburg and Toulouse (France).

In 1965, he joined the Paris office of Der Spiegel, Germany's leading news magazine, first at the Economics Desk then, in 1970, as Chief Correspondent in Paris, and in 1977, Foreign News Editor in Hamburg. Beginning in 1980 he was director of the Spiegel Book department for its duration, and in 1993 entered early retirement to pursue activity as an independent journalist, researcher, and author.

In Gust's own account, he happened upon the story of the Armenian Genocide by pure chance. While in France in the late 1980s, he read Le ciel était noir sur l'Euphrat by Jacques der Alexanian (1988), a book about the horrors of persecution something he had encountered in Holocaust literature but here, for the first time, it was about an Armenian. When he searched for secondary source material on the genocide, he found some post-1918 German works, but almost nothing published after 1945.

On the basis of what material he did find, he authored a series of three articles in Der Spiegel in 1992 that dealt with the Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict and Armenian Genocide. In the following year he published Der Völkermord an den Armeniern. Die Tragödie des ältesten Christenvolks der Welt (The Armenian Genocide: The Tragedy of the Oldest Christian People in the World). With this first book he sought to use his journalistic skills to introduce a broad readership to the results of available studies in modern European languages.

Work on primary sources came later; together with his wife, Sigrid, he spent years copying the original German diplomatic correspondence from government archives during the genocide. Titled Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16. Dokumente aus dem politischen Archiv des deutschen Auswärtigen Amts (The Armenian Genocide 1915/1916. Documents from the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office), it would appear later in Turkish (2012) and English (2014). This voluminous work required meticulous, time-consuming work, including deciphering handwritten Imperial-era cursive script (Süttelin), a task that his dedicated wife accomplished until serious illness forced her to pause. With a website www.armenocide.net, the Gusts made this rich primary source material available to researchers as well as the general public.

During his decades-long involvement with Armenian history, Wolfgang Gust never sought academic or personal reward, although he received the AGBU Garbis Papazian Award (2006) as well as the Special Prize of the President of the Republic of Armenia (2012). What motivated him was a search for truth, especially regarding a crucial chapter in the modern history of his native Germany, and he never shied away from controversy. At the same time, if shown to be mistaken, he would readily acknowledge and correct his errors.

Wolfgang welcomed an exchange of ideas with anyone desiring to learn. He offered informed insights to fellow researchers and students, but also to artists, writers, and actors dealing with Armenian themes. His work has made a special impact on intellectuals of Turkish background, be it genocide historian Taner Akçam, publisher Ragıp Zarakolu, who was involved in the Turkish edition of Gust's archive research, playwright Dogan Akhanlı, or filmmaker Fatih Akın. Artists have come to him not only for factual material, but for insight into understanding the human dimension of the genocide. He also lent his time and efforts to provide intellectual and moral support to civil society initiatives aimed at bringing together Germans, Armenians, and Turks who were committed to working through their overlapping histories, in the search for recognition and reconciliation.

Wolfgang and his beloved wife Sigrid, a prominent lawyer, shared a special relationship. In 65 years of marriage, they pursued successful careers, while combining their efforts in the archives. Anyone involved in genocide research knows this is an arduous task, a challenge to endurance physically and intellectually. Together they have devoted themselves to the task.

At the same time, they raised a family, in France and then in Germany. When the children were growing up, they learned a great deal from their parents, and not only about the Armenians. Son Matthias recalls how his father, a "walking encyclopedia," would tell them such captivating stories that they were stimulated to learn more about history and politics. In later years, Wolfgang would look forward with similar excitement to visits from his sons and relished in discussion with them. Visits from the four grandchildren were a source of delight, the garden a place for quiet relaxation. And Wolfgang always maintained a passion for sports, following soccer with keen interest.

We extend our deepest condolences to his devoted wife Sigrid, sons Matthias, Oliver, Bertold and their families. We are grateful to have had the good fortune to know Wolfgang Gust and his family.

Rose Chacran Zartarian

Dedicated to Family, Community

BELMONT, Mass. — Rose Chacran Zartarian, née Wolohojian, died peacefully at home in Belmont, at the age of 98.

Born and raised in Arlington, Rose graduated from Arlington High School, and graduated from Boston University thereafter. A committed educator, she taught business at Fisher College for many years. After she retired from teaching at the college level, she turned to teaching high school students in the Lexington school system.

Rose was a dedicated wife and daughter who cared for, loved and committed herself to her family, especially to her parents and her husbands. She was widowed twice, having enjoyed the love of two wonderful husbands who admired her spirit, her sense of humor and her great sense of style.

Rose led an active social life, particularly through her church and with the Belmont Women's Club, of which she was a long-time dedicated member and officer. A talented violinist in her youth, Rose's love of music and the arts animated her throughout her lifetime.

She was predeceased by her parents, Mugrdich and Mendoohi (Keljikian) Wolohojian, her husbands, Jay Chacran, and Major Robert Zartarian, her brother, Dr. Albert Wolohojian, and her beloved nephew, Jon Andrew Wolohojian.

She is survived by her brother John



(Anita) Wolohojian, her sister-in-law, Florence Wolohojian, her nieces and nephews, Judge Gabrielle Wolohojian, Dr. Stephan Wolohojian, Michael Aram Wolohojian, and Lucine Almas Delins, and her grandnieces and grandnephews, Matiss Delins, Luna Delins, Thadeus Aram, and Anabel Aram.

Her memory will remain present in the lives of all whom she touched.

Funeral services were at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont, on Friday, June 12. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church or to the Belmont Women's Club.

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

Paid Summer Internship through ASA

The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is seeking an intern for a six-week program this summer (mid-July through August, though it is possible to start earlier). The intern will receive a $150 weekly stipend provided through the Armenian Students' Association of America's Internship Program.
The intern should be in college or graduate school and does not necessarily have to be studying journalism. Internet skills are a plus. The internship may be done in person or long distance, via electronic communications. Native speaker knowledge of English is important. If interested, please email tcadirector@aol.com or mirrorspectator1975@gmail.com with your resume.

Ararat Home Holds Annual Membership Meeting

MISSION HILLS, Calif. — Ararat Home welcomed trustees and members to its Annual Membership Meeting on April 26, where attendees received comprehensive reports on the organization's accomplishments over the past year, its current state, and strategic priorities for the year ahead.

Board Chair Joseph Kanimian, Esq., and CEO Derik Ghookasian presented reports highlighting Ararat Home's continued commitment to providing exceptional care and services to its residents while advancing the organization's mission across its various facilities and projects. Facility administrators shared updates on operations, resident care, and key initiatives, while the director of the Ararat-Eskijian Museum and Research Center reported on the Museum's ongoing efforts to preserve and promote Armenian history, culture, and heritage.



The Westside Guild of the Ararat Home with a check donation to the Ararat Home

The meeting also featured presentations from the leaders of Ararat Home's supporting organizations, who reviewed their activities and fundraising efforts throughout the past year. Their reports reflected the dedication of hundreds of volunteers and supporters whose contributions continue to enhance the quality of life for residents and strengthen the organization's work.tMembers were provided with an overview of anticipated opportunities and challenges facing the organization in the coming year, including the evolving healthcare landscape, regulatory requirements, and the ongoing need to garner support that helps sustain and expand the Home's mission.

At its organizational meeting held the following month, the Board of Trustees elected its Executive Committee for the coming term. Joseph Kanimian, Esq., was re-elected as chair. The other Executive Committee positions were filled by Ron Nazeley as First Vice Chair, Sinan Sinanian as Second Vice Chair,. Debbie Avedian as Secretary, Dr. Aram Youssoufian as Treasurer, Rafi Mardirosian as Assistant Secretary and Peter Darakjian as Assistant Treasurer.

"Ararat Home's strength lies in the commitment of its members, volunteers, supporters, staff, and leadership," said Kanimian. "Together, we continue to build on our mission of providing compassionate care and service to our community."

Rev. Arsen Barsamian

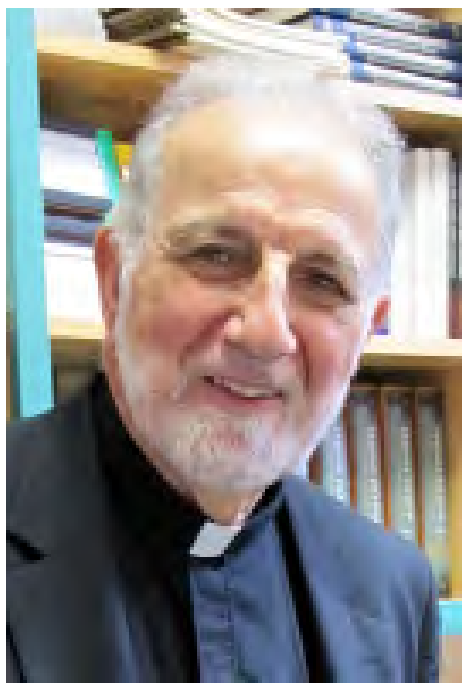
St. James Associate Pastor, Dedicated to Family

WATERTOWN — Rev. Arsen Barsamian, past Associate Pastor of St. James Armenian Church, passed away peacefully on June 12, 2026, with his family by his side. He was 94.

