

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932

Volume LXXXIII, No. 46, Issue 4935

JUNE 6, 2026

\$2.00

Karabakh Refugees Face Hard Time Voting In Armenia's Upcoming Elections

By Marut Vanyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — On May 29 Karabakh (Artsakh) lawyers gathered at their office in Yerevan, where they explained the procedure by which Karabakh Armenians with Armenian code 070 passports and citizenship can restore their right to vote.

Karabakh Armenians hold passport issued by the Republic of Armenia, but the Armenian government considers it only a travel document and suggests applying for a new passport, only after which they can be considered full citizens of Armenia. After the 2023 exodus, 25,126 Karabakh Armenians have received a “new” Armenian passport, which means that they have the right to vote (making up nearly 2.5 million total eligible voters), while the names of the rest were not included in the voter lists and are deprived of the fundamental right to vote.

Earlier, at least three court decisions confirmed that persons with passport code 070 are considered citizens of Armenia, and it was stated that the name of that person must be included in the electoral lists. The court refers to the RA Law “On Citizenship” and International conventions.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs considers the spread of the news on social media as misleading, claiming that Karabakh Armenians can vote on June



Pashinyan's poster with the slogan “Stand for peace” in a children's playground in Yerevan. (Marut Vanyan Photo)

7, and made a clarifying statement.

“Since yesterday, misleading information regarding the voting rights of displaced persons (Karabakh Armenians) has been spread on social media, stating that it is possible to acquire the right to vote and be included in the voter lists without applying for and receiving Armenian citizenship, which is not true. Our compatriots displaced from Karabakh have been taken under the protec-

tion of the Republic of Armenia, having acquired temporary protection - refugee status. Therefore, the only way to obtain the right to participate in the NA elections on June 7 of this year is to obtain RA citizenship in order to satisfy the key criterion of being a citizen of the Republic of Armenia within the framework of the formation of the right to vote.”, reads in the statement.

see VOTING, page 2

Armenian Fruit Imports Also Banned by Russia

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Russia banned more imports from Armenia on Monday, June 1, imposing “temporary restrictions” on the sale of Armenian fruits just days before the country's crucial parliamentary elections.

As was the case with other food products essentially banned by it late last month, the Russian agricultural watchdog Rosselkhoznadzor claimed that many of them do not meet phytosanitary requirements of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) because of what it called poor oversight by Armenian authorities.

The government agency said that the measure, effective June 2, applies to grapes and stone fruits such as apricots, cherries and peaches. It comes just

see FRUIT, page 4



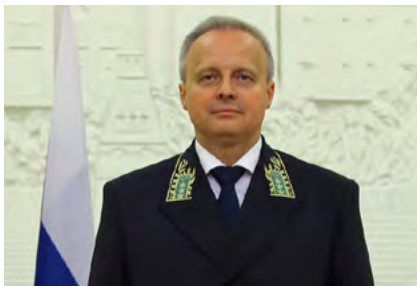
Peach trees with ripe fruits in Armenia, Vayots Dzor Provinces.

Russia's Ambassador To Armenia Recalled Ahead of Elections

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Moscow has recalled its Ambassador to Armenia, Sergei Kopyrkin, “for consultations” about Armenia's relations with the EU. The decision came a day after Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states urged Armenia to swiftly hold a referendum to choose between the two blocs.

see RECALL, page 6



Russian Ambassador to Armenia Sergei Kopyrkin. Official photo.

New Ambassador Of Armenia to US Makes Closer Economic and Political Ties His Priority

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WASHINGTON — Armenia is in the midst of a contentious election campaign which has attracted not just a lot of international attention but international involvement. On the part of the United States, high level officials, starting from President Donald Trump, Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, have publicly stated their support for the administration of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Dr. Narek Mkrtchyan, Armenia's ambassador to the United States



Ambassador Narek Mkrtchyan (photo Aram Arkun)

since August 2025, plays a key role in relations between these two countries. He recently spoke about his work and career.

From Academia to Government

Born in Parakar, Armenia, the comparatively young ambassador turns 37 this June. He has a doctorate in world history from Yerevan State University and a master's degree from the American University of Armenia in political science and international relations. He said that prior to entering politics, he taught at both aforementioned institutions.

He was introduced to the leader of the 2018 Velvet Revolution, current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, in 2015 or 2016 by means of current Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan, he recalled, and connected with Pashinyan's Civil Contract party during his years in academic life. By the time Pashinyan came to Yerevan from Gyumri in the My Step march see MKRTCHYAN, page 10

MASSACHUSETTS

Watertown Hosts The 2026 ACYOA Assembly and Sports Weekend

Page 7



CALIFORNIA

TCA Participates In Pasadena Armenian Festival

Page 15



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 18.

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



ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

First NVIDIA Blackwell Shipment Arrives in Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The first shipment for the Firebird AI megaproject has arrived at Zvartnots International Airport, consisting of 1,792 GPUs from a total planned deployment of 6,144 NVIDIA Blackwell-generation graphics processors.

The first phase of the project launch in Hrazdan of a modern “AI factory” with a capacity of about 18 MW, powered by high-performance computing resources based on NVIDIA’s Blackwell architecture.

The data center will use a closed-loop water-cooling system.

Investment in the first phase amounts to \$500 million.

Following the launch of the first phase, the center is expected to employ up to 100 highly qualified specialists. More than 1,000 specialists are expected to be involved in the construction and expansion works during the second phase, creating new high-paying jobs.

A key component of the project is a \$25 million strategic program signed between the Armenian government and Firebird AI. Under the agreement, the state will receive access to high-performance AI computing resources for five years to support Armenian startups, research groups, universities and specialists.

Catholicos Addresses Possibility of Arrest

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — During a meeting with representatives of several media outlets, Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II responded to a question about what would happen if the authorities decided to arrest him.

He stated that the Church would use all legal means available to seek justice.

“If we do not succeed, as was the case with our other clergymen, we are also prepared to bear that unjust punishment and decision with the same sense of duty. However, our position will not change. We will remain faithful to our sacred vow, our service, our nation and homeland, and to the defense of the autonomy of the Church,” the Catholicos said.

Commenting on statements regarding his possible removal from office, Karekin II said that forcing the Armenian Patriarch from the throne is not a simple matter.

“The Church has its own canonical principles, and the removal of the Armenian Patriarch is not subject to the will of any authority, individual or institution. If there are questions concerning the Armenian Patriarch or any clergyman, those issues are discussed in the appropriate bodies and decisions are made there,” he said.

The Civil Contract party’s election platform includes provisions related to reforming the Church, revising its charter, removing the Catholicos of All Armenians and holding new Catholicos elections.

Karabakh Refugees Face Hard Time Voting In Armenia’s Upcoming Elections

VOTING, from page 1

Previously, the difficulty of the status of Karabakh Armenians was associated with obtaining housing or jobs, then in the run-up to the elections, the issue has become even more acute as most are not considered eligible voters.

“Over the past week, four Artsakh Armenians have applied for judicial protection with a request to be included in their voter lists. The applications of three out of the four applicants were satisfied by a judicial act,” lawyer Roman Yeritsyan said in a conversation with journalists at the Artsakh representation. “In other words, the courts satisfied the claims of Artsakh Armenians in three different decisions. Moreover, these decisions enter into force from the moment of issuance and are not subject to appeal. One application was rejected due to another circumstance. It was purely due to the fact that the dispute is subject to examination not in civil, but in administrative proceedings. It did not say that an Artsakh Armenian does not have the right to vote. And the other three judicial acts clearly stated that an Artsakh Armenian, regardless of having a passport with code 070, having citizenship or not, has the right to vote,” Yeritsyan added.

The passport difficulties of Artsakh Armenians began after their displacement in 2023. After the bread queues during the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, they began to stand in line in front of passport offices in Armenia. Afterwards, the process began to

be carried out online, which made the process a little easier but to this day they face bureaucratic hassles. This issue became even more acute in the run-up to the elections.



The passports of Artsakh Armenians are the same blue passports as all citizens of Armenia (Marut Vanyan photo)

Most Artsakh Armenians see intent on the part of the Armenian government and believe that it is being done on purpose so that they cannot vote, given their oppositional views.

“All Karabakh Armenians in Echmiadzin support Karapetyan or Kocharyan, but many do not have Armenian citizenship, so they cannot vote. I personally applied for citizenship months ago, but I am still waiting like this,” said a Karabakh woman.

“Honestly, I don’t care about politics, I applied for an Armenian passport and citizenship so that I could benefit from the housing program. I haven’t decided who I’ll

vote for yet, but it’s not Pashinyan’s party,” added a Karabakh man.

During the campaign, hate speech towards Karabakh Armenians has become even more intense, almost unbearable (perhaps there is no need to mention Pashinyan’s calls to stay and die).

Armenians have always talked about unity, that Armenia, Artsakh and the Diaspora are one united body, however, beyond patriotism, the picture is not pleasant. It would be logical and desirable if those with opposing political views respected each other’s opinions, but in this pre-election period, the matter has reached stabbings, like the murder that shocked Armenia on May 26 in the Kotayk region, which occurred as a result of a dispute over the elections.

In the context of the elections, the other “undesirable” Armenians are the Armenians from Russia. There are publications suggesting that Russia will export them to vote.

“The Kremlin could send up to 100,000 voters to the Armenian elections to ensure Pashinyan’s defeat. Armenians living in Russia will be forced to vote against the party of current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in the parliamentary elections, Reuters reports, citing Western intelligence sources,” Deutsche Welle wrote in a story.

June 7 won’t be the end of Armenia. The question is how things will play out after the votes are counted. The problem is how “good” and “bad,” “real” and “fake” Armenians will live together after the storm subsides.

FAR Provides Services to Nurses for Career Advancement

YEREVAN — The conference “A New Era in Nursing” was recently organized by the American University of Armenia BSN alumni association, the Association of Hematology, Oncology, and Palliative Care Nurses, in collaboration with the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR). It addressed key challenges in the field as well as offered a platform for nurses from different medical institutions to exchange professional experience.

Strengthening nursing education, professional communication, and interdisciplinary collaboration is an important step toward raising nursing standards in Armenia, while also reinforcing nurses’ professional role, leadership, and reputation.

According to Varduhi Petrosyan, dean of the Turpanjian College of Health Sciences at the American University of Armenia, the conference marked the realization of a long-held dream.

“For years, we dreamed of having higher education in nursing. After overcoming legal and regulatory barriers, we received permission to launch a bachelor’s degree program in nursing. Today, nurses in Armenia can receive university-level education, and we already have our first graduates, who have united to establish the Armenian Association of Bachelor Nurses,” she said.

For many years, FAR has been one of the leading organizations in Armenia supporting continuing professional development programs in healthcare. Among FAR’s founders was the renowned Prof. Nurse Annette Choolfaian, whose contribution greatly advanced the profession.

“We will continue implementing programs that strengthen the role of nurses within the healthcare system,” noted Dr. Hambarzum Simonyan, Deputy Country Director and Healthcare Program Director



Dr. Hambarzum Simonyan, Deputy Country Director and Healthcare Program Director at FAR joined Nurses in Armenia at New Era in Nursing Conference.

at FAR.

Since 2022, FAR has also been implementing the Head Nurses Continuous Professional Development Program sponsored by the Armenia Medical Fund. During the first half of this year, 34 nurses graduated from the program, representing medical institutions across Armenia’s regions, with another group of graduates expected by the end of the year.

Recently, participants of the program gathered at the FAR office to discuss its outcomes. After completing the online phase, nurses further enhanced their practical skills through training at the Arabkir Medical Center.

Tamara Avagyan, a nurse from the Metsamor Medical Center, noted that many nurses in Armenia cannot afford paid training courses, making programs like this a valuable opportunity to gain new knowl-

edge and professional training.

“I’ve worked for seven years and attended many trainings, but nowhere have we been welcomed and taught with such professionalism and support. We gained valuable experience that we will apply in our hospitals,” said Nadya Grigoryan, a nurse from Echmiadzin Medical Center.

Simonyan emphasized that one of the program’s most important outcomes is that nurses return to their medical institutions and introduce positive changes, while also educating and motivating their colleagues locally.

FAR aims to support not only practicing nurses, but also students choosing this profession. This year, we plan to provide medical college scholarships, including the Choolfaian Scholarship for seven students and the Tufayan Scholarship for up to 30 students.



ARMENIA

Russia Threatens Armenia with Gas Price Hike as US President Endorses Pashinyan

By Marut Vanyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Against the backdrop of the ongoing political campaign of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the intensified courting of the European Union in Armenia, Russian-Armenian relations are becoming increasingly tense.

Russia initially began to ban the transportation of flowers, brandy and fish from Armenia to its market, but these obstacles were created by Armenian drivers at the level of border guards, who justified it by saying that the flowers were withered or that the truck door was rusty, but, everyone understood the political context of all this. However, Russia is already officially threatening to use its most powerful “weapon” against Armenia — gas.

Russian Energy Minister Sergey Tsivilev has sent a letter to the Armenian Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, warning that it could cut off the tax-free supply of gas, petroleum products and uncut diamonds, Kommersant reported.

Armenia’s Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure said it had not received any letters or notifications regarding the matter.

The same Russian media outlet published another article, saying that indeed, Armenian authorities know that the letter has indeed arrived. While the title of the article was very polite, one has to note that Russian President Vladimir Putin loves “to joke” like this.

Thus, distant Armenia and Russia are “negotiating” over a new gas price. While Russia threatens to take away the special price it charges Armenia for gas, Pashinyan stated during the campaign, “We are no longer that poor state and people, we are today able to create our own prosperity. Armenia will no longer be a country of thousands or millions, but a country of billions and trillions.”

On the heels of that squabble, US President Donald Trump issued a statement on social media endorsing Pashinyan this week, something that is highly unusual. “Nikol has my COMPLETE and TOTAL Endorsement for Re-Election on June 7, 2026. Make (Armenia) Great Again — MAGA,” Trump posted on his Truth Social account.

He continued, “Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, of Armenia, a great friend and



The agency in Vagharshapat offers postal transportation to Russia and back to Armenia (Marut Vanyan photo)

Leader, is making his Country strong, wealthy and very secure! Nikol completely shares my vision of PEACE and PROSPERITY for Armenia and the entire South Caucasus region. Our Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, just traveled to Armenia, where he advanced several important Deals for both our Countries. Soon, the United States and Armenia will break ground together on the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity, which will transform the South Caucasus and help our wonderful American Energy Companies gain access from Central Asia all the way to the United States.”

Certainly in the past month, Armenia has seen its share of the global spotlight, with the European Summit earlier in May and the visit of Secretary of State Marco Rubio last week, many in Armenia consider this flurry of activities as a pre-election campaign and want to understand how it would translate into money in their pockets.

In the south of Armenia, the locals are waiting for the train to pass through the abandoned Meghri railway and where it will go and in the north, truck drivers are waiting at the Lars checkpoint for the Russians to allow them to deliver their strawberries (which are already spoiling) to the Russian market.

It is obvious that Russia is no longer hiding its discontent, and has gone from hints about “sanctions” against Armenia to action. The Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Supervision already has announced restrictions on Armenian vegetables and fruits.

“From May 30, 2026, the Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (Rosselkhoznadzor) will introduce temporary restrictions on the import of fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, green vegetables and strawberries originating and shipped from Armenia until an appropriate algorithm for ensuring the safety of shipped products is developed. The decision was made in response to increasing violations in the supply of Armenian fruit and vegetable products to Russia and to ensure phytosanitary safety. The current situation poses a threat to the phytosanitary status of the country’s territory. Furthermore, the competent Armenian agency has failed to take appropriate measures to address previously identified violations,” the Agency announced.

Rubio’s Transit through Yerevan

It is clear that gas is of greater importance to the Armenian economy than the export of fruits, vegetables, alcoholic beverages and Jermuk to Russia, although these are

no less important.

“The Russian Foreign Ministry’s statement does not refer to an increase in gas prices, but to the cancellation of the agreement on this issue. If this were a political issue and Russia wanted to put pressure on Armenia, Russia could simply raise the price,” Step1.am editor-in-chief Naira Hayrumyan told the Armenian Mirror Spectator.

“On May 27, Nikol Pashinyan clearly explained that a decision had been made to abandon Russian gas in favor of Azerbaijani gas, which Armenia would receive in exchange for transit. This means that once the pipeline passes through the TRIPP, Armenia will receive gas in exchange for transit, although no payments have been finalized yet. Apparently, this was agreed upon with Russia. But if Armenia has decided to abandon Russian gas, why not choose Iranian gas, especially since such a pipeline already exists and is more convenient from a logistical standpoint? This is a truly complex issue, because in addition to the main pipeline from Russia to the Armenian border, Russia’s Gazprom owns Armenia’s entire internal network infrastructure. What will happen to it? How will it be taken from Russia and in exchange for what,” noted Hayrumyan.

Under the 2013 agreement, Russia supplied Armenia with gas, fuel and diamonds without export duties and on preferential terms for domestic consumption.

“As for Rubio’s visit to Armenia, it is due to the elections, it is another matter how it is received in the Trump administration. However, it may have the opposite effect, taking into account the pro-Russian sentiments in Armenia and not only in political but also economic terms. Russia is already restricting the import of Armenian fruits and vegetables into its country, which is hurting Armenian businessmen, which can cause negative sentiment against Trump, especially since there have already been cases, as in the case of Orban, whom Vance supported, but he did not pass, Ivanishvili remains in Georgia as a Russian power. Everything is still unclear. Everything will depend on the outcome of the elections and, most importantly, how the vote count is conducted, since most violations occur during the counting process. Only then will it become clear which geopolitical power wields influence in Armenia,” concluded Hayrumyan.

Former Prime Minister Kocharyan Says Pashinyan Mirrors Saakashvili Policy

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Former Armenian President Robert Kocharyan, the prime ministerial candidate of the Hayastan Alliance, has said that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is “copying” former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili by pursuing policies that provoke problems with Russia.

Speaking on Armenia’s Public Television, Kocharyan said he completely rejects such an approach.

“This is a policy that I simply reject. My model of policy is this: do not get drawn into clashes between major powers, try to find areas of cooperation with those countries where cooperation is possible, and do not play on their disagreements,” he said.

Kocharyan added that he sees the same behavior in the prime minister’s domestic policies. While such an approach may not

create serious problems internally, he argued that it is extremely dangerous in foreign relations, with the public ultimately paying the price for the consequences.

“I did not invite Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who made harsh statements against Russia from Armenian territory. What required such urgency in signing a strategic partnership agreement with Lithuania, a country that had declared it was in conflict with Russia and said Kaliningrad should be seized?” he said.

Responding to questions about why the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) did not respond to Armenia’s requests after the 44-day war, Kocharyan stated that nearly all CSTO member states maintain closer relations with Azerbaijan than with Armenia. In his view, the organization would not have adopted such a decision, while Russia would have been

left isolated in such a vote.

Asked about the possibility of bilateral assistance from Russia, Kocharyan said that, to the best of his knowledge, the relevant procedures had not been utilized.

“I would have solved that issue with one phone call,” he added.

He also stated that such a war simply would not have occurred during his time in office.

Kocharyan reiterated his position that Pashinyan’s statements and actions made war inevitable, undermined the negotiation process and legitimized an attack for Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev through territorial claims, including the statement that “Artsakh is Armenia. That’s all.”

“I never made such statements. Negotiations were taking place around self-determination. There were no territorial

claims. On the contrary, at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I said that I recognize Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity. Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity has nothing to do with Karabakh, because at that time a process of self-determination was underway. Territorial integrity is a principle that is important for Armenia as well, because it also has its own territory,” Kocharyan stressed.

The election campaign that began on May 8 will continue until June 5. June 6 will be a day of silence, while voting will take place on June 7. On May 25, it became known that the Alliance Progressive Centrist Party had submitted a withdrawal request, after which the Central Electoral Commission annulled the registration of the party’s electoral list. As a result, ballot paper number 13 will not appear in the upcoming elections.



ARMENIA

Armenian Military Parade Appears to Include Iranian Air Defense System

By Ray Furlong, Hannah Kaviani and Robert Zargayan

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Armenia on May 28 staged a Republic Day military parade showcasing hardware including rocket launchers, drones, and armored vehicles from countries such as France and India — as well as what appears to be an Iranian air defense system.

A weapons purchase from Tehran could strike an awkward note as Armenia forges closer relations with Washington, with the Yerevan parade coming just hours after US President Donald Trump endorsed Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for June 7.

The first reported sighting of the AD-08 Majid, a truck-mounted short-range air defense system, came during rehearsals for the parade the previous day. Multiple Armenian media outlets carried photos of what they identified as partially covered Majids.

On May 28, RFE/RL's Armenian Service witnessed the same systems trundling across Republic Square with the covers off. But amid a martial drumbeat, an official announcer was coy about their origin.

“The Scorpion short-range self-propelled surface-to-air missile system is designed for the detection and destruction of low-flying aircraft, helicopters, and unmanned aerial vehicles, as well as for the air defense of vital military and industrial facilities,” he said.

Scorpion appears to be a local, Armenian name conferred on the system by the authorities. Localized names were also given to

some weapons systems from other nations. For example French Caesar howitzers were named Aramazd after a god in Armenian mythology.

A spokesman for the Defense Ministry in Yerevan was also cautious, declining to confirm or deny if the Scorpion was actually of Iranian origin.

But Sirous Amerian, a New Zealand-based military affairs analyst, told RFE/RL's Radio Farda he had no doubts about the system's origin.

“Anyone who sees images of these Iranian systems can effectively identify them without needing official Armenian confirmation,” he said.

“If you look at the components and structure of this system and compare it with images of the Majid system, in my opinion there is about a 99.5 percent overlap. Therefore, it is most likely the same system. So, either due to local requirements, or perhaps Armenia — because it is not under sanctions — has access to a better, international chassis, instead of, for example, an Iranian Aras vehicle, they mounted it on an (Italian) Iveco chassis,” he added.

Why The Majid?

The Majid is a relatively new Iranian system, first used by Iran during the 12-day war with Israel last year, according to the Tehran Times.

Armenia would be the first country to buy it, Defense Security Asia wrote on May 27.

“It can position itself somewhere, deploy its stabilizers, activate its optics, scan, fire its missile, and five minutes later be 5-10 kilometers away. This mobility, lightness, and

the fact that everything is integrated into a single vehicle is very attractive,” Amerian told RFE/RL.

Iranian authorities have claimed effective use of the Majid against US forces in March and April, including an incident in which an F-35 jet was damaged, but this could not be independently confirmed.