He was pre-deceased by his wife, Yeretzgin Varteni Mikirditsian Barsamian. He was the father of Lucine MacMasters and her husband George of Watertown, Steven Barsamian and his wife Dorian of VA, and Raffi Barsamian and his wife Lilit of CA; grandfather of Lucine Avedikian Abrahamian (CA) and Harry Andrew Barsamian (VA) and their families. He was pre-deceased by his brothers, Harry and Arthur, and sisters Mary Jane Kornblum and Goldie Barsamian. He is survived by his brother, Bruce Barsamian and sister, Patricia Barsamian Antaramian - both in the Chicago area, as well as many loving members of his extended family.

Fr. Arsen (baptismal name Steven) was born in South Milwaukee, Wis. to Shnork and Anjel Barsamian on April 6, 1932, the fifth of seven children. He completed his primary and secondary education in South Milwaukee and graduated from high school in June 1950. The following year, he received a full scholarship to study music theory and composition at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, but due to financial difficulties and a calling to become a priest, he left after completing one year of study.

He forsook a career in music to follow his calling into the priesthood. Through the efforts of the late Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, Walter Vartan of Evanston, Ill. — owner of Lakeshore Photo Engraving in Chicago —served as his benefactor. Vartan underwrote all his educational expenses during his six years of theological study.



Fr. Arsen studied for two years from 1951-1953 at the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Lebanon and one year at the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem. He furthered his learning at Kendall College, Seaburg-Western, and Garrett Biblical Seminary. As a lifelong learner and teacher, he has written and recorded extensively on topics of Armenian religion and history. They can be seen at www.armenianexperience.net.

He married Yeretzgin Varteni in Crete, Greece in 1959 and brought her to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to continue pursuit of his ministry and start a family. On March 13, 1960, he was ordained into the Order of the Holy Priesthood by then-Primate Archbishop Sion Manoogian at St. Mesrob Armenian Church in Racine, Wisconsin. He was then appointed Pastor of St. George Armenian Church in Waukegan, Illinois, where he would serve for the next four years from 1960-1964. He would continue to serve many parishes throughout his ministry, including St. John the Baptist Armenian Church in West Allis, Wisconsin, and St. James Armenian Church in Richmond, Virginia, and as Visiting Pastor to St. Shoghagat Armenian Church, East St. Louis, Illinois, and St. Gregory the Illuminator Church, Chicago, Illinois. In 1989, Fr. Arsen became the Associate Pastor at St. James Armenian Church in Watertown, serving the parish in ministry alongside Fr. Dajad Davidian and Fr. Arakel Aljalian. While he retired formally in 2002, Fr. Arsen continued to be an active and integral part of our St. James parish and worship life as Associate Pastor Emeritus.

Funeral services were held on Friday, June 19, at St. James Armenian Church with Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate, presiding. Interment followed at Ridgelawn Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, the family has requested that donations be made to St. James Amreian Church or Holy Resurrection Armenian Church in South Milwaukee.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Assembly Honors Longtime Leaders And Staff at Boston Celebration

BOSTON — The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) held its Celebration of Service weekend here on June 5 and June 6, honoring Dr. Rouben Adalian, Bryan Ardouny, Anthony Barsamian, Mary Garabadian, Van Z. Krikorian and Carolyn Mugar with the Distinguished Service Award in recognition of more than 25 years of service each to the Assembly. The weekend brought together Armenian American leaders, supporters and friends to honor exceptional service and celebrate our shared commitment to the community.

The weekend opened on Friday, with a program at the Armenian Heritage Park on the Rose Kennedy Greenway. The landmark is dedicated to the memory of the Armenian Genocide, the contributions of Armenian Americans to Boston and the nation and the diversity and resilience of all immigrant communities that have been welcomed in Massachusetts.

The program was organized by the Armenian Heritage Foundation, of which the Assembly serves as a foundation board member, with remarks delivered by Foundation Chair Jim Kalustian and Celebration of Service Committee Member and Assembly Terjenian-Thomas intern alumni parent Nicole Babikian Hajjar.

The evening continued with a Sponsors' Reception for Assembly Members, supporters and guests, where Senator Edward Markey (D-MA) made a special appearance and was joined by French National Assembly Deputy, Astrid Panosyan-Bouvet. Assembly Co-Chairs Talin Yacoubian and Oscar Tatosian spoke as well.

On Saturday evening, Assembly Members, supporters and guests filled the Artists for Humanity EpiCenter for the Celebration of Service. The program was co-hosted by Dr. Henry Ben Morgenthau IV, great-grandson of Ambassador Henry Morgenthau and Kristina Ayanian, Market Site Reporter for NASDAQ.

Governor of the Commonwealth Maura Healey, the first woman elected Governor in Massachusetts history and who was the only sitting governor to have called on then-President Biden to end Azerbaijan's

conyinued on next page



Jim Kalustian and Nicole Babikian Hajjar address community members and guests at Armenian Heritage Park









l-r: Governor Maura Healey of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; Anna Afeyan and Dr. Noubar Afeyan; Armenian Assembly Honorees and Co-Chairs; Senator Edward Markey (D-MA)

COMMUNITY NEWS



Honorees (l-r): top row Anthony J. Barsamian; Van Z. Krikorian far right; Carolyn G. Mugar; bottom row: Dr. Rouben Adalian center; Bryan Ardouny far right; Mary Garabadian center

blockade of Artsakh, opened the evening with reflections on her close relations with the Massachusetts Armenian community. Assembly Board Co-Chair Talin Yacoubian addressed guests, followed by a world music performance by the Secret Trio — Ara Dinkjian, Ismail Lumanovski and Tamer Pınarbası.

Tatosian and Yacoubian presented the Distinguished Service Award to Board honorees Anthony J. Barsamian, Immediate Past Co-Chair; Van Z. Krikorian, Chair Emeritus; and Carolyn G. Mugar, President Emerita. Staff honorees Dr. Rouben Adalian, director of the Armenian National Institute; Bryan Ardouny, executive director; and Mary Garabadian, archivist, were presented by their fellow honorees in turn. The awards ceremony concluded with remarks by Assembly Life Trustees Anna Afeyan and Dr. Noubar Afeyan, in tribute to the honorees and their valued contributions.

Video messages were shared by Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and Ambassador Edward Djerejian, who served as U.S. Ambassador to Syria and Israel and as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs under Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

Following dinner, Tamar O'Brien Barsamian, a 2018 alumna of the Assembly's Terjenian-Thomas Internship Program and a third-year law student at the University of Maine School of Law, offered remarks. The program also featured a tribute to the Assembly's Advocacy Summit Scholarship initiative, which has grown from a pilot class of 20 students in 2024 to 130 scholars in 2026. Susanna Kharatyan, Assembly Terjenian-Thomas Internship Program alumna and three-time Advocacy Summit Scholar, currently pursuing dual master's degrees from Harvard Divinity School and the Fletcher School of Diplomacy at Tufts University, addressed the gathering. Assembly Co-Chair Oscar Tatosian's closing remarks concluded the celebratory evening.

The evening festivities continued with traditional Armenian music and dancing with the Mal Barsamian Ensemble — Mal Barsamian, Bruce Gigarjian and Jason Naroian — joined by Ara Dinkjian. Young Professional attendees joined the Hye House Boston Kickoff Kef, held in partnership with the Armenia Tree Project, for more music and dancing late into the night.



Father
Diana Markosian

Father traces the artist's attempt to rediscover and rebuild a lost bond with her father through photographs, archival material, video, and writing, reflecting on loss, identity, and belonging. The project makes its U.S. debut at the Armenian Museum of America.

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Diana Markosian, Detail from *The Cut Out*, Father Series, 2014-2024

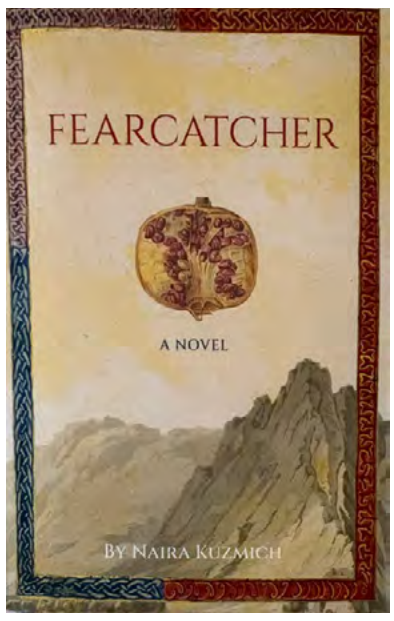
Arts & Culture

BOOKS

Fearcatcher's Naira Kuzmich: A Woman Brave Enough to Tell The Story

By Arpi Sarafian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

"Just keep walking on this street, miss. It will lead you to where you need to go. All these streets will lead you there," the forty-two year-old bus driver — who had come to Yerevan from Leninakan when he was twenty-one and regretted leaving the moment he had arrived — tells Ruzan Garsevanian as he drops her on the streets of "the great modern city." Ruzan escapes her hometown, the small mountainous village of Satoyavan by the Bazum Mountains in Armenia, so she can "be reborn" and live the way she had always wanted to live.