Pashinyan said the point of the Yerevan parade was to present a report to the nation on the weapons Armenia has purchased to upgrade its armed forces since their defeat in a war with neighboring Azerbaijan in 2023.

That conflict exposed Armenia's vulnerability to drone attacks and resulted in 100,000 ethnic Armenians fleeing their homes as Azerbaijan regained control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

“The transformation of the army is not about war, but about peace,” Pashinyan said on May 28. “We set a task to increase Armenia's defense capability.” He said the parade featured hardware from seven countries. This included French Bastion armored vehicles, American M2 machine guns, and Russian Mi-17 helicopters.

Elections And Endorsements

Pashinyan faces a battle for reelection on June 7, fighting on a platform about pivoting Armenia away from its long-standing reliance on Moscow and toward realigning with Washington. This has gained the backing of the US president.

“Nikol has my complete and total endorsement for reelection,” wrote Trump on social media on May 27. His comments followed a visit by US Secretary of State

Marco Rubio on May 26, in which he said Pashinyan promised “a brighter and more independent future for Armenia.”

Pashinyan has also been seeking closer ties with the European Union, passing a law declaring Armenia's intention of gaining eventual EU membership.

This geopolitical shift drew a broadside from Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova on May 28.

“We can't not be disturbed by the course taken by the Armenian leadership toward closer ties with the North Atlantic alliance whose basic policy is aimed against Moscow,” she said.

But while Pashinyan aims to refocus foreign policy, he can't change Armenia's geography. Hemmed in by a largely hostile Turkey and Azerbaijan, the country has close economic ties with neighboring Iran, which supplies petroleum and industrial goods and was also, prior to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a key transit route for Armenian trade.

What Iran makes of Armenia's pro-Western course is not clear. Iran's ambassador to Armenia, Khalil Shirgholami, was among the guests observing the parade.

Amerian, the military analyst, believes pragmatism will probably continue to guide Iran's attitude to Armenia.

“Iran does not seem to perceive Armenia's Western tilt as threatening, and this sale may have been driven simply by the opportunity to export. For a country like Iran, exporting \$500 million — reportedly the value of these contracts — is not insignificant,” he said.

Armenian Fruit Imports Also Banned by Russia

FRUIT, from page 1

before the beginning of the apricot and cherry harvesting period in Armenia. Russia has long been a key market for these crops grown by tens of thousands of Armenian farmers.

Many others grow vegetables that have also been exported to Russia in large quantities for many years. Rosselkhoznadzor blocked their imports late week, saying that it has found dangerous “quarantined objects” in many Armenian tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and greens. Imports of Armenian cut flowers and mineral water were halted earlier in May.

The punitive measures highlight a further deterioration of Russian-Armenian relations that followed the holding of two European summits in Yerevan in early May. Moscow has since been pressuring the Armenian government to choose between continuing to seek membership of the EEU, a Russian-led trade that guarantees Armenian exporters' tariff-free access to the Russian market.

On Friday, EEU member Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan joined Russia in telling Yerevan to make such a choice through a referendum “as soon as possible.” They also implicitly threatened to suspend Armenia's membership in the bloc. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan dismissed the demand.

Moscow is ramping up the pressure on Yerevan ahead of the June 7 elections in which Pashinyan's Civil Contract party is challenged by opposition groups pledging

to repair Russian-Armenian relations.

According to Armenian government data, Russia accounted for 35.8 percent of Armenia's foreign trade last year, followed by China (12.3 percent) and the EU (11.7 percent). Armenian exports to Russia totaled almost \$3 billion in 2025, compared with \$667 million worth of goods exported by Armenian firms to EU member states.

The EU condemned the Russian pressure



Armenian-grown strawberries being delayed by Russian border authorities (Marut Vanyan photo)

on Monday. It accused Moscow of trying to “hurt Armenia's economy” and “influence the outcome” of Sunday's elections.

“We will continue supporting Armenia to handle such attempts of coercion,” EU spokesperson Anouar El Anouni said, according to the AFP news agency.

The EU itself was accused by Russia as well as the Armenian opposition of election meddling after deciding earlier this year to

send a “hybrid rapid response team” to Yerevan for the ballot. The deployment was requested by Pashinyan's government.

Opposition leaders running in Armenia's June 7 parliamentary elections have blamed Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for Russia's widening bans on the import of Armenian goods and warned of their devastating impact on the domestic economy.

“If this government miraculously stays in power, Armenia's economy will be plunged into a deep crisis,” former President Robert Kocharian said during an election campaign rally in central Yerevan on Sunday. “And what for? For the sake of one person who wants to cling to power.”

“I honestly don't know why they are artificially turning us into an enemy of Russia,” he told thousands of supporters of his Hayastan alliance. “They are taking us down the destructive path of Ukraine. We don't need that, my dear

people. What we need is allied relations with Russia and very good relations with both Europe and the United States.”

Gagik Tsarukyan, the leader of the opposition Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK), likewise expressed concern over the economic impact of the Russian bans as he campaigned in the northern Lori province at the weekend.

“Why are we feuding with Russia?” Tsa-

rukyan said. “Do we have better options? People go there for work, people export goods, and every month \$160 million in remittances comes from Russia.”

“You've heard the Russian president's speech,” he added, alluding to Vladimir Putin's latest warning that the Armenian government must choose between striving to join the European Union and remaining part of a Russian-led trade bloc that gives Armenia tariff-free access to Russia's market and a significant discount on the price of Russian natural gas.

Levon Zurabyan, the top election candidate of former President Levon Ter-Petrosian's Armenian National Congress (HAK) party, spoke on Monday of an “impending energy and economic collapse” in the country. He claimed that Pashinyan has “dragged us into a proxy war between the West and Russia and Iran.”

Russia is Armenia's leading commercial partner, having accounted for 36 percent of its foreign trade last year. Armenian farmers, agribusiness firms and alcohol producers are particularly dependent on the Russian market. Nevertheless, Pashinyan insisted last Thursday that the Russian sanctions do not pose “any threat to Armenia's developing economy.”

Pashinyan's three main election challengers — Hayastan, the BHK and Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetian's Strong Armenia bloc — have pledged to repair Russian-Armenian relations if they win the elections. The Armenian premier has repeatedly branded them Russian “agents” and “spies” on the campaign trail.



INTERNATIONAL

5 Winning Educational Ideas: WIN4Education Concludes Across Armenia and Georgia

YEREVAN/TBILISI — The regional WIN4Education program, initiated by the Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology (FAST), officially concluded across Armenia and Georgia.

Over the course of six months, more than 200 women and young people from regional communities in Armenia and Georgia took part in a free capacity-building and mentorship program at the intersection of STEM education and entrepreneurship, empowering them to turn their educational experience into innovative, solution-driven ideas.

The Armenian phase of the program officially concluded on May 23 with the Best Idea Award final competition held at the Innovative Solutions and Technologies Center (ISTC) of Yerevan State University.

“Every participant who has reached this stage is already a winner, because the greatest achievement lies in the growth, confidence, and belief they have gained in their ability to create meaningful change through their ideas — in their communities and in their own lives,” mentioned Larisa Avetisyan, WIN4Education Program Lead, in her opening remarks.

WIN4Education was implemented in Armenia in partnership with Teach For Armenia, and in Georgia in collaboration with the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA).

“For Teach For Armenia and the Kaits Incubator, our involvement in WIN4Edu-

cation was a deeply intentional mission to empower our Teacher-Leaders and alumni to transform classroom insights into sustainable social enterprises. Over a rigorous 6-month journey, this cohort proved the sheer strength of their internal drive and dedication,” said Armine Gevorgyan, Senior Officer For Alumni Engagement and adding that their recent survey data highlighted participants’ incredible stamina, with an overwhelming 91% of them maintaining active engagement right until the final week, and 72% expressing strong, grounded confidence in applying their newly acquired entrepreneurial tools.

The training phase was followed by a two-month mentorship journey, during which 54 participants formed 19 teams and, with the support of mentors, further developed their ideas into practical solutions addressing real challenges in education and STEM.

Projects were evaluated by a distinguished jury comprising Ani Oganessian (Plug and Play Tech Center), Anna Gevorgyan (Startup Grind Yerevan), Irina Ghazaryan (Doctor Yan), and Karni Keushgerian (Women’s Fund Armenia).

Following the final pitches, five teams were selected for financial awards. Nexus, AR Garden, and Lullie each received 500,000 drams; Koli received 1,000,000 drams; while the grand prize winner, AssistED, received 1,500,000 drams.

“WIN4Education gave us not only valuable experience, but also the confidence to bring our ideas to life. Today, we feel ready to apply the skills and leadership capabilities we have developed in our communities and contribute to meaningful change in education,” said Marine Poghosyan, representative of the winning AssistED team and teacher at Gavar Secondary School N2.

The prize fund was co-financed by Women’s Fund Armenia and Teach For Armenia.

The closing event also included a certificate ceremony recognizing all program participants.

The Georgian phase of WIN4Education concluded on May 25.

“Throughout the program, participants not only gained knowledge and practical skills, but also built connections with people they may never have imagined collaborating with and met mentors they had only dreamed of learning from. Taking the first step is always the hardest—but that is exactly where the most meaningful change begins,” said Nino Parsadanishvili, WIN4Education Leadership Module Lead in Georgia and representative of the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA).

WIN4Education was implemented within the framework of the RECONOMY program, supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Helvetas, and Help – Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe.



The participants at the awards ceremony

INTERNATIONAL

Czech Journalist Explores Ruben Vardanyan’s Journey

PRAGUE (Panarmenian.net) — A recent article in *Lidové noviny*, Czech journalist Tomáš Vlach examines the case of Ruben Vardanyan and the broader issue of Armenian detainees in Azerbaijan. The article explores both the controversies surrounding Vardanyan and his humanitarian legacy, Free Armenian Prisoners reported.

Vlach notes that in 2022 Vardanyan renounced his Russian citizenship, left his business activities behind, and moved to Nagorno-Karabakh during a period of blockade and growing uncertainty.

He later served as State Minister and remained in the region until Azerbaijan’s military operation in September 2023.

Following his detention by Azerbaijani forces, Vardanyan was tried in Baku and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

The article notes that human rights defenders have raised concerns about the legal proceedings against him and other Armenian detainees.

Special attention is given to Vardanyan’s recent nomination for the 2026 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize.

The nomination highlights his humanitarian work, including his role in founding the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and supporting educational and charitable projects.

The article argues that the fate of Armenian prisoners held in Baku receives limited international attention despite its humanitarian significance.

Pashinyan Says Armenia Will not Leave EAEU

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated during a pre-election meeting in Tsovaguyh that Armenia is not planning to leave the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). He was responding to a question from a journalist with the Russian newspaper Izvestia.

Commenting on a recent EAEU statement, Pashinyan said: “I read it. It was a very balanced text. It turns out that our partners from the four EAEU member states support the idea of holding a referendum in Armenia on joining the European Union,” according to Panorama.am.

According to the prime minister, no referendum can take place unless Armenia officially applies to the European Union.

At the end of the conversation, Pashinyan assured that he would attend the next EAEU meeting.

During the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council held in Astana on May 29, the presidents of four EAEU member states — Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan — adopted a statement regarding Armenia’s situation. The statement proposed that Armenia hold a referendum as soon as possible on choosing between the EAEU and the European Union.

EU Allocates €2.2 Million for Armenia Visa Reforms

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The European Union is allocating €2.2 million to Armenia to support the visa liberalization process. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the funding will be directed toward reforms in border management, document security, and the law enforcement system.