When Ruzan, the village fearcatcher Ripsimeh Garsevanian's dark-skinned foundling daughter, understood that a perpetual state of confusion and fear was the only truth of the human condition — the rest was all lies, "All yarn, all yarn" — and that "God was the one doling out the hurt," she began to question her schoolteachers' tales about duty and destiny and the priests' accounts of heaven and justice.

Fearcatcher, by Naira Kuzmich (University of New Orleans Press, 2025) is no ordinary tale. It is the story of generations of fearcatching families in Armenia trusted with dispelling the fears of their communities. "I ease the fear that God has burdened you with," Ripsimeh tells the children of Satoyavan. Fearcatching was an age-old tradition in Armenia — still practiced in rural villages — an ancient folk healing ritual to cure both emotional and physical trauma by taking the fear out of the afflicted person.

The novel is full of stories about magical apples, evil stepmothers, the snake on the ground poisoning the apple, all symbolic that there is no running away from destiny. In one mystical story, Ripsimeh tells her daughter, the future fearcatcher, that God had created the demon al who, with an iron axe in his hand, enters homes and snatches all he wants. The village women have their own charms and weapons. Yet, when they beg Christ for mercy and Christ grants it, they "continue to cry, Mariam, Mariam, Mariam." People will always be afraid in a world where one cannot

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A scene from Wind in the Sassafras Branches

Gerald Papasian's 'Wind In the Sassafras Branches' Opens in Yerevan

YEREVAN — There are performances that are merely staged. And then there are those that are born. They emerge in the silence of the rehearsal room, through the actors' relentless searching, the invisible labor of the technical crew, and the stubborn refusal to give up after every setback.

Such is the story of "Wind in the Sassafras Branches" at Yerevan's Henrik Malyan Theater. A new production by Gerald Papasian opened on Yerevan on June 5. Written by French playwright René de Obaldia in the 1960s, it remains a brilliant Western parody that doubles as both a raucous comedy and a profound exploration of human relationships. First staged in 1965, it has since become one of the most beloved comedies in European theater.

Here, it is far more than just another production. It has become a shared journey that the entire creative team has travelled together. Director and translator Gerald Papasian has preserved the spirit of the French original — its intellectual, delicate humor that often skirts the edge of the absurd.

Crucially, the translation never feels literal. It has come alive in Armenian: natural, sharp, contemporary, and completely organic. Here, the humor never settles for easy laughs. It reveals character, mocks time itself, and lays bare human frailty. Every time the audience bursts into laughter, they also catch a glimpse of themselves.


Gerald Papasian directing

As a theater expert remarked after the performance: "It was a masterclass in stage directing."

At the center of de Obaldia's world stands John Emery Rockefeller — a man convinced that oil, money, guns and sheer willpower are enough to solve any problem. The author didn't choose the Rockefeller surname by accident. It's a clear nod to the oil baron mythology of American capitalism. The character is both admirable and ridiculous: he emulates the great Rockefeller but frequently ends up in comical situations, becoming a living parody of that legend.

Mkhitar Avetisyan embodies Rockefeller with impressive range — strong yet vulnerable, self-assured yet absurd. It's a performance you can get angry at and still watch with affection. Beside him stands the quiet pillar of the family: his wife, played by Christina Hovakimyan. She is the steadfast inner strength holding the entire household together; without her, everything would have collapsed long ago. Anush Kalashyan brings youthful energy, dreams, and restless vitality to Pamela.

Arman Matevosyan creates one of the production's most endearing characters — the family member who perpetually finds himself in the most awkward situations. Levon Meloyan gives the Doctor a particularly colorful portrayal. In Obaldia's universe, the doctor has long transcended mere medicine; he is part philosopher, part drinker, and part detached observer, watching the human chaos unfold with quiet amusement.

see SASSAFRAS, page 13

Karen Kornienko

On Music, Beauty, and Armenian Roots



By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN-MOSCOW — Karen Sergeyevich Kornienko (born in 1974 in Astrakhan) is a Russian pianist and composer-transcriber. He graduated from a music school in Dnepropetrovsk and, at the age of 15, moved to Moscow to continue his education. He studied at the Academic Music College attached to the Moscow Conservatory, first in the theory department and later in the piano department. In 1993, he entered the Moscow Conservatory, where he refined his skills under Evgeny Malinin and Vera Gornostayeva. He is a prizewinner of the First and Second International A. Scriabin Competitions (1995, 2000) and the Grand Prix winner of the Second International S. Rachmaninoff Competition (1997). Following these successes, he performed as a soloist with the Moscow State Academic Philharmonic and toured extensively in many countries.

An important part of his repertoire consists of his own piano transcriptions of symphonic and operatic masterpieces. Among his best-known works are piano suites based on the music of Tchaikovsky and other original arrangements.

More information about Kornienko can be found on his official website: https://www.karenkornienko.ru

Dear Karen, you are known not only as a pianist but also as the author of piano transcriptions. In your work on a composition, what comes first: fidelity to the original or the creation of a new artistic image?

The original is certainly primary for me. People should recognize the music of the original, but that does not exclude creating something entirely new. When I composed my transcriptions, my foremost goal was to create, through pianistic means, the illusion of orchestral sound and, at the same time, to reveal aspects of the music that are beyond the capabilities of an orchestra. This primarily concerns agogics and various musical subtleties. An orchestra, even the finest one, is still a very large musical organism, and for it to function

see KORNIENKO, page 17

ARTS & CULTURE

‘Wind in the Sassafras Branches’ Opens in Yerevan

SASSAFRAS, from page 12

Then the “cowboy of our hearts” rides in. Samvel Topalyan’s Carlos instantly shifts the atmosphere the moment he appears. He carries every classic Western trait — mysterious past, masculine charm, constant aura of danger. Yet this is where Obaldia’s genius shines: he both builds and dismantles the heroic archetype, making the character vividly, endearingly human.

Vahagn Gasparyan’s dual roles (“Partridge-Eye and Lynx-Eye”) are multilayered, embodying striking contradictions: sharp predatory instinct on one hand, surprising innocence and insight on the other.

Anahit Petrosyan’s “whore” refuses to fit classic stereotypes. She is the kind saloon girl, deeply human, compassionate — often more noble than the “respectable” people society looks up to. Once again, de Obaldia flips the script, showing that goodness doesn’t recognize social labels or professions.

One of the production’s greatest strengths is that the actors don’t merely coexist as separate characters. They form a single living organism: a family. And that family begins not on stage, but backstage. The rehearsal process faced what seemed like impossible obstacles: searching for scenic solutions from near nothing, technical difficulties, relentless time pressure, endless changes, exhaustion, and occasional despair. Yet those very struggles became the foundation of the show.

Invisible but essential is the theater technical team the audience rarely sees — lighting designers, sound engineers, stagehands, set builders, costume staff, and the administrative team. Thanks to their work, every evening the stage turns into a small miracle. When everything on stage looks effortless and spontaneous, it means only one thing: an enormous amount of work has been done in the wings.

At the heart of this entire creative world stands Narine Malyan, the artistic director of the Malyan Theatre. The environment she has cultivated over the years proves that theater is not just a building. It is a family united by shared values and a deep love of art.

“Wind in the Sassafras Branches” is a story about madness, family, loss and dreams, and about people who refuse to stop moving forward even when the whistling wind of reality tries to scatter them like leaves. It is a show where you can laugh until tears stream down your face, then realize that beneath the laughter lies a very simple, very human truth. When the performance ends, the audience doesn’t just take away the jokes. They take away the people. Rockefeller. The cowboy. The big-hearted “whore.” The characters full of contradictions. And, most importantly, the feeling that the family they saw on stage truly exists offstage as well.

Perhaps that is the deepest secret of this production. It wasn’t created merely with roles, sets, or text. It was created by people. And when a show is created by people, it stops being just a show. It becomes life.

By A.P.



A scene from “Wind in the Sassafras Branches”



A scene from “Wind in the Sassafras Branches”



Arman Matevosyan as Tom



Anouche Kalashyan as Pamela

Fearcatcher’s Naira Kuzmich: A Woman Brave Enough to Tell the Story

FEARCATCHER, from page 12

escape one’s *djagadakeer* — what is written on one’s forehead, in Armenian. Ruzan comes to understand that her attempt to escape it all was “damned from the very beginning.”

Fearcatcher is, nonetheless, a mythical tale rooted in the realities of the small village of Satoyavan in Soviet Armenia, in the 1970s and 1980s. Kuzmich revives a whole culture where mothers needed their daughters “to defend [them] from their fathers’ heavy hands” — “It was always the woman, it was always Eve who would be thrown first out of heaven. If she did not throw herself out, of course.“ But she also reminds us of “dethroned fathers“ who felt threatened by their women and children. The constant references, on the other hand, to Soviet policies about construction, to commissars who pocketed the resources allocated to cheap buildings that did not stand, evoke the Armenian people’s dream to determine their own course. “The splendour of dictators in Armenian lands was temporary,” writes Kuzmich, commenting on “a tall stone woman wielding a sword” taking the place of “a man named Stalin,” on the pedestal of the Mother Armenia Monument in Yerevan.

It should not be difficult to see the novel as a meditation on life. Kuzmich invites the reader to ponder Ruzan’s feeling of loneliness, “somewhere down deep,” as she wonders why no one was coming to get her out of the hospital where she gave birth to her baby girl, Araxie. Where was her child? Later on, the young mother is tormented by visions of the begging old woman (a fearcatcher herself?) she had befriended on the streets of Yerevan, watching her child for a day when she returns to her hometown. Had she just given her daughter away to the strange old woman? Will she ever go back to Araxie? “Did it even matter?” This questioning — with the burden of fear being the only (terrifying?) certainty — is perhaps the only truth about human life, and Kuzmich captures it masterfully. It is impossible not to be awed by the depths she can reach in her probe into the truths of this existence.

I would like to add that while the struggle of the village women to overcome their fears is destined to fail, the novel does not suggest celebrated Irish writer Samuel Beckett’s infamous quote, “You’re on earth, there is no cure for that!” which it, nonetheless, clearly evokes. Not doing anything might be the answer, yet Kuzmich makes us embrace everything one does to survive. Ruzan yearns for the safety and the protection of a home for her child, “A small home, falling apart and in constant need of repair, but a home nonetheless.” What Kuzmich offers the world is infinite love and empathy. Rouzan’s fury at the immense suffering she witnesses around her, and the violence of a war that leaves her brother with one limb, is an all-too-passionate clinging to a life that falls short of what it could be or should be but is not. The real tragedy would perhaps be finding it impossible to “pretend [you]’re not helpless in God’s world and pretend it is not His doing.” “Be hopeful in the face of your helplessness, dark girl. Allow yourself to be deceived,” the strange old woman cautions Ruzan.

Fearcatcher ends with a primordial scene of devastation — the 1988 Spitak earthquake. (Satoyavan was only an hour’s walk away from Spitak). “A mythical woman” (Ruzan?), with “a dark-eyed man and the one-armed man they so loved” (Ruzan’s lover and her brother?) carrying a casket that “held the bodies of a woman and man” (Ripsimeh and her husband Petros?), is leading the ever-growing crowd of mourners through the rubble (had the dead come back to the living?) “Come,” says the dark woman turning to her people. Was it a new dawn, or was the world collapsing around them?



Naira Kuzmich

Perhaps there is no human answer. Some greater power of the universe, which the village women recognize, ending this “cruel world” and bringing in new souls may just be the only answer.

Kuzmich’s writing is always graceful, full of insight and light-hearted humor. “The relief workers walked slowly to ease their guilt, as the elderly do at cemeteries,” or “These children . . . thinking that because they were old enough to wipe their own bottoms, they were running towards something and not away from something,” linger in the reader’s consciousness. Her “The mountains of Bazum a supple brown color, almost clay-like, shaped by God’s hand. His prints all over this country, in the oak, beech and pine that feed from the same river that His people do, the Pambak at the base of the *sahrer* flowing gently first toward Kirovakan, and then, generously, towards them,“ is sheer poetry.

Naira Kuzmich was born in Soviet Armenia in 1988. She moved to the United States as a toddler and was raised in the Little Armenia neighborhood in Hollywood. Kuzmich succumbed to lung cancer in 2017. A collection of her short stories, *In Everything I See Your Hand*, was published posthumously in 2022, followed by her debut novel *Fearcatcher,* in 2025. Kuzmich’s short story “The Kingsley Drive Chorus“ was published in the prestigious *The O. Henry Prize Stories 2015* anthology.

ARTS & CULTURE

MFA Director Terjanian Makes Big Impression at Tekeyan Talk

TERJANIAN, from page 1

The Strasbourg-born Terjanian has served as the Ann and Graham Gund director and CEO of the MFA since July 2025. Before that, he was the museum's chief of curatorial affairs and conservation.

The event marked the first public outing for Terjanian hosted by an Armenian-American organization. He seemed to enjoy getting to know his fellow Armenians, and as the attentive and frequently applauding audience indicated, the feeling was mutual.

The questions covered a large variety of topics, from his background to how he got to his current position as well as details about the MFA.



Pierre Terjanian, left, and Aram Arkun speak (Ken Martin photo)

A 'Gem' in a Classic City

The MFA, founded in 1870, is the fifth largest museum in the US and the 20th largest in the world.

Terjanian may not be a dyed-in-the-wool Bostonian, yet his reverence for the city which is home to the MFA and its historic tradition of support of cultural institutions by the city's business and social elite, was palpable. He also stressed that the museum should shrug off any stuffy sensibilities and should instead be a living institution.

"What makes the MFA special is in part where it is. It is in Boston, it's in Massachusetts and it is one of the gems of the city but it is one of its many examples of great accomplishments … by civic philanthropy, … through the generosity of collectors, donors and philanthropists," Terjanian said. "It was always meant to be of service to the community. It is a museum that wanted to be encyclopedic … but it is also a museum that has character because very early on it invested very heavily in a certain directions."

The museum has many rich sections, including the modern American wing and a healthy number of Impressionist paintings

He singled out for praise the museum's collection of Asian art, calling it "absolutely sublime," adding the collection of Japanese art "is better than what you can find in Japan under a single roof."

"A museum continues to reinvent itself," he said, noting the growing collection of the museum's modern art, which includes a Gorky painting, titled "Good Hope Road" from 1945, on display. Another Gorky, an ink and pencil piece, titled "Study for Nighttime, Enigma and Nostalgia," from 1931 is also on display. The museum has in storage an untitled piece.

Terjanian spoke about the museum's $13-million deficit, another dreaded legacy of Covid and its subsequent lockdown. The financial gap is widening, he said, as



Mary Barooshian, the sister of the late Armenian-American abstract painter Martin Barooshian (Jirair Hovsepian photo)

expenses are rising faster than revenues. As a result, he explained the museum is taking a creative approach in tackling the task of closing that gap.

"We've given ourselves three years to go back to balancing the budget. It is going to require a lot of disciple and ingenuity," he said. They are also looking at philanthropy and increased means of bringing in revenue, rather than cost-cutting.

"It's going to be a long haul but we are going to get there," Terjanian said, keeping "to our mission and how we create even more value, what the museum is about."

He stressed the importance of making connections with the community and stressing that the message of the museum and what it offers in terms of mental healing.

He defined at various times what exactly the museum means and why it is of vital importance, often stressing access.

"It's not just a repository of art," he said, but a meeting place where people can come together.

AI and Art

Arkun asked about AI and its possible effects — negative or positive — on art.

Terjanian said the museum is "not turning our back on technology," he said. "We will not be able to compete successfully with the metaverse," which allows a viewer to literally go inside a painting.

He added, "In my view you do not come to the museum to see these images. You come to be in the presence of the originals, to have an emotional response and not just an understanding. And who you are seeing the object with makes a difference. I believe in the human touch so we need a combination of spectacular experiential displays but the presence of a fellow human being who will surpass the apps. I guarantee it."

Technology, he said, has its rightful place.

One creative way it has been used is teaming up with Kayem Foods to digitally put in hotdogs into art depicting figures from the American Revolutionary War era.

This campaign, he said, was a "way to open up to museum. It is not a bad thing for a museum to be present in unexpected places."

Funding

Terjanian said the museum does not receive much federal funding; in fact, he said, federal funds account for 1 percent of the museum's annual budget. He further expanded that the MFA had turned down a couple of federal



Pierre Terjanian (Jirair Hovsepian photo)

grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

One advantage in this course of action is independence, especially in the current hyper-conservative political atmosphere.

"If we are self-funded. Are we really going to turn over the review of our interpretations, selection of the objects, the exhibition programs to somebody else? We have fought long and hard to be where we are with the support of the community. It seems absurd to compromise that when we are not clear where the expectations might be if we were to seek federal funding," he said diplomatically. "What is at stake is that a museum is a storyteller. And we are no longer credible if we no longer control the narrative."

The comment received applause.

continued on next page



Arman Manoukian asks a question (Ken Martin photo)

A Day in the Life

Before landing at the MFA, he was the Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Curator in Charge of The Met's Department of Arms and Armor. (He is now a Curator Emeritus there). ,Before that, he held the dual role of J. J. Medveckis Associate Curator of Arms and Armor and acting head of the Department of European Decorative Arts and Sculpture before 1700 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

He was asked about the day-to-day nature of the job and he replied that the tasks are so large and so many, that each day looks different from the others. He said in addition to his fiduciary responsibly, he is focusing on bringing in new audiences.

Using a nautical metaphor, he showed glimpses of his thought process.