On June 1, the launch ceremony was held for the program titled “Support to the Visa Liberalization Dialogue in Armenia in the Areas of Border Management, Document Security and Law Enforcement Reforms.”

Minister of Internal Affairs Arpine Sargsyan stated that this is the first program

in Armenia specifically designed to directly support the visa liberalization process. According to her, the initiative represents an important step toward deepening Armenia-EU cooperation, expanding opportunities for Armenian citizens to travel freely and with dignity, and strengthening people-to-people ties.

The minister also emphasized the importance of expanding cooperation with European Union member states, noting that the program is being implemented in partnership with the Republic of Lithuania.

According to Sargsyan, under the leadership of the prime minister, Armenia has

set the goal of achieving a visa-free regime with the European Union as quickly as possible, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs will continue its consistent efforts in that direction.

Senior representatives of the European Union and Lithuania praised Armenia’s progress, emphasizing that reforms carried out within the framework of the visa liberalization dialogue under the coordination of the Ministry of Internal Affairs have already produced visible and tangible results. Project Team Leader Evelina Gudzinskaite presented the initiative’s key priorities and planned activities.



INTERNATIONAL

Turkey's Main Opposition Says Erdoğan Is Trying to Retain Power by Removing Alternatives, Vows to Resist

ANKARA (SCF) — Turkey's main opposition party on June 2 accused President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of trying to hold on to power by eliminating political alternatives, Turkish Minute reported.

The accusation came at a crowded parliamentary group meeting of the Republican People's Party (CHP), days after a court annulled the party's 2023 leadership congress, removed its elected chairman, Özgür Özel, and restored former chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu to the post.

Özel, who led the meeting despite the court ruling, said the leadership crisis was not an internal party dispute but part of a broader attempt to block voters from changing the government.

"This is not a matter within CHP," Özel said. "This is a matter between Erdoğan, his regime and the nation."

The meeting at the Turkish Parliament turned into a show of defiance against the ruling. Party members chanted for a congress before the speech, while Özel said 3,200 people were waiting outside the parliament and that the hall was filled beyond capacity.

Özel said Erdoğan's government had lost public support and was trying to create a political system in which elections would be held only in form.

"They want to turn to a democracy of form, where elections exist only in shape, where those who have the will and determination to change things become exhausted and turn away from the ballot box," he said.

He accused Erdoğan of seeking to leave voters "without a candidate, without a party, without an institution" and to make elections "without alternatives."

Özel also rejected Erdoğan's denial of involvement in the court case, saying the president could not avoid responsibility by remaining silent.

"One does not say, 'I'm not part of this,'" Özel said. "One stands against a coup."

The court ruling has deepened the crisis inside the CHP, Turkey's oldest political party and the main opposition force against Erdoğan, who has ruled the country as prime minister and president since 2003.

The Ankara Regional Court of Justice annulled the CHP's 38th Ordinary Congress, held in November 2023, where Özel defeated Kılıçdaroğlu after the party's loss to Erdoğan in that year's presidential election. The court ruled that the congress was invalid and ordered the previous leadership to return as an interim measure.

The case concerns allegations of irregularities in the 2023 party vote, including claims of vote buying and manipulation. The CHP denies wrongdoing and says the lawsuits are part of a campaign to weaken the opposition after its gains in the March 2024 local elections, when the party won Turkey's largest cities and finished ahead of Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) nationwide.

Özel said the court ruling had created the appearance of "two CHPs," with one side at party headquarters under the court-appointed leadership and the other in parliament, where lawmakers and party members were resisting the decision.

He described the ruling as an alliance between what he called "the absolute sultan" and "absolute nullity," a reference to

the legal term used to invalidate the party congress.

"Today, defending CHP is not defending a party," he said. "Today, defending the CHP is defending democracy."

Özel said the party had begun col-

municipal officials have been detained or arrested in investigations the party says are politically motivated.

Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, Erdoğan's most prominent political rival and the CHP's presidential candidate,



Özgür Özel

lecting signatures from delegates to request an extraordinary congress and had passed the required number. He said the campaign reached 600 signatures shortly after noon and was moving toward 1,000, despite what he described as pressure on delegates.

Under CHP bylaws, an extraordinary congress must be convened if an absolute majority of delegates signs a petition. Kılıçdaroğlu's side argues that a congress cannot proceed before the appeals process is completed.

The leadership fight comes amid a broader crackdown on the CHP. More than 20 CHP mayors and hundreds of

was arrested in March 2025 on corruption and terrorism-related charges that he denies and remains in prison.

Özel said the legal pressure on the party was tied to the government's fear of losing power.

"What is being done is a coup against the next president, against the next government," he said.

He said the party would continue to resist with support from other opposition parties, labor unions, bar associations, civil society groups and voters.

"The CHP is standing tall," he said. "This group is a group marching to power."

Russia's Ambassador to Armenia Recalled Ahead of Elections

RECALL, from page 1

The move comes amidst renewed tensions between Armenia and Russia ahead of the 7 June parliamentary elections. The latest round of friction largely followed a 1 April meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, during which Putin expressed their wish that "pro-Russian" forces would be able to "participate in this domestic political work during the elections."

The day before Kopyrkin's recall, the leaders of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan adopted a joint statement during an EAEU session in Kazakhstan on May 29, calling for Armenia to hold a nationwide referendum "as soon as possible" on joining the EU or remaining in the EAEU.

Armenia was represented at the session by Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan, as Pashinyan was engaged in election campaigning.

The appeal was issued in light of "the significant risks to the economic security" of EAEU member states stemming from Armenia's "preparations for accession to the EU", as well as the need to prevent related damage to the bloc.

The leaders also agreed that member states would report at the next EAEU meeting in December 2026 on "the possible consequences of suspending" Armenia's membership. However, under the bloc's

regulations, a country can only be removed based on its own request.

The statement came roughly three weeks after Putin made a similar proposal, suggesting that a referendum should determine Armenia's geopolitical trajectory. Putin added that if the Armenian people chose the EU path, "we will make the relevant conclusions and take the path of a gentle, intelligent, and mutually beneficial divorce" — remarks Pashinyan later rejected.

The same day as the EAEU session, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Armenia "cannot and must not" deepen relations with the EU "at the expense of the finances of EAEU countries."

On Monday, June 1, Pashinyan rejected the need for a swift referendum, noting that his government would continue to work within the EAEU bloc "until the point when making a choice between the EU and the EAEU becomes unavoidable."

He stressed that the choice between the two blocs must be made based on the referendum; however, he saw no ground for holding it now, as such a choice currently remains "theoretical" at this stage.

"Until the point when Armenia has either officially applied for EU membership or is very close to obtaining candidate status, holding any referendum would be unreasonable", Pashinyan said.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan at a weekly press briefing in May 2026. Official photo.

He added that they would continue to work "calmly and steadily, without disputes" within the EAEU.

Pashinyan also reiterated that bilateral relations with Russia are undergoing a "transformation" and at the same time underscored they were "significantly developing and attaching importance" to those relations.

"I consider the transformation phase to be positive because, yes, in the context of this new situation, we are establishing new relations with Russia, and I am confident that we will succeed in this", Pashinyan said.

Later on Monday, Pashinyan and Putin held a phone call, in which the Armenian leader "thanked the Russian president for his balanced positions on a number of issues that gave rise to misgivings, his friendly tone, as well as his support." According to the Armenian readout, the two agreed to "continue the discussions at a suitable opportunity in the format of a meeting."

Speaking after the EAEU session on May 29, Putin said that Russia and Armenia, as well as their peoples, shared a "special relationship."

He recalled telling Pashinyan that "everything that is good for Armenians is acceptable and good for Russia", adding that any future decision would not "spoil our humanitarian ties, it will not spoil our political ties."

"But in this case, we're talking about

purely economic matters. Everything needs to be calculated, carefully examined, and a decision needs to be made", Putin said.

He also warned of potential consequences if Armenia moved away from the EAEU, including changes to migration conditions, increased railway tariffs, and higher energy prices. According to Putin, such developments could "lead to a loss of at least 14% of Armenia's GDP."

His comments came as Russia suspended the import of several Armenian products, including fruit and vegetables, alcoholic beverages, Jermuk mineral water, and flowers, citing alleged violations.

The restrictions have widely been seen as Moscow applying economic pressure on Armenia ahead of the elections, which has been a toolkit repeatedly used by Moscow.

Those concerns have been further fueled by reports based on apparent leaked documents alleging Russian attempts to influence the vote.

The latest such article was published on 29 May. Reuters, citing five Western intelligence officials and leaked documents, reported that Moscow's plans included "disinformation campaigns in favor of pro-Russian candidates" as well as bussing "tens of thousands of Russian-Armenians" into Armenia to influence the election outcome.

(This story originally appeared on the www.oc-media.org on June 1.)



Community News

New 'Amot Che' Podcast Amplifies LGBTQ+ Armenian Voices and Mental Health Awareness

LOS ANGELES — A new video podcast series dedicated to the experiences, stories, and mental health journeys of LGBTQ+ Armenians is launching this month with the goal of breaking stigma, increasing visibility, and fostering community connection.

Hosted by Lara Vanian-Green, founder of Armenian Enough, Amot Che, which means "There Is No Shame" in Armenian, is an eight-part video podcast series designed by and for the LGBTQ+ Armenian community of Los Angeles County. Through honest conversations about identity, family, culture, faith, healing, and belonging, the series explores mental health topics while sharing stories, advice, and resources from activists, mental health professionals, educators, faith leaders, and community changemakers.



The series is sponsored by the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) as part of ongoing efforts to increase awareness of culturally sensitive mental health resources and reduce barriers to care in underserved communities.

Through conversations with activists, artists, mental health professionals, faith leaders, and community members, the series explores the unique challenges and triumphs of LGBTQ+ Armenians while encouraging greater understanding, acceptance, and access to support. The podcast seeks to break cycles of shame and stigma within the Armenian community by uplifting personal stories and connecting listeners with affirming care, community support, and mental health resources.

"Too many LGBTQ+ Armenians grow up feeling isolated or forced to choose between their identity and their culture," said Vanian-Green. "Amot Che exists to remind people that they deserve community, joy, support, and mental health care exactly as they are."

To celebrate the launch, Amot Che Pride 2026: An Evening of LGBTQ+ Armenian Joy! will take place Saturday, June 13, 2026, from 5 to 9 p.m. at Sooki Studio & Supply, 2971 Alessandro St., Los Angeles, CA 90039. The free community event, presented in partnership with GALAS (LGBTQ+ Armenian Society), will feature community resources, cultural programming, music, performances, educational activities, and opportunities for LGBTQ+ Armenians and allies to connect, celebrate, and build community.

For episode releases, guest information, event details, and culturally sensitive mental health resources, visit AmotChe.com.



Mixed volleyball (Photo by Mano Baghjajian.)

Watertown Hosts the 2026 ACYOA Assembly And Sports Weekend

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA) Seniors of St. James Church in Watertown welcomed 300 guests from across the Eastern Diocese for the 2026 ACYOA General Assembly and Sports Weekend.

Meeting over Memorial Day Weekend — May 22-25 — the annual youth event in Boston was stage for meeting new people as well as joy-filled reunions among friends.

Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan presided over the entire weekend, interacting with young church members and cheering them on in the sports competitions.