"My job is not so much to have all the answers but to leverage the expertise we have on our board," as well as members on the staff, he said. "Setting a direction is absolutely essential because we live in a world full of uncertainty and we cannot have just plans. We need to have a destination. We will navigate the troubled waters and get there."

Again and again he stresses the human element. Terjanian announced that the museum has just gotten a major donation to provide the staff professional development, "enabling everyone to be at their very best at their game."

He also discussed some of the innovative ways the museum is trying to bring in more people, including concerts with antique instruments usually on display only.

"I am always looking for how else we can multiply the reasons to come to the museum," he said. "Not just the visual experience, but something richer. The museum is a place to make connections."

Added Terjanian, "I believe in the theatrics. … Art museums should be first and foremost about enjoyment and then comes the learning. There is some virtue in that."

"We can create a better rhythm in the way you explore the museum," he said. "Another way is more anthropological exploration of the museum. One challenge is how do you represent everyone … in the museum. That would mean acquiring a lot of works to better represent historically marginalized artists and communities."

"There is a real opportunity in my view for inviting a navigation of museum looking at materials and techniques," he added.

Returning Works of Art

The MFA recently returned two jars made by a slave, David Drake, in 1857 in South Carolina.

"We are the first and so far only museum in the US to have done so [returning a work of art to descendants of slaves]," he said. "We followed the analysis that the maker of this work, working in the conditions of enslavement, could not have a say in keeping the works, in profiting from their sale, therefore it is a form of coercion. The logical conclusion was to work with the descents" of the artist, he added.

Arkun asked if the MFA's collection can afford to return every work of art with a dubious provenance.

"The answer is no, we cannot return everything," Terjanian said, adding "I don't believe we can be credible or inspiring if we are transactional and only self-serving and therefore it is essential that we bite the bullet and accept the consequences of being ethical."

Terjanian praised the current curators and spoke at length about his vision not only for the MFA, but in how museums are currently perceived as well has how they will function in the future in society.

"The real ambition is even beyond the MFA is to make sure that museums have a bright future and that art museums are providing a service that is valued," he said.

Terjanian spoke with charm and humor about his long journey from his native Strasbourg to Boston. He asked the audience if they knew at 16 what they wanted to do in the future. He said education in France was affordable and good. He went to law school as well as business school, though he realized he did not want to work in either field. He did add, however, that what he learned in those schools is still helping him in his profession now.

"In France, I was 24 when I finished all these degrees," he said, noting that he had aged out of a museum school that then Minister of Culture Jack Lang had created. As he explained, anyone who wants to work at a museum in France would have to finish the program, after which they would be sent to museums based on their ranking rather than their interest. Since at that time the European Union had not in essence created one European market, he could not work in other nations on the continent.

Dejected, after finishing his military service, he went to visit a friend studying at New York University. There, he visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art and inquired about working there. Serendipitously, someone there told him that while there were no positions available at the Met, the Philadelphia Museum of Art was looking for an arms and armaments curator, which happened to be his specialty.

He praised the US for giving him the opportunity to choose a new path.

Armenian Heritage

Terjanian grew up in Strasbourg, where there are few Armenians and therefore his last name stood out. His parents, including his Armenian father, did not tell him much about his background.

"He [the older Terjanian] was born in Paris. I have a photograph of him in the arms of a GI in 1944," he said. His father was born to an Alsatian mother and a father who came from Kayseri (Caesaria or Gesaria) and was one of the very few survivors in his family" as a result of the Armenian Genocide.

When his grandfather arrived in France at age 12, he decided to assimilate into the French culture.

The only element in the lives of his father and grandfather which had roots in the Armenian tradition was the family business: selling carpets. It was after coming to the US that Terjanian really started discovering the Armenian community, he said.

"It's been a slow discovery," adding that so much that shapes him personally and professionally, has roots in his heritage. "I'm very interested in ebb and flow, resilience, displacement and how art and cultural artifacts are reaffirming the existence and genius of people," he said. "Art," he said, "is more than the work of a single creator. It tells you a lot about the place it was made and for whom it was made and the relationships."

And continuing with the Armenian theme, Terjanian said that in addition to the Gorky works, the museum has a "beautiful, beautiful" 18th-century Armenian altar curtain in storage, measuring six meters in width.

"We don't even have the space to examine it," he said, much less display it.

In addition there are objects from Urartu in the Near East department and photographs from Canadian-Armenian legend Yusuf Karsh.

At the event Terjanian announced that, the museum just recently received a piece from Martin Barooshian, the Boston-based abstract artist. What makes his work even more special, Terjanian said, is that Barooshian attended the MFA's Museum School.

This is not the first Barooshian piece at the museum.

Arkun asked if the MFA and Terjanian had any interest to work with groups in the Armenian community.

"I would like to spend time with the Armenian community before we decide what direction it should take," he replied. "Traditionally museums were ivory towers. They had very highly educated people who claimed superior knowledge and unique command of certain subjects. What we have learned over time is that we all are richer by bringing to the table other voices than our own."

He added that he recently got a "magnificent tour" at the Armenian Museum of America and was "so impressed with the passion and energy" of the museum and its current and extremely successful Gorky exhibit. Terjanian said slowly he is meeting with various community organizations and he would like to know how he can help them.

Said Arkun after this comment got applause, "We are already helping connect you with the community."

The evening ended with a lengthy question-and-answer period, followed by a light reception, during which Terjanian was happily surrounded by fans.

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



Oven-Roasted Chicken Shawarma

"Here is a recipe for an oven-roasted version of the flavorful street-side classic usually cooked on a rotisserie. It is perfect for an evening with family and friends. Serve with pita and tahini, chopped cucumbers and tomatoes, some olives, chopped parsley, some feta, fried eggplant, hummus swirled with harissa, rice or rice pilaf. You can make the white sauce that traditionally accompanies it by cutting plain yogurt with mayonnaise and lemon juice, and flecking it with garlic. For a red to offset it, simmer ketchup with crushed red pepper and a hit of red-wine vinegar until it goes syrupy and thick, or just use your favorite hot sauce instead."

This recipe is contributed by Sam Sifton. He is the founding editor of NYT Cooking, and an assistant managing editor leading culture and lifestyle coverage for The New York Times. He's the author of three cookbooks, and one of the writers of the Cooking newsletter. He was previously The Times's food editor, culture editor, national news editor, restaurant critic and columnist for The New York Times Magazine. His most recent cookbook is "No-Recipe Recipes." He lives in Brooklyn with his family. He graduated from Harvard College.

Sifton adds, "It's a dish I developed in a South Florida kitchen a decade ago, to bring the taste of late-night rotisserie shawarma into my in-laws' home, thousands of miles away from where I'd traditionally eaten it on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, in Berlin, in Melbourne. They'd never had shawarma. In the years since, they've had a lot of it. I'd like to think this recipe has brought people joy."

(Linda Xiao for The New York Times. Food Stylist; Hadas Smirnoff. Prop Stylist: Megan Hedgepeth)

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

INGREDIENTS:

2 lemons, juiced
1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon olive oil
6 cloves garlic, peeled, smashed and minced
1 teaspoon kosher salt
2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
2 teaspoons ground cumin
2 teaspoons paprika
1/2 teaspoon turmeric
A pinch ground cinnamon
Crushed red pepper, to taste
2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs
1 large red onion, peeled and quartered
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

PREPARATION:

Prepare a marinade for the chicken. Combine the lemon juice, 1/2 cup olive oil, garlic, salt, pepper, cumin, paprika, turmeric, cinnamon and crushed red pepper in a large bowl, then whisk to combine. Add the chicken and toss well to coat. Cover and store in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour and up to 12 hours.

When ready to cook, heat oven to 425°F. Use the remaining tablespoon of olive oil to grease a rimmed sheet pan. Add the quartered onion to the chicken and marinade, and toss once to combine. Remove the chicken and onion from the marinade, and place on the pan, spreading everything evenly across it.

Put the chicken in the oven and roast until it is browned, crisp at the edges and cooked through, about 30 to 40 minutes. Remove from the oven, allow to rest 2 minutes, then slice into bits. (To make the chicken even more crisp, set a large pan over high heat, add a tablespoon of olive oil to the pan, then the sliced chicken, and sauté until everything curls tight in the heat.)

Scatter the parsley over the top and serve with tomatoes, cucumbers, pita, white sauce, hot sauce, olives, fried eggplant, feta, rice — really anything you desire.

For this recipe, go to: https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1017161-oven-roasted-chicken-shawarma



NATIONAL BESTSELLER - The debut cookbook from the popular New York Times website and mobile app NYT Cooking, featuring 100 vividly photographed no-recipe recipes to make weeknight cooking more inspired and delicious--featuring a convenient flexibound format. ONE OF THE BEST COOKBOOKS OF THE YEAR: Vanity Fair, Time Out, Salon, Publishers Weekly.

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Among the scrumptious no-recipe meals in this book: Fried Egg Quesadillas, Pizza Without a Crust, Weeknight Fried Rice, Pasta With Garbanzos, Roasted Shrimp Tacos, Chicken With Caramelized Onions and Croutons, Oven S'Mores, Fettuccine With Minted Ricotta, Smothered Pork Chops With Onions and Sautéed Greens, Taleggio Grilled Cheese With Egg and Honey, Ham and Radicchio Toast and Quick Roasted Chicken With Tarragon.

For more recipes from Sam Sifton, see: https://cooking.nytimes.com/author/sam-siftonSam Sifton

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Sam Sifton

ARTS & CULTURE

Karen Kornienko: On Music, Beauty, and Armenian Roots

KORNIENKO, from page 12

properly, one must accept numerous limitations that even the greatest conductors can hardly overcome. At the piano, however, you are both conductor and orchestra.

Let me give an example. I have performed Rachmaninoff's concertos with orchestras many times. I begin the Second Concerto at a rather restrained tempo, but soon move forward quite significantly. More than once, it happened that during rehearsals we worked carefully on this acceleration, yet in the concert the guest conductor was unable to "move" the orchestra, and they continued playing the principal theme of the first movement at the initial tempo throughout.

Another aspect can be illustrated by Tchaikovsky's *Waltz of the Flowers*. Its principal theme returns many times. In an orchestra, this works perfectly well, but on the piano, it is impossible to play the same theme identically ten times without boring everyone to death. Therefore, each new appearance of the theme becomes a new variation. In my arrangements of Tchaikovsky's magnificent ballet waltzes there is a great deal of my own music, but I tried to write it in such a way that there would be no dissonance or eclecticism. The listener should hear Tchaikovsky, and specifically the Waltz of the Flowers, not something different and incomprehensible.

Have you ever changed your interpretation of a work because of a life experience? Could you give an example?

I would say that, under the influence of my life experience and, even more so, my religious convictions, I have stopped performing certain works that once frequently appeared in my concert programs. One example is *Mephisto Waltz* by Franz Liszt. I even created my own arrangement of this remarkable piece, combining the piano and orchestral versions. However, now that the Lord God occupies the foremost place in my life, excessive attention to the devil contradicts my convictions, which are based on the principles of the Orthodox faith. I try to select for my concert programs only music that is beneficial to the soul. Many people believe that every classical work is beautiful, but I do not think this is so. For me, beautiful music is music in which there is no spiritual substitution, where evil is not elevated almost to the level of virtue and where there is no fascination with evil, as, for example, in the music of Richard Wagner or Alexander Scriabin.

Incidentally, in my youth I was deeply fascinated by Scriabin's work, but today I retain in my repertoire mainly his early compositions, written before he made what I consider to be his final spiritual choice and embarked on the path of Satanism. Beethoven is a different matter. For me, he resembles the biblical Jacob, who wrestled with God. He struggled for half his life. Yet in the complete silence of his deafness, he ultimately beheld the Divine Light that shines through the music of his late sonatas. Everything in his work is sincere and genuine. There is no deceit in his music.

This concert season at the Moscow House of Music, you performed a program entitled "The Embodiment of Beauty." What does beauty mean to you?

Beauty is a wondrous quality of God's creations that inspires us with admiration, tenderness, joy, and praise for God. Human beings can also create beauty, but only in co-creation with God. In essence, it is God who creates beauty through a person, because every human being bears the image of God. Through this divine image, a person perceives beauty and, through it, comes into contact with the Spirit of God, restoring, at least for a time, the connection that has been lost. That is why Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote: "Beauty will save the world."

Unfortunately, especially in our own time, the concept of beauty is distorted by human passions, increasingly cultivated by the enemy of mankind—the devil. As a result, the opposite of beauty emerges: ugliness. It arises when, instead of maintaining a connection with God, a person attaches himself to the devil, who himself



was transformed from a beautiful angel into something vile because of envy.

By creating ugly works, a person, in effect, worships the devil, who passionately desires such worship. People are constantly being persuaded that ugliness is beauty. We are continually presented with counterfeits: musical compositions that are impossible to listen to, paintings that are impossible to look at, dreadful sculptures, buildings, clothing, and much more. The devil wishes us to drown in this ugliness, but he will not succeed, because the aspiration toward true beauty can never be completely eradicated. The image of God is implanted in every human being from the beginning, and beauty will save the world.

In a truly transcendent performance, does your sense of time disappear?

An interesting question! Have I ever experienced truly transcendent performances? That is not for me to judge. Sometimes you look at a pianist: his eyes are lifted to heaven, his gestures are beautiful and expressive, yet all the while he is quietly counting note values, and everything is carefully planned and calculated! Great is this mystery...

Time itself is a very relative thing. Ideally, during a concert it should pass unnoticed for the listener, but that depends on the energy the performer communicates to the audience. Every piece of music has its own sense of time, and one should feel it rather than step outside it and forget to return.

As for the transcendent in music and in art generally, this is a very important subject. The moment a musician enters the realm of the transcendent, he becomes aware that certain forces "not of this world" begin to participate in the process of music-making. Unexplainable things happen. "How did I play like that? How did that happen?" the musician asks himself.

And here, in my opinion, lies the greatest danger for a creative person. At that moment he must choose either to attribute everything to himself—great and wonderful as he is—or quietly thank God for having experienced it. Or, if it was not from God (which is also entirely possible), ask to be delivered from it so as not to harm his soul. The first path leads to pride; the second, to humility.

Your name and appearance suggest Armenian roots. Could you tell us more about them?

My grandfather, whose family name was Igitov (Igityan), came from the Armenian community of Astrakhan. My two grandmothers were Russian, and my other grandfather was Ukrainian. Although only one quarter of my ancestry is Armenian, there was a cult of everything Armenian in our family when I was growing up.

My grandfather spoke Armenian, and my father also knew some Armenian. He learned it specifically so that he could travel to Armenia and converse there in Armenian, and my parents always remembered their trip to Armenia with great affection.

Let me tell you a childhood story. I was playing the fairy-tale game Teremok (The Little House) with my parents. You remember it: "I'm Mousey-Wousey, and I'm Froggy-Woggy. Who might you be?" When my turn came, I immediately answered: "And I am an Armenian!" That's how it was (laughs).

When I received my passport at the age of sixteen, already studying in Moscow, I wrote "Armenian" in the nationality line (there was such a line in Soviet passports).

By the way, my teacher at the music college affiliated with the conservatory, Galina Nikolayevna Yeghiazarova, was 100% Armenian! She was born and raised in Baku; now lives in Spain.

How familiar are you with Armenian music? Have you ever performed piano works by Armenian composers?

In my youth I greatly admired the Piano Concerto of Aram Khachaturian. I learned it, although unfortunately I never performed it on stage.

I have long wanted to make an arrangement of the *Adagio* from his ballet "Spartacus, "but so far that idea has not yet been realized. God willing, I shall do it. Perhaps one could even create an entire suite based on the music of "Spartacus."

The famous *Nocturne* by Arno Babajanian could also be arranged beautifully; I can already hear it in my own transcription.

Incidentally, I remember that in the spring of 1989, when I was a first-year student at the Dnepropetrovsk Music College, my parents brought me to Moscow for consultations. At the time I was composing extensively and imagined my future as that of a composer. We were fortunate enough to meet Karen Khachaturian, the son of Aram Khachaturian and my namesake. He told my parents: "If you want your boy to achieve something, transfer him from Dnepropetrovsk to Moscow, to the College attached to the Conservatory." To me he said: "Develop your piano technique. You will become a pianist; you have excellent gifts." His words proved prophetic. We followed Karen Aramovich's advice. I was admitted directly to the second year of the theory department at the Merzlyakov School. Once in Moscow, however, I stopped composing. I did not want to become a theorist, so in my third year I combined studies in both the theory and piano departments and eventually graduated as a pianist.

My compositional aspirations were transformed into the creation of piano transcriptions. I returned to composing only in mature years. At first I wrote variations on famous themes alongside my transcriptions, and later I began composing original piano pieces and sacred chants for church worship.

Thank you for this conversation, dear Karen. I hope to see you on the Yerevan stage in the near future.

I would be delighted if such an invitation were to come!

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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

AUGUST 23 — ANNUAL PICNIC 12-5 p.m. Lamb Shish Kebab, Chicken Kebab, Losh Kebab and Kheyma. Pastries Table and Armenian Coffee. Live music by the Jason Naroian Ensemble. Holy Archangels Armenian Church, 1280 Boston Rd., Haverhill.

SEPTEMBER 15 — ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT at Hickory Hill Golf Course 200 North Lowell Street, Methuen. 7:30 a.m. registration, 9:00 a.m. Shotgun Tee-Off; sponsored by Holy Archangels Armenian Church; for more information, contact Mark Kazanjian (508) 633-7447 or Markkaz55@gmail.com

SEPTEMBER 24 — Save the Date! Celebrating Contributions! Gala to benefit the Armenin 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.