It began on Friday, May 22, with the ACYOA General Assembly, where Bishop Mesrop, clergy, and more than 60 youth delegates from local ACYOA chapters across the Eastern Diocese engaged each other in discussions about the Armenian Church, its mission, and the fruitful role played by youth and young adults in church life.

"This is a very meaningful year for ACYOA, marking the 80th anniversary of its founding," he reflected in his remarks, invoking the blessed memory of his predecessor who established the group, Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan. "For eight decades, ACYOA has helped young Armenian Christians discover that the church is their home."

"I see its impact every time I visit a parish," he continued. "I witness all the alumni of ACYOA who are leading our Diocese today. ACYOA is a living testimony that when young people are loved, trusted, and invited to serve, the whole church becomes stronger."

ACYOA Central Council Elections

The assembly was also an occasion for elections to the ACYOA Central Council, Auditing Committee, and Nominating Committee.

Newly elected to the 2026-27 ACYOA Central Council are Lori Dorian (chair), Grigor Galstyan (vice chair), Talin Propes (communications), Georgette Avrigian (ministries and outreach), Armine Utas (ministries and outreach), and alternate Nicholas Dadekian. Remaining on the Council are Peter Bogosian (treasurer), and Shahe Der Torossian (secretary).

see ACYOA, page 9



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan at the ACYOA General Assembly (photo Mano Baghjajian.)

Heartbreaking Details Emerge About North Hills Murder-Suicide

By Jocelyn Fiset and Kareen Wynter

LOS ANGELES (KTLA) — New details have been revealed about the victims of a possible murder-suicide that occurred in the North Hills neighborhood Wednesday, May 27.

The bodies of a man, a woman and two children, including a baby, were discovered after a report of gunfire inside the home.

The medical examiner identified a man, believed to be the husband and father of the kids, as 31-year-old Khajag Basmajian.

The two children have been identified as a 2-year-old boy and a baby girl who was just 6 days old.

The mother, a woman in her 30s who investigators believe was the shooter, was also found dead.

The community is trying to wrap its head around how something like this could have happened to the family.

It remains unclear what led to the tragic events, but police arrived at the home on the 16200 block of Londelius Street around 8 p.m. Wednesday after neighbors reported hearing gunshots coming from inside the house.

Officers arrived and discovered the grim scene inside. Investigators believe the mother shot and killed her two children and then their father.

One neighbor, who didn't want to be identified, said she never saw the family fighting and noticed no warning signs or issues.

She said she saw the husband taking out the trash around 7 p.m. while she was out walking her dog, and everything appeared to be normal.

While KTLA was at the scene on Thursday, community members visited the home and left flowers for the victims as they tried to process what happened.

A woman who identified herself as Paula Smith said she does not know the family, but her heart breaks for the two children who were killed.

"We live a few blocks away and we heard all the helicopters last night. We didn't know what was going on," she said tearfully. "But to wake up this morning and to hear about this and these kids, it's really heartbreaking. So go home and love the people you love. If someone is hurting, please reach out. Don't be ashamed."

The cause of the shooting remains under investigation. One neighbor said it appeared the mother may have been struggling with mental health issues, possibly postpartum depression, but officials have not confirmed that.

According to the California Department of Public Health, 1 in 3 pregnant people experience anxiety or depression symptoms during or after pregnancy.

The National Maternal Mental Health Hotline provides 24/7, free, confidential support before, during, and after pregnancy. You can call 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262).

COMMUNITY NEWS / OBIYUARY

Armenian Sports News Receives Credentials to Cover UFC Fight at White House

BOSTON — Armenian Sports News (ASN) has received media credentials to cover the upcoming UFC event taking place at the White House on June 14, marking a milestone for the independent media outlet.

Founded by Andre Khatchaturian following the 2020 Artsakh War, Armenian Sports News has grown from a passion project into a widely followed outlet covering professional and collegiate sports while highlighting Armenian athletes, coaches, and sports figures worldwide.

Khatchaturian and reporter Jason Takhtadjian will attend the event as credentialed media members, providing coverage from the White House and joining media outlets



Andre Khatchaturian

from across the country covering the occasion.

“This is an incredible opportunity for Armenian Sports News and a proud moment for Armenian representation in sports media,” said Khatchaturian. “We’re honored to have the opportunity to cover such a historic event.”

Through original reporting, interviews, and event coverage, ASN has built a dedicated audience while remaining committed to elevating Armenian voices and achievements in sports.

Khatchaturian is a digital content producer and the founder and head of content for ASN. Prior to founding ASN, Andre produced video and written content at New England Sports Network (NESN). He has covered four Super Bowls, more than a dozen high-profile UFC events, the NBA Playoffs, Stanley Cup Playoffs, NASCAR events, FIFA World Cup qualifiers and Armenia Basketball. He is also the host of the ASN Podcast, where he has conducted dozens of interviews with Armenian athletes.

A native of Glendale, he graduated from the University of Southern California with a bachelor’s degree in mathematics. He later moved to Boston, where he earned a master’s degree in broadcast journalism from Boston University.

Takhtadjian graduated from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, in May 2020 with a bachelor’s degree in Journalism and a minor in Communications. He began his broadcast journalism career in April 2021



Jason Takhtadjian

as a Multimedia Journalist in Sioux City, Iowa, and was promoted to Weekend An-

chor within a year. After three years in Iowa, he accepted a reporter position in Fresno, where he currently works.

Takhtadjian became involved with Armenian Sports News in January 2023 after sharing a news tip with Khatchaturian regarding San Francisco 49ers quarterback Brock Purdy’s Armenian heritage. Since then, he has played an integral role in the growth of the platform, helping expand its audience from a few thousand followers to the leading Armenian sports media outlet.

As Content Manager for Armenian Sports News, Takhtadjian has helped lead coverage of numerous major sporting events, including UFC 300 and Armenian National Team soccer matches, while continuing to grow the platform’s reach and impact within the Armenian community and sports media landscape.

OBITUARY

Laraine Kazanjian-Ballard Devoted to Church and Family

Laraine Kazanjian-Ballard, 68, of Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, passed away peacefully at home on May 23, 2026, surrounded by her loving family. A devoted wife, loving mother, doting grandmother, cherished daughter, supportive sister, adoring aunt, and a treasured friend. Laraine’s loss is felt deeply by her family and the countless people whose lives she touched.

Laraine was the second of five daughters born to Florence and the late Edward Kazanjian. After attending Marple Newtown High School, Laraine graduated from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School where she met Bruce, her husband of 41 years. She later received her MBA from Temple University.

Laraine lived a life deeply rooted in family, faith, music and community. She was a longstanding member of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Church in Wynnwood, Penn., where she shared her gift of music as an organist for 30 years and served in various leadership roles on the Parish Council and Women’s Guild. She was also an active member of the Episcopal Academy community where she served as the Episcopal Academy Parents Association President, formed lifelong friendships, and generously gave her time, energy, and heart.

Laraine will be remembered for her warmth, generosity, resilience and unwavering love for her family. She had a remarkable way of making everyone feel welcomed, cared for, and valued — always with a big smile. She loved playing the piano, cooking for her family, hosting gatherings, gardening, traveling, listening to Sundays with Sinatra, watching the Phillies, playing tavloo (backgammon), spending time at the beach in Avalon, sewin and celebrating the Armenian community. Above all, her greatest joy came from caring for



and being surrounded by those she loved.

She is survived by her mother Florence; her husband Bruce; her children, Armena, Christopher (Molly), and Michael (Jennifer); her grandchildren, Lucy and Jack; her sisters, Robin Williams (Gerald), Nancy DerSimonian (Nishan), Lisa Kazanjian (Steve Coyne), and Dina Kazanjian (Charles Simonian); and her cherished nieces and nephews, Mark (Carly), Alexis (Ryan), Dean, Jane, Ana, Nicholas, Chloe, and Perri. She is predeceased by her father, Edward Kazanjian.

The funeral service was held Thursday, May 28, at St. Sahag & St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church, 630 Clothier Road, Wynnwood, PA 19096.

A private interment followed.

In lieu of flowers donations can be made in memory of Laraine to St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Church Permanent Endowment Fund, 630 Clothier Road, Wynnwood, PA 19096.

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.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Watertown Hosts the 2026 ACYOA Assembly and Sports Weekend

ACYOA, from page 7

The ACYOA Central Council extended gratitude to outgoing members Mara Najarian, Alisha Panthier, Dn. Garek Megrdichian and Sarah Tavitian for their dedicated service to the ACYOA. The Central Council will continue to work in collaboration with Diocesan Ministries staff, Jennifer Morris, to pursue national and regional programs.

In addition to Bishop Mesrop and host parish pastor Fr. Arakel Aljalian, clergy attending the General Assembly and Sports Weekend included Diocesan Vicar Fr. Simeon Odabashian, Fr. Tateos Abdalian, Fr. Avedis Kalayjian, Fr. Khachatur Kesablian, Fr. Vasken Kouzouian, Fr. Aren Jeb-



Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan speaks as Fr. Arakel Aljalian listens (photo Mano Baghjajian)

ejian, Fr. Abraham Malkhasyan, Fr. Haroutiun Sabounjian, and Fr. Krikor Sabounjian, along with interning clergyman Fr. Vardan Hayrapetyan, and deacons Adam Bullock and Arman Shirikyan.



The St. James Boys' Team at play (photo Mano Baghjajian.)

During the General Assembly's Primate's Luncheon, ACYOA Central Council presented its annual awards to individuals and chapters for their service and dedication to the youth organization and to the Armenian Church.

Social & Sporting Events in Boston

On Friday evening, young adults gathered at Boston's Urban Wild for dancing to a live band, yard games and food before preparing for sports competitions on Saturday.

Saturday morning, athletes boarded buses early to head to BB&N Athletic Center for a full day's schedule of sports competitions that included men's basketball, women's basketball, co-ed volleyball, backgammon, chess, ping pong, and Mario Kart. After a brief rest back at the hotel, everyone dressed up for the Seaport Soiree at the Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, which included a lively night of dancing and gorgeous views of the city's waterfront.

On Sunday morning, the pews of St. James Church were filled with 100



The assembled participants of the ACYOA (photo Mano Baghjajian.)

ACYOA Seniors as well as 300 ACYOA Juniors attending the concurrent Hye M'rtsoom weekend. Bishop Mesrop celebrated the Divine Liturgy, which concluded with the ACYOA Central Council installation ceremony.

The sports finals took place back at BB&N.

Sunday evening began with a special ACYOA Alumni reception showcasing archived items and memorabilia to honor the ACYOA's 80th Anniversary. (Click here to watch a video.)

Sunday evening began with a special ACYOA Alumni reception featuring lavish mezze and time to mingle and reminisce, before the doors opened for the ACYOA Awards Dinner and Banquet. The Hamazkayin Dance Ensemble took center stage before the ballroom floor filled with dancers enjoying music from the Yerakouyn Band and DJs MKay and Esso.

Subsequently, the doors opened for the ACYOA Awards Banquet, where awards were presented. Then Armen Asayan and Band and DJ Garret took center stage as the ballroom floor filled with dancers enjoying traditional and popular music.

Participants departed on Memorial Day energized for further involvement in the life of the Armenian Church among their home parishes.

The ACYOA Central Council congratulates St. James Church's 2026

ACYOA General Assembly and Sports Weekend Committee, the parish ACYOA Seniors and Juniors, and the Boston-area parish community for their efforts in organizing a memorable weekend. Special appreciation is extended to the steering committee composed of pastor Fr. Arakel



Aljalian, youth minister Maria Derderian, and co-chairs Katrena Daldalian and Vinney Moushigian.

2026 ACYOA AWARDS

ACYOA Seniors Chapter "A" Award:
Holy Archangels Church, Haverhill, MA
Sam Nersesian Service Award:
Serien Keleshian, St. Sarkis Church, Carrollton, TX
Gregory Arpajian Leadership Award:
Griffin Connors, Holy Resurrection Church, New Britain, CT
Very Rev. Fr. Haigazoun Melkonian Award:
Rev. Fr. Khachatur Kesablian, Sts. Vartanantz Church, Chelmsford, MA
Rev. Fr. Haroutiun and Yn. Patricia Dagley Award:
Sonia Kalian Placido, St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Church, Wynnewood, PA

2026 ACYOA SPORTS COMPETITION

Outstanding Sportsmanship:
Vinney Moushigian
Sarah Tavitian
Co-Ed Volleyball:
St. James ACYOA "A", Watertown, MA
Runner-Up: Sts. Vartanantz ACYOA, Chelmsford, MA
Women's Basketball:
St. James ACYOA, Watertown, MA
Runner-Up: Holy Martyrs ACYOA, Bayside, NY
Men's Basketball:
St. James ACYOA "A", Watertown, MA
Runner Up: Sts. Vartanantz ACYOA, Chelmsford, MA
Ping Pong:
Michael-Armen Kadian
Runner-Up: Charles Khachian
Backgammon:
Charles Khachian
Runner-Up: Shahe Der Torossian
Chess:
Michael Sarafian
Runner-Up: Arek Gulbankian
Mario Kart:
Victor Hermes
Runner-Up: Shaunt Makarian



The young guests take to the dance floor (photo Mano Baghjajian.)



COMMUNITY NEWS

New Ambassador of Armenia to US Strengthens Ties, Business Development a Top Priority

MKRTCHYAN, from page 1

in April 2018, Mkrtychyan said that he was participating almost daily in the movement.

After Civil Contract assumed power, Mkrtychyan was proposed as a candidate for the Armenian National Assembly for Armavir Province. He was elected as a deputy and served for 2 ½ years. After the 2020 war with Azerbaijan, Mkrtychyan was appointed as deputy minister of labor and social issues and became the full minister in August 2021. He remained in this post until his appointment as ambassador.

He recalled: “It was a fairly difficult period. The war had newly ended. We had people displaced from Karabakh.” His ministry carried out programs to help the refugees, people wounded during the war, and families of people killed in the war. For the Karabakh Armenians, Mkrtychyan said, more than 30 programs were implemented, ranging from monetary aid to providing employment, health assistance, social programs and housing, and hundreds of millions of dollars were spent. He declared that over 90 percent of these programs were paid for through taxes on citizens.

Simultaneously, Mkrtychyan said, his ministry began a series of reforms of systems, including for helping the handicapped and improving pension systems.

The ministry reached out to experts in various parts of the world, as well as local ones, to formulate its approaches and plans. Mkrtychyan gave the examples of Vienna’s Wittgenstein Center for Demography and Global Human Capital and Prague’s Charles University among the institutions which helped in shaping demographic strategy.

During the same period that Mkrtychyan served as a minister, he also represented the ruling Civil Contract party in foreign relations, through a decision of the party’s executive (Pashinyan was the head of the party executive). Mkrtychyan established relations between Civil Contract and political parties in different countries as well as with individuals, research institutions and think tanks and various political organizations. He said that there were very active relations with India, France, Greece, various other European countries like the Nordic ones, and political associations of the European Union.

As part of this work, he said that he also traveled to the United States many times. He recalled that he presented the Armenian government’s Crossroads of Peace transportation plan during numerous meetings with think tanks in New York and Washington, as well as interviews with media organizations, including NewsMax’s American Agenda program.



US Congressman Abe Hamadeh, left, with Ambassador Narek Mkrtychyan

Washington Accords

Mkrtychyan was appointed as ambassador to the US immediately after the signing of the Washington Accords in August 2025 between Azerbaijan and Armenia through US mediation. Mkrtychyan declared: “The mission of the ambassador of the Republic of Armenia is first of all and exclusively the deepening of relations between the Republic of Armenia and the United States, including the realization of projects.”

When asked whether a pivot in Armenia’s political connections was necessary after the 2024 election of Presi-

TRIPP and Foreign Policy

Mkrtychyan was asked in the context of recent developments whether Armenia needs a powerful state such as the US or Russia as a protector and whether closer ties with the US implied a downturn in Russian relations.

He replied: “The Republic of Armenia had for a long time needed to keep the interests of the Republic of Armenia in a central and prioritized position. We are not exchanging one ally for another. There is no such thing. TRIPP [Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity through Syunik connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhije-



US Vice President JD Vance shaking Amb. Narek Mkrtychyan’s hand during his February visit to Armenia

dent Donald Trump, he declared that these relations are institutional in nature, irrespective of whether Republicans or Democrats are in charge of the US government. Moreover, he and his predecessor as ambassador, Lilit Makunts, maintained good communications with the two American political parties, he said.

He added, “We have had cooperation with the United States over many years concerning assistance for democracy and we signed with the prior administration a charter on strategic partnership. I am happy that this administration continues to remain on the same page deepening strategic cooperation.”

Mkrtychyan stated: “We have a very direct dialogue with the United States and there is no [outside] interference. It is at a pretty high level and positive personal relations have been established between Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and US President Donald Trump. I consider the fact that on the personal level relations are very good is a very important aspect for us, but also nearly in every sphere we have involvement at the highest level by the United States.”

He did single out Trump for his efforts last summer.

“We must accept with thanks President Trump’s efforts at mediation, because he truly succeeded in obtaining the historic peace declaration in the White House. It is the result of sharing discussions, values and visions about that theme that such good relations have been established between the prime minister of the Republic of Armenia and the president of the United States. Armenia has been invited to join the Board of Peace as a founding member and we value highly the participation of the United States in various conflict situations in order to establish peace. The declaration of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan is one of the early examples of this,” he noted.

Mkrtychyan said that in nearly all US government departments where Armenia has an agenda, including the State Department and Commerce Department, there are working groups to work with Armenia so that ongoing processes do not encounter any internal bureaucratic obstacles. The members of the working groups from the Armenian side are of course from the government of the Republic of Armenia.

van] is not against any country. TRIPP is not the project of the Republic of Armenia against Russia. TRIPP is not a project of the Republic of Armenia against Iran. This is a project arising from the interests of the Republic of Armenia.”

He explained that following the 2020 war with Azerbaijan, Armenia declared it was going to balance its foreign policy and diversify its supply chains, energy policy and defense cooperation. Now, Armenia partners with various different countries to ensure its defense security, he said, including the US, India, France and others, always stemming from the interests of Armenia. He remarked that Pashinyan has declared that being more independent means being dependent on several countries instead of just one.

Mkrtychyan dismissed concerns about whether Armenia has any real guarantees of security or protection if the US war with Iran expands regionally or if local incidents of terrorism on TRIPP by any instigators from outside countries take place after TRIPP is operational. He said: “I would not in reality seek possible scenarios, and pessimistic ones in particular, because there is peace at this time in the Republic of Armenia. This true peace is felt by the people of the Republic of Armenia, including the people living at the borders, the ordinary citizens of the Republic of Armenia. In other words, we have not had any shootings, wounded or deaths at the border for an extended period of time... We have begun a dialogue with Azerbaijan. Certain economic relations have been established. Civil society representatives have exchanged reciprocal visits. All these steps aim at peace for Armenia, when the two sides have the political will to move forward to establish an agenda of peace.”

He said that any activity of TRIPP, including any type of risk, will be governed by Armenian jurisdiction, and this principle is placed at the foundation of all relevant documents, which include the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty. He emphasized that while hoping for a quick end to the Iran-US conflict, “one thing is a fact — on the territory of the Republic of Armenia there is no worry, there is no military activity and there are no targets subject to attack.”

continued on next page



COMMUNITY NEWS



Ambassador Narek Mkrtchyan at the Armenians in America 250 event in Washington

from previous page

TRIPP has not been postponed due to the Iran war, he added. As a very large project, there have been a series of steps planned for its implementation which take a long time. He said, “It is not just an infrastructure project. It is not just constructing a road or a railway. There are many profound layers.”

TRIPP is one part of Armenia’s Crossroads of Peace project, Mkrtchyan said, so that it is not only about establishing ties between Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan or Armenia-US bilateral agreements. It is also about connecting several broader regions to each other through global supply chains. It can help connect Central Asia to the southern Caucasus, and the Near East through Turkey to Europe, towards the Mediterranean. Various infrastructural projects can become part of it, including roads, railways, fiber optics, transmission wires, cables, electric transmission lines, and pipelines, but Armenia and the US will have the possibility of sharing the administration and making joint decisions, Mkrtchyan noted.

As part of the project, the TRIPP Development Company has been established, in which the governments of the US and Armenia are partners. Mkrtchyan said that they are now working on the financial structure, determining how financing and financial flows will be secured, and through which channels. He said that Armenia is in an active dialogue with the US International Development Finance Corporation (the US government’s international investment arm). Reciprocal visits have taken place between representatives of various Armenian governmental departments and American ones.

He recalled that when Vice President JD Vance visited Armenia this February, the creation of the TRIPP Enterprise Fund was discussed. This fund could extend beyond Armenia and Azerbaijan to become an interregional platform for investment and participation in projects which will be connected to TRIPP.

After the financial and legal mechanisms have been established, Mkrtchyan said, the practical construction stage will rapidly begin.

(The May 26 brief visit of US Secretary of State Rubio to Armenia took place after this interview. New documents on TRIPP were signed specifying details on the joint venture and an engineering survey was set up.)

On a different foreign relations topic, when asked about how to deal with claims by high level Azerbaijani government officials on Armenia’s territory under the name of Western Azerbaijan, and calls for Azeris to return there, Mkrtchyan responded: “I do not wish to talk now about illegitimate discourse. When we speak about illegitimate discourse, we are turning it into legitimate discourse.” He said there are no similar theses in any of the documents officially being negotiated or signed, so why create artificial agendas?

Mkrtchyan wondered, “Is it possible that this is being dictated by certain quarters? Is it not possible that these are aimed against the interests of the Republic of Armenia? It seems to me that we must be very cautious in approaching such matters.”

Corporate Diplomacy: IT and Economic Relations

The memoranda which were signed on August 8, 2025 in Washington included agreements on technology, arti-

cial intelligence, semiconductors, energy and infrastructure. One of the priority directions for the Armenian embassy in Washington, Mkrtchyan explained, is corporate diplomacy, through which it is making active efforts to establish ties with various types of corporations and establish business associations. Attempts to establish bridges between private Armenian and American sectors are taking place at several levels.

On the administrative policy level, Armenia attempts to assure the smooth entry of American companies into Armenia, in part by softening certain regulations. This type of accommodation is necessary in the US, as Armenia is fairly flexible in its approach and welcomes the economic benefits American companies may bring, but even when capital and expertise are ready, US government permission is needed, especially for the export of technologies



US Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Riley Barnes meeting at the Armenian Embassy with Ambassador Narek Mkrtchyan

with strategic significance.