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EDITOR
Alin K. Gregorian

MANAGING EDITOR
Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR
Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

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

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

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

VIDEO CORRESPONDENT
Haykaram Nahapetyan

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FAX: 617-924-2887
www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com
For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

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COMMENTARY

ADLP Coordinated Press Declaration

Based only on the election results revealed by June 9, the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party Coordinated Press declares the following.

The elections to the National Assembly of Armenia took place in an exceptionally tense atmosphere on Sunday, June 7.

The final results of the elections are not yet known. They are subject to review due to violations of various electoral rules.

Therefore, with this statement, we would like to state the following provisionally and yet with a fair degree of certainty: the following groups will enter parliament in order of the number of votes received: Civil Contract, Strong Armenia, Armenia Alliance, Prosperous Armenia and probably also Wings of Unity.

While it is certain that the Civil Contract led by Nikol Pashinyan will be able to form a government, its ability to make constitutional changes will likely be severely limited once the final results are announced.

The disputes over the violation of electoral rules will likely remain unresolved for a long time.

At this stage, however, despite the obvious cases of violation of accepted electoral procedures and rules adopted by the outgoing authorities through their administrative means, which are still subject to ongoing review, we congratulate the Civil Contract as the grouping that received the most votes.

Our main call and message, however, remains the same, directed to all political, economic, and intellectual circles operating in Armenia, as well as to the entire Armenian people. All should make every effort in order that peace, unity, and respect for all sanctities [*Serpoutyounner*] reign in Armenia, and in particular, pursue with the utmost emphasis and consistency the vital work of providing the country with its own means of defense.

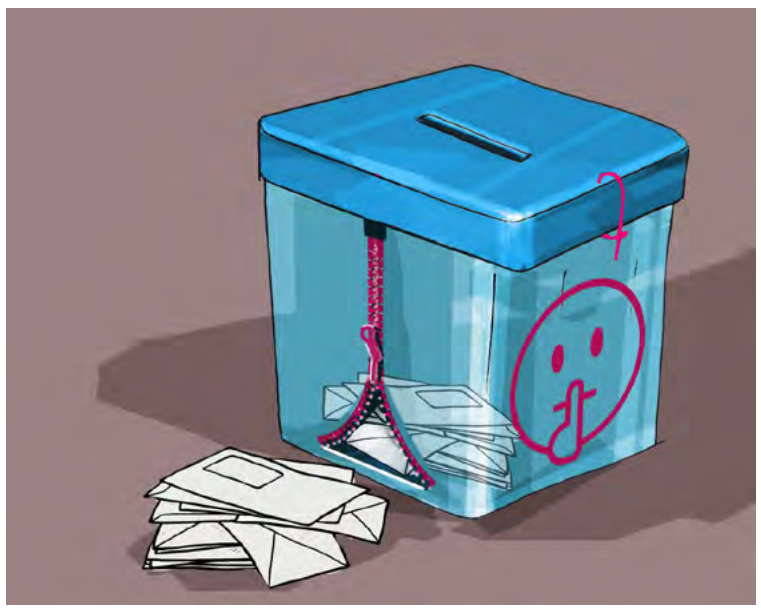
(Our final statement will follow only the announcement of the final official election results.)

Armenian Public Opinion Is Divided on Foreign Policy

By Suren Sargsyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

On June 7, parliamentary elections were held in Armenia, resulting in the re-election of the country's ruling authorities, who will continue governing for the next four years. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who came to power following the 2018 revolution, has now secured a governing mandate for the third time through parliamentary elections, and once again is forming a government based on these results. The current elections were exceptional in several respects.

It is important to focus on the external factors that are likely to have a significant impact on Armenia's future in the years ahead. Prime Minister Pashinyan failed to surpass the 50 percent threshold, receiving approximately 49 percent of the vote. He will nevertheless enjoy a parliamentary majority only because of the specific features of Armenia's electoral system and the fragmentation of the votes of parties not passing to the parliament, securing 63 seats in the National Assembly of Armenia. This means that roughly 51 percent of voters did not place their trust in Pashinyan and instead supported alternative candidates.



This reality is likely to complicate Pashinyan's efforts in foreign policy, as questions regarding the legitimacy of major decisions will continue to arise. While he possesses a parliamentary majority, claiming to speak on behalf of a broad national consensus will be considerably more difficult. Another challenge concerns the implementation of certain international commitments that his government has undertaken, particularly regarding the normalization of relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. As a result, avoiding political and diplomatic complications is unlikely.

One of the most significant features of these elections was the direct and indirect external involvement that took place throughout the campaign period. Various actors — including European countries, Turkey, Azerbaijan, US and Russia — sought, in different ways, to influence voters and steer support toward particular political forces. Ultimately, Armenian society delivered neither the government nor the opposition a clear mandate for a fundamental change in the country's foreign policy direction. This is a remarkable development and, in many respects, an unprecedented phenomenon in the three-decade history of the Republic of Armenia.

Consequently, difficult days lie ahead for Pashinyan, especially with regard to the normalization of relations with Azerbaijan. He must somehow convince the public to adopt a new constitution and amend those constitutional provisions that exist as preconditions for Azerbaijan and Turkey. In these elections, Pashinyan received around 730,000 votes. Significantly more votes are needed to pass a constitutional referendum, and it is difficult to imagine what could happen if the referendum fails.

On the other hand, there is active American involvement in the construction and operation of the Trump Route, which does not seem to be connected to the signing of a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Trump considers peace to have already been established and has begun vigorously advancing the American agenda through projects aimed at connecting Central Asia to Europe via the South Caucasus.

The Armenian public views this situation from two perspectives. On the one hand, Russia's pressure and statements did not produce positive results, and one half of the public remains inclined to believe that Pashinyan will lead them toward Europe. On the other hand, the support provided by the EU and the United States at the highest levels was not sufficient for Pashinyan to secure more than 50 percent support in order to advance his presumed pro-European agenda. It has become very clear that the Armenian public is deeply divided, and under such conditions, any change in Armenia's foreign policy course will not be accepted unanimously.

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

COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Democracy Hijacked: Armenia's Rigged Parliamentary Elections

Armenia's parliamentary elections were held on June 7 under widespread, systematic, and well-documented fraudulent conditions.

These elections were not merely held to determine the representatives of the people or the future orientation of the country. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was well aware that the outcome would decide whether he could continue to rule the country single-handedly for another five years or face prosecution for violating hundreds of laws and the constitution.

Realizing that this was a fight for personal survival, Pashinyan resorted to every legal and illegal means at his disposal to secure reelection and avoid imprisonment.

The electoral fraud started long before a single vote was cast. In a series of draconian measures in the months leading up to the election, Pashinyan ordered the arrests of hundreds of opposition supporters, accusing them of buying votes. Yet, not a single one of the arrested individuals has been tried or found guilty. Furthermore, without any legal authority, he ordered the arrests of several parliamentary candidates from the opposition. His intent was to undermine their electoral campaigns and intimidate their supporters. He also violated the legal requirement of obtaining prior approval from the Central Election Commission before arresting any candidate for parliament. Pashinyan additionally barred opposition leaders Gagik Tsarukyan, Robert Kocharyan, and Narek Karapetyan from leaving the country for brief trips, again without the required approval of the Central Election Commission.

Pashinyan ordered the arrest of prominent businessman and philanthropist Samvel Karapetyan on the very day he said he defended the Armenian Apostolic Church. After spending months in pretrial detention under harsh conditions, Karapetyan was placed under house arrest. In doing so, Pashinyan effectively deprived a major political opponent of the ability to campaign for his party ahead of the elections.

Pashinyan travelled throughout the country for several weeks before the election, improperly using extensive government resources for his political campaign. He was accompanied by government ministers and parliamentary leaders who abused their official positions by failing to take leave of absence.

Contrary to election laws, the government compelled hundreds of schoolchildren and teachers to attend Pashinyan's campaign rallies during school hours, to create the appearance of massive public support. Government employees faced similar forced attendance.

Regarding voter rolls, the Central Election Commission announced 2.5 million registered voters in a country with a population of at most three million. This includes a large number of children under 18 and hundreds of thousands of Armenians who had emigrated years earlier but whose names remained on the registered voter lists This discrepancy created ample opportunity for fraud, as the government could cast votes in the names of absent citizens. Indeed, several voters reported arrived at polling stations only to discover that someone else had already voted in their place.

Additional fraud occurred when authorities brought a large number of soldiers to polling stations and instructed them to vote for the Prime Minister's party. These soldiers engaged in multiple voting by moving between several precincts — a tactic known as "Carousel voting."

The authorities also created obstacles for those citizens of Armenia who had come from overseas specifically to vote. Upon arrival, many were immediately sent for 25-day military training, thus depriving them of their voting rights.

Remarkably, after only a small number of votes were counted on June 7, Pashinyan hastily announced that his party had won a majority, thereby pressuring the Central Election Commission to declare him the victor.