At the highest level, Mkrtchyan said, Armenia works with the Department of Commerce, the State Department, and the National Security Council, which can make decisions concerning the entry of American organizations, especially technology companies, into Armenia. The most significant latest example is permission for the export of artificial intelligence Nvidia chips. “Here the embassy is very involved in very difficult but fruitful work,” he continued. “We have a major project in Armenia which will turn Armenia into the fifth country in the world with such computing capabilities.”

“Would you have been able to imagine in the political

context of diversification of the Republic of Armenia,” Mkrtchyan rhetorically asked, “that the United States would become an important pivotal partner and as a result of that partnership, today, as a result of the cooperation between Armenia and the United States, we would have in the region a project concerning the most advanced technology of the 21st century, artificial intelligence, which has important strategic significance, which would give the possibility to American financial structures to make an investment of around \$4 billion? This is a project which will give the possibility of converting electricity into intelligence. And the beneficiaries of this intelligence, this digital brain, will also be various structures of the United States.”

Mkrtchyan added: “Armenia is not on the map of conflicts any longer. It now appears on the map of AI.”

Aside from the governmental level, Armenia also works directly with corporations, attempting to present Armenia as a country with a suitable ecosystem and electrical energy available for data centers, Mkrtchyan said.

In Silicon Valley, for example, Mkrtchyan declared that Armenia has good relations with companies like OpenAI, Anthropic, ServiceNow, Synopsys, Nvidia, AMD, Google and Apple, and operational agendas.

These relations are not only directly economic but also concern education. He said that negotiations of the Armenian government with OpenAI and Firebird which began last November were soon concluding with an agreement to provide 50,000 educational AI subscriptions for Armenian schools and universities, and this number will increase over time (the actual agreement was signed after the interview on May 29).

Another direction of the embassy’s work, Mkrtchyan said, is to attempt to establish economic relations directly with individual states. For example, there is a treaty signed with the state of California and recently, discussions have been held with the states of Utah and Florida. Each state in the US has economic councils or structures which the embassy attempts to connect with corresponding bodies in Armenia. The government of Armenia has also established the Enterprise Armenia investment promotion agency, which encourages the activity of Armenian companies abroad and the involvement of organizations abroad in Armenia with the Ministry of the Economy.

On a different level, Mkrtchyan said, the embassy attempts to connect various local business councils or

chambers of commerce in various states with Armenian business associations or the Ministry of the Economy. He gave the examples of the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, the World Trade Center Utah, and the Greater Sacramento Economic Council, with which the embassy initiated contacts.

Mkrtchyan also said that the embassy proposed that the US Chamber of Commerce establish a US Armenia Business Council within its framework, and there is hope that this will be created soon.

Outside of IT, Mkrtchyan said that another important economic field for Armenia is mining. Soon, he said, a

see AMBASSADOR, page 12



COMMUNITY NEWS

New Ambassador of Armenia to US Strengthens Ties

AMBASSADOR, from page 11

large American company will begin work in Armenia on the largest goldmine there. During the aforementioned visit of Rubio to Armenia, the United States of America-Republic of Armenia Framework for Securing of Supply in the Mining and Processing of Critical Minerals and

Armenian Church

In addition to the embassy's work on US-Armenian economic, security, infrastructure, energy, and other practical material topics, Mkrtchyan remarked that he considered two further important spheres of cooperation concerned values. One is the ongoing assistance of democratic struc-

no matter from which part of the world it may originate, which may obstruct the conduction of people's democratic elections, which may obstruct free and just elections, which may aid in practices outside of the realm of the law, we consider unacceptable. We must combat this with all possible means, because the [Velvet] revolution took place in Armenia so that these defective practices will have no place in the internal life of the Republic of Armenia."

He added that hundreds of reforms have been instituted, some of which with US cooperation, so that Armenian democratic practices and institutions take form, including the use of modern technologies.

However, he noted the use of financial means to sway people, and efforts to spread fake news and keep people in fear. He said, "I am sorry also that often this misinformation reaches all kinds of layers of our diaspora in the United States. For example, I am forced during encounters with our compatriots on all sorts of different occasions and places to refute with laughter the most absurd information which they have, and tell them that such things cannot possibly be true."

When asked for an example, he said that in Armenia construction is flourishing, with homes and even entire quarters being built, but some people, influenced by fake news, are asking whether these homes are being built for Azerbaijanis.

Mkrtchyan said that the Armenian government has spoken about such "hybrid warfare" here with various departments in the United States, about how to control fake news and what are the best practices which can be communicated to Armenian state institutions about how to keep foreign state intervention distant from Armenian elections.

While in his position as ambassador, Mkrtchyan did not wish to speak in detail about the current election campaigns, or any claims of use of government power to sway the vote, he did note that the Republic of Armenia had its most democratic elections in the period of the Pashinyan government, according to the evaluation of various outside governments, including Russia and the United States.

He said, "When we speak about democracy, I do not imagine it in another way than, for example a citizen of the Republic of Armenia will have the possibility during the campaign to approach the prime minister, argue with



Jeffrey Kessler, Under Secretary of Commerce for Industry and Security, at left, with Ambassador Narek Mkrtchyan at the Armenians in America 250 event in Washington

Rare Earths agreement was signed.

Energy is an important field for Armenia's strategic security, Mkrtchyan said, and therefore negotiations are in progress for a framework treaty for what is called a "123 agreement" with the US concerning nuclear trade. Once it is signed, Mkrtchyan said, there will be the possibility of involving American companies in Armenia's energy sphere, including modernizing its operating structure and making new investments in civil nuclear energy.

Mkrtchyan said that in other fields, Armenia and its embassy are working with the Commerce Department to facilitate US investments in Armenian agriculture and industry.

Relations with Armenian-American Diaspora

Mkrtchyan observed that if there are Armenians involved in companies or projects working with the Armenian government, then of course there is cooperation. He gave the example of Razmik Hovakimyan, who lives in San Francisco but cofounded Firebird AI with businessman Alexander Yesayan in Armenia. Mkrtchyan declared: "In general, if any of our compatriots are in any technology organization or business project and desire to work with Armenia, we are ready 24 hours a day to collaborate."

However, he said that in general relations with local Armenian-American communities were not part of his responsibilities as ambassador. While there may be a perception among some that the ambassador should spend more time with the community, he said that if he did so, sadly the Armenia-United States agenda would suffer. It is the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs which is tasked with keeping relations with diasporan communities.

Nevertheless, Mkrtchyan said, taking into consideration that there is a large Armenian community in the US, contact with members is inevitable in the context of different "side events." Aside from citizens of Armenia there are many Armenian-Americans who are interested in the Republic of Armenia and see the substance of their national identity inextricably tied to the Republic of Armenia. He said that it is a great honor to work and communicate with those for whom relations with the Republic of Armenia is an ultimate goal, though he noted with sorrow that there are others without much connection to the Armenian state.

tures in Armenia, and the second concerns cooperation about Christian ethics.

He said that Armenia enjoys a very good collaboration with the White House's Faith Office. The latter participated in this January's embassy reception on the occasion of Christmas at the highest levels. The director of the Faith Office, Paula White-Cain came, along with the Primates of the two Echiadzin Armenian Dioceses in the US.

Armenia also has good working relations with US government bodies dealing with issues of religious freedom, he said. They consider the Republic of Armenia an important partner in establishing a platform for religious freedom.

Mkrtchyan observed that it was with the assistance of the prime minister of the Republic of Armenia that the National Prayer breakfast took place in Armenia last year, and that it will again take place this October with even greater American participation.

Those relations appear to be in somewhat of a contrast to relations between the Armenian government and church. When asked about those relations currently, which include the imprisonment of a number of high level clergy and the prime minister attending services led by defrocked priests, he replied, "I must sadden you that the prime minister generally does not stand back from any agenda or his principles and the policies that he has adopted. He is always consistent and I must also say that there is no conflict, no disagreement, between the government of the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Apostolic Church."

He said that while the church continues to represent an important value, "what the prime minister of the Republic of Armenia is carrying out is to make the Armenian Apostolic Church more sincere [angeghdz] and more independent and keep it clean from falsehood, and, sad to say, from the immorality [aylaserutiun] of various individuals. Those processes which are taking place are absolutely about making the Armenian Apostolic Church as a structure, as an institution, stronger and more independent and to guide it towards its own mission."

Upcoming Elections

When asked about Russian, US or European attempts to support various candidates in the current Armenian elections, Mkrtchyan replied: "Any type of foreign development which may hinder people's expressions or assembly,



Keith Krach, CEO of Freedom 250, left, with Ambassador Narek Mkrtchyan at the Armenians in America 250 event in Washington

him, even be allowed to cross the line and have a discussion of a personal nature, and nothing happens to him."

When it was pointed out that some people had been arrested after such arguments, he said there are criminal cases in such circumstances which will be sent to preliminary investigative bodies for clarification. He stated that the state legal system is distinct from law enforcement institutions in Armenia and also noted that in many cities and villages during prior elections the opposition candidates won office and still continued to work with the central government. Furthermore, he said, independent monitoring shows that the opposition has a greater media platform or presence to express its ideas than the governing authorities.

Finally, he said, "the elections are a fundamental political process and it is through these elections that the future of our country will be decided. That is also very much connected to the Armenian-American agenda, naturally, since with the direction that we have taken with the United States, in all aspects, it is very important for its continuation and institutionalization that the current [Armenian] administration with its foreign political vision and approaches again have the opportunity to work so these processes reach their logical conclusion."



Arts & Culture

Georgiy Saakov

Going with the Will (On Armenians of Uzbekistan)



By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/TASHKENT — Georgiy Saakov (born 1960, Tashkent) has been an active member of the Armenian community in Uzbekistan since its establishment. An activist since 1989, the journalist has been the editor-in-chief of the Armenian magazine *Depi Apaga* (“Toward the Future”) since 2008. He has written about the preservation of the native language in diaspora, ties with other national communities in Uzbekistan and with the shelters in the Armenian Diaspora, and well-known people who leave a visible mark in this world. These articles have been published in many famous diaspora media outlets.

Dear Georgiy, how would you describe the history of presence of Armenians in Uzbekistan?

Armenian merchants and Christian missionaries appeared in Central Asia at the time when the Great Silk Road was emerging. Centuries later, a new wave of immigration followed. This time, it consisted of thousands of skilled craftsmen who were resettled for the construction of the great Timurid capital, Samarkand, by the renowned commander Timur (Tamerlane) during his second campaign.

Although Armenians were Christians, they were not persecuted within the territory of the empire. A priest named Karapet of Julfa, who was among the settlers, became the bishop of the local Christian community. This was a remarkable example of tolerance demonstrated by the local population.

The third wave of Armenian immigration took place at the end of the nineteenth century. At that time, peasants and skilled workers moved there with their families in search of employment on the construction of the Trans-Caspian Railway. At the same time, the settlers established Armenian schools in order to preserve their national identity.

In my family, people often recalled the Armenian Workers’ House in Tashkent during the 1920s and see SAAKOV, page 16



Seda Nahapetyan

Seda Nahapetyan Brings Komitas to Giessen

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GIESSEN, Germany — Armenian Cultural Festivals in Germany, which are becoming a tradition in several cities, usually last several days. Giessen, in the federal state of Hessen, hosted a unique city-wide cultural festival on May 16, which lasted only one day – but what a day.

Inaugurated last year, this Night of Culture (Kulturnacht) was organized by Mayor Frank-Tile Becher and the municipality’s Departments of Cultural Affairs and Cultural Promotion. It began at 2:00 in the afternoon and lasted until the wee hours of the morning. A wide range of cultural events, 200 in all — concerts, tours, theater, film showings, and participatory music events — took place in 63 locations throughout the city. And every location was packed.