After preliminary counting on June 8, serious discrepancies emerged between the votes recorded at polling stations, and the totals reported by the Central Election Commission. Hundreds, if not thousands, of votes for opposition parties were undercounted. All three major opposition parties rejected the results as fraudulent, called for new elections, and appealed to the Constitutional Court. However, new elections would likely yield the same outcome under the same fraudulent methods. Moreover, all the members of the Constitutional Court were appointed by Pashinyan's parliamentary allies, making any overturning of the results virtually impossible.

On June 14, a full week after the elections, the Central Election Commission announced the final results. Despite documentation from the Prosperous Armenia party showing plenty of uncounted votes, the Commission claimed the party had fallen a few votes short of the 4 percent threshold. As a result Pashinyan's Civil Contract party was reported to have received 49.75 percent of the votes — which translates to 64 parliamentary seats; Strong Armenia party received 23.27 percent — 29 seats; and Armenia Alliance received 9.9 percent — 12 seats. Pashinyan's party secured approximately 60 percent of the seats in parliament, despite receiving only 49 percent of the public votes because 15 other parties having fallen below the 4 percent threshold, their votes were redistributed — largely benefiting Pashinyan's party.

Nevertheless, Pashinyan's party failed to achieve the two-thirds majority needed, to adopt the new constitution demanded by Pres. Ilham Aliyev. Consequently, Azerbaijan will not sign Pashinyan's much-touted Peace Treaty. This outcome is highly embarrassing for Pashinyan, who had campaigned on a promise of peace while accusing the opposition of being "parties of war."

Over the past week, there has been extensive debate in Armenia about whether opposition parties should take their seats in the fraudulent parliament or boycott it. Both options carry advantages and disadvantages. They will shortly announce their decision.

Regardless of whether the opposition parties choose to assume their seats, they should take two critical steps:

1) Unite all opposition forces and jointly call for hundreds of thousands of Armenians to flood the streets of Yerevan and other cities in sustained protests until Pashinyan resigns.

2) Form a "Shadow Cabinet," assigning opposition politicians to unofficial ministerial positions. This body would lead the campaign to oust Pashinyan and prepare for a smooth governmental transition after his departure.

Guardians of Memory: Why the Zoryan Institute Must Be Secured for Future Generations

By Bedross Der Matossian

It was in the early 1990s that my interest in the Armenian Genocide, late Ottoman history, and the study of mass violence first began to take shape. At that time, without access to the internet or a personal computer, the university library became my gateway to the world of genocide scholarship. As an undergraduate at the Hebrew University, I spent countless hours sifting through books on the Armenian Genocide. It soon became clear that many of the most influential works in the field were the product of the Zoryan Institute and, in particular, the scholarship of its research director, Prof. Vahakn N. Dadrian. Often called the architect of Armenian Genocide studies in Western academia, Dadrian's groundbreaking work was possible only through the steadfast support, resources, and vision of the Zoryan Institute.

For those unfamiliar with it, the Zoryan Institute of Canada is a registered non-profit organization — and a uniquely important one. It is dedicated to advancing rigorous scholarship and fostering public awareness around genocide, human rights, and diaspora studies. Crucially, the Institute operates independently, free from political, governmental or religious influence. This independence safeguards the integrity and credibility of its mission. In an era when denial, distortion, and the erosion of historical truth threaten our collective moral compass, the Zoryan Institute stands as a vital bulwark for human dignity and social justice.

Zoryan conducts comparative and multidisciplinary research on genocides and gross human rights violations worldwide — from the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide to the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides. Its work has shaped the very foundations of genocide and human rights scholarship, influencing educators, policymakers, and civil society. But Zoryan's impact extends even further. As home to the International Institute of Diaspora Studies (IIDS), the Institute is also a leading center for understanding how dispersed communities preserve identity, form transnational networks, and shape cultural and political landscapes across borders.

One of its most visionary initiatives is the Genocide and Human Rights University Program (GHRUP), a highly respected graduate-level summer course that has trained hundreds of emerging scholars and educators from around the world. Many of today's leading voices in genocide studies trace their academic origins to this transformative program. Zoryan has also developed high-school genocide education initiatives in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Education, equipping young people with the tools to understand equity, tolerance, and the consequences of dehumanization. These programs — taught in schools across Canada and beyond — help cultivate informed, empathetic global citizens.

Zoryan is also a guardian of memory. It maintains one of the largest collections of Armenian Genocide survivor testimonies and continues to expand its oral history archives through projects such as the 44-Day Artsakh War Oral History Project. Past efforts include documenting the experiences of Syrian-Armenian refugees rebuilding their lives in Canada — records that will serve generations of scholars, educators, and community members.

Through its publications, the Institute has achieved global reach. Its two peer-reviewed academic journals published with the University of Toronto Press — Genocide Studies International and Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies — are regarded as leading platforms in their fields. Combined with its books, podcasts, webinars, and international collaborations, Zoryan continues to shape global conversations on human rights and shared human experience.

Across its decades of work, the Zoryan Institute's impact can be seen in three key areas:

Educational empowerment: Equipping students, teachers, and communities with the tools to recognize injustice and advocate for human rights.

Scholarly influence: Training generations of researchers, professors, and thought leaders who now serve in institutions across the world.

Memory and prevention: Preserving testimonies and fostering dialogue to help prevent future atrocities.

Yet, despite its extraordinary contributions, the Zoryan Institute faces profound financial challenges. Unlike many academic institutions, Zoryan has no endowment and receives no institutional funding. It relies entirely on donors, partners and supporters. At a time when

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Scholar Warns Election Commission's Decision Risks Undermining Democracy

YEREVAN (Panorama) — An Armenian legal expert has accused the country's Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of setting a "dangerous precedent" by refusing to order a re-vote at disputed precincts following the June 7 parliamentary elections.

In a social media post on Tuesday, June 16, Arsen Tavadyan, associate professor at Yerevan State University, said the CEC misused a Venice Commission opinion to justify inaction. The commission argued that partial re-votes could allow voters to cast ballots tactically, knowing preliminary results. Tavadyan countered that while the Venice Commission acknowledged such risks, it also stressed that violations capable of affecting results must trigger effective remedies.

"The CEC's stance is not a legal argument but a manipulation," Tavadyan wrote. "If partial re-voting is deemed inappropriate, the next question should be what remedy is proper — not whether to ignore the violation altogether."

Armenia's electoral code provides two options. ordering a re-vote at specific polling stations or calling new parliamentary elections. By dismissing both, Tavadyan said, the CEC effectively created a "third path" — recognizing violations but leaving them without consequence.

He warned that such logic risks turning serious violations into guarantees of impunity. "This approach transforms electoral law into a formality serving political convenience," he said.

Tavadyan also noted that the Venice Commission's 2025 urgent report was drafted in the context of Romania's 2024 presidential elections, where the Constitutional Court annulled the first-round results. He argued that citing this document to justify leaving Armenia's election results untouched was "shooting itself in the foot."

The dispute now rests with Armenia's Constitutional Court, which must decide whether electoral violations carry enforceable consequences. Tavadyan cautioned that if the court upholds the CEC's position, it will set a precedent allowing future violations to remain unaddressed whenever remedies are deemed politically inconvenient.

"This is no longer just an electoral dispute," he said. "It is a matter of constitutional order."

Why the Zoryan Institute Must Be Secured for Future Generations

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universities are cutting programs and similar institutes in Canada have closed due to funding shortages, Zoryan's work is more vulnerable — and more essential — than ever.

As the leading institution in North America dedicated to genocide studies, diaspora research, and human rights education, Zoryan's future must be secured. Now is the moment for the Institute to establish its own independent endowment — one that will safeguard its mission, sustain its programs, and empower the next generation of scholars, educators, and human rights defenders.

Supporting the Zoryan Institute is not merely an act of philanthropy. It is an investment in truth, justice, and the preservation of collective memory. It is a commitment to ensuring that denial and distortion never eclipse historical reality. And, above all, it is a pledge to uphold human dignity in a world that needs it now more than ever.

Establishing an endowment may be a formidable undertaking, but it is well within reach when we truly appreciate the extraordinary importance of the Zoryan Institute's mission. For decades, Zoryan has been cultivating future scholars — individuals who are not only contributing to today's academic and policy worlds, but who will also become the moral and intellectual leaders of tomorrow. Their work will help shape how humanity understands justice, identity, and the dignity of all peoples.

By launching a global campaign, we ignite a movement that will safeguard and strengthen this mission for generations to come. An endowment is more than financial support — it is a powerful statement of belief in the transformative impact of knowledge, truth, and education. Its ripple effect will resonate across disciplines, empowering groundbreaking research in Comparative Genocide Studies, Diaspora Studies, and Human Rights Studies. Through this support, we nurture the ideas, discoveries, and conversations that push humanity toward greater understanding and compassion.

Such an endowment will not only sustain Zoryan's legacy — it will elevate it. It will create stronger educational opportunities, cultivate more deeply trained scholars, and inspire greater public awareness. And in doing so, it will help build a brighter, more just, and more humane world — one where the lessons of the past guide the conscience of the future.

(Bedross Der Matossian is a Guggenheim Fellow and Professor of Middle East History at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. He is the author, editor, and co-editor of nine books.)

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