Armenian culture was represented by Seda Nahapetyan, a young soprano who, following completion of her Master’s from the Yerevan State Conservatory in 2011, worked with the Yerevan State Chamber Chorus from 2012 to 2013. She has been choral assistant in Freiburg, and in Giessen since 2019.

At the nocturnal cultural event, Nahapetyan held a solo concert, entitled, “From Armenia and Mallorca – Armenian Folksongs and Chopin Preludes.” Her accompanist, Wolfgang Wels, introduced both the vocal pieces and the Chopin Preludes, which the composer wrote during his stay in Mallorca from late 1838 to early 1839. The program was a lively dialogue between the legendary Armenian musicologist and composer and Frédéric Chopin, who, Wels said he considered “kindred spirits.” His rendition of the preludes was refreshingly vibrant and energetic. The program included *Krunk* (Crane), *Qele, qele* (Run, run), *Chopin Prelude op. 28 Nr. 1, C-Major*, *Shogher jan* (Dear Shogher), *Garun a* (It is Springtime), *Chopin Prelude op. 28 Nr. 6, B-minor*, *Alagyaz*, *Chnki Tsar* (Mountain, Frankincense tree.), *Hov Areq* (Blow, Wind), *Chopin Prelude op. 28 Nr. 14, E-flat minor*, *Chopin Prelude op. 28 Nr. 10, C#-minor*, *Zulo* (Zulo), *Prelude op. 28 Nr. 22, G-minor*, *Hoy Nazan*.

Following the concert, which was enthusiastically received by a large audience, soprano Nahapetyan moved to the atrium of the town hall where she starred as the soloist in a performance of the “*Misa a Buenos Aires*,” (Tango Mass) by Martin Palmeris (1965), with Marlène Clément (Bandoneon) and Marion Bathe (Organ), conducted by Christoph Koerber.



Pianist Wolfgang Wels and Soprano Seda Nahapetyan

Poetry & Music Bring People Together at LA Public Library

By Karine Armen

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

VAN NUYS — The Los Angeles Public Library held a program featuring poetry reading and musical performances on Thursday, May 28, organized by the REAB (Racial Equity Action Board).

Its purpose was to bring the community together across multiple cultures, celebrate music and poetry from all backgrounds and languages, and find a shared voice in music and poetry, enjoying one worldwide language of music.

Four students from Glendale High School read their poems, followed by Meri Tumanyan, the advisor to Glendale High School’s Creative Writing Club. She expressed her gratitude to Liana Vardanian and Ziba Perez for inviting them to this meaningful event. Tumanyan said, “We were honored to participate in the REAB Traveling Symphony Series, where our young poets were given a venue, an audience, and an opportunity to express their unique voices. It was an extremely empowering experience for our students.”

Tumanyan is a full-time high school English teacher and an adjunct professor of English at local



Poet Meri Tumanyan (Karine Armen photo)

community colleges. She holds a bachelor’s in English and comparative literary studies from Occidental College and a master’s in creative writing from California State University, Northridge. She is the author of five poetry collections and four children’s books. Her forthcoming poetry collection, *Why I Pray in Armenian*, will be released in January 2027 by Finishing Line Press.

The second part of the program included performances by violinist Ani Sinanyan and her mother, Zhanna Sinanyan, on keyboard. The repertoire had musical pieces from different cultures: Austria, Hungary, Argentina, and Armenia.

Ani Sinanyan said, “Today’s program is a journey across different countries, traditions, and musical voices. Each piece tells a story shaped by the culture it comes from. She added, “Although these composers lived in different places and times, they all used music as a way to preserve memory, identity, and human emotion.”

see POETRY, page 17



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Mary Shirejian's Lentil Soup from Fresno's old Peach Tree Restaurant

FRESNO — “Many of my earliest childhood memories are rooted in the tastes and smells of Armenian food,” says Fresno native Julianne (Juls) Marashian Burk. She is the creator of the new “Jul’s Armenian Kitchen” (JAK), a local Valley PBS cooking show with international reach, featuring Armenian and Middle Eastern recipes from California’s San Joaquin Valley.

“Some of my fondest memories are of eating at The Peach Tree Restaurant, my Uncle Jack and Aunt Mary Shirejian’s popular Fresno restaurant that was located on the northwest corner of Peach and Kings Canyon Road. Starting in the early 1970s, this small family restaurant featured a truly amazing menu of traditional homemade Armenian dishes like lulu kebab, shish kebab, pilaf, sarma, keyma sandwiches, baked lamb shanks, a variety of homemade soups, and especially my Aunt Mary’s famous lentil soup,” she adds. In fact, Woody Laughnan, the celebrated feature writer for the Fresno Bee wrote a weekly column (Dining Out) about the restaurant in 1976 titled, “A Peach of a Restaurant.”

“Everything on the menu but the pastries were made fresh daily, the soups getting an early start, and the pot watched almost constantly. Each day, my Uncle Jack was the master at the grill and broiling. All-American food like hamburgers, hot dogs, grilled cheese and hot pastrami sandwiches were also featured. The restaurant was open 6 days a week and closed on Sundays. My uncle and aunt had three talented children: David, Harry and Karen, all of whom worked at the restaurant. Karen was the hostess and helped Mary serve the food. My uncle and aunt also managed Jack’s Burgers of Easton, California prior to opening The Peach Tree Restaurant,” she said.

“Like many other customers at the time, I began each meal at the Peach Tree with a big bowl of my Aunt Mary’s fragrant lentil soup. I remember it was made with fresh carrots, celery, tomatoes, and a really nice beef broth, and had a distinct flavor that has stayed with me all these years. Sadly, my Aunt Mary passed away in 2021 at the age of 92. At our last meeting, I reminded her about her special

lentil soup that I loved so much. She said she was grateful to remember the good times we all shared at their restaurant, and the countless local families and happy customers who came back week after week to enjoy their delicious Armenian fare. Aunt Mary was too ill to remember her recipe in detail when we talked, but I was fortunate to receive a copy from another niece. I reworked her recipe to update some of the ingredients and details, such as ‘a bag of lentils,’ so you can easily make it for your family soon.”

“I also remember winning a Fresno County History Day competition with a story I wrote about my great-grandmother Beatrice’s escape to America after the Armenian Genocide. She arrived in Fresno carrying more than her life, she brought a culinary heritage that flourished in the San Joaquin Valley for many years through her children and grandchildren. As a teenager, I began my own recipe notebook, visiting my relatives and other family friends to record their memories and their favorite Armenian dishes, cooking techniques, and recipes.”

“Jul’s Armenian Kitchen’ is the community cookbook come-to-life. It’s a cooking show where the chefs are crowd-sourced, where anyone can put forward their signature Armenian dish, and where, as show host, I am actually the student – eager to learn the traditions before it’s too late,” says Juls. “As generations pass, so do their stories, flavors, and recipes, unless we capture and document them. Jul’s Armenian Kitchen celebrates the food and rituals that connect us to our roots, from rolling the perfect chorag dough to picking the finest grape leaves for your sarma or dolma. It is a warm, joyful journey that preserves and shares the culture we love the most, like an Armenian coffee date with your favorite auntie where laughter flows, secrets are shared, and the future is read to you in your coffee cup.”

This new 10-episode season hosted by Juls will take viewers from San Joaquin Valley farms to a variety of Armenian family kitchens and restaurants, offering sponsors a meaningful way to support culture, food, and community. This is a local cooking show, slated to air later this Spring, and it brings the rich flavors and spirit of many Armenian kitchens to life.

“Think of it as the beloved community cookbook brought to life as a cooking show. We invite you to help preserve the recipes and stories that define our community while celebrating the huge variety of local produce and crops that shape Fresno’s Armenian cuisine,” adds Juls.

Follow Juls for a behind-the-scenes preview of the show’s development at @julsarmeniankitchen on Instagram and Facebook.

To learn more about program sponsorship opportunities, contact Juls at jburk@valleypbs.org

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/2 cups brown lentils, rinsed
- 1/2 cube salted butter
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2-3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- 2 large stalks celery, chopped
- 2 medium carrots, peeled, chopped
- 32 oz. can low-sodium beef broth
- 14.5 oz. can crushed or diced tomatoes
- 2 teaspoons Lawry’s seasoned salt
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon allspice
- Black pepper to taste
- 2 handfuls of medium-wide egg noodles (or noodles of your choice)

PREPARATION:

In large pan add the lentils to 5 cups of water. Bring to a full boil and simmer, cooking until the lentils are soft. (For Juls, that’s about 15 minutes, for others it might be 20 minutes, depending on how strong your burner is.)

Meanwhile, in a frying pan with butter, sauté the vegetables until they are soft. Add the seasonings and mix to incorporate the flavors. Add the vegetable mixture to the cooked lentils along with the beef broth, crushed tomatoes, and bring to a boil. Simmer for about 30-35 minutes. Taste and adjust seasonings as needed. Add the egg noodles (if using), and cook approximately 10 minutes until soft. Check seasonings again before serving, as the noodles will soak up some of the salt.

Yield: 6 servings

Note from Juls: “This was Aunt Mary’s personal recipe; the version she served at the restaurant did not contain egg noodles. That said, I rather like the noodles: they transform it from a starter to a main course. Feel free to omit them if you prefer the traditional preparation.”

For this recipe, go to: <https://julsarmeniankitchen.com/recipe/mary-shirejians-best-selling-lentil-soup/>

For more family stories and recipes, go to: <https://julsarmeniankitchen.com/>

To view all recipes: <https://julsarmeniankitchen.com/recipes-view-all/>

For Jul’s Grandma’s Armenian Coffee, go to: <https://julsarmeniankitchen.com/recipe/grandmas-armenian-coffee/>

Explore Jul’s Armenian Kitchen’s ever-growing library of delicious Armenian recipes, authentic and updated.

Connect at:

YouTube videos, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjVc2YzgAIX-v51ovVKZdCMPBLz3B7ADSA>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/JulsArmenianKitchen>

Podcast: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/julianne-burk-host-of-juls-armenian-kitchen/id1495138106?i=1000586158806>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/julsarmeniankitchen/>

Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.com/julsarmeniankitchen/>

TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@julsarmeniankitchen>



Back row left to right: Unidentified friend, Karen Shirejian (Mary’s daughter), Mary Shirejian, Florence Marashian, and Buelah Moorjian. Front row: Helen Shirejian.



ARTS & CULTURE

A Heart Beating for Armenia and the Diaspora: Edmond Y. Azadian's Memorial Book Presentation

YEREVAN — Three years after the passing of Edmond Y. Azadian, one of the most influential and distinguished Armenians who served as a bridge between the Armenian diaspora and Armenia, a bilingual Armenian and English commemorative volume dedicated to the writer, pundit and public figure has been published by the Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada.

The first presentation of this book took place at the Tekeyan Center in Yerevan on May 29. The book will also soon be available from the Tekeyan centers in California, Canada, and Boston.

During the presentation of *Book of Remembrance*, the documentary film “Between Homeland and Diaspora,” based on Azadian’s life, was screened. The film is likewise dedicated to the memory of the great Armenian.

Azadian founded the weekly newspaper *Zartonk-Sport* in Beirut. He served as editor of the daily *Arev* in Cairo; managing director of *Baikar* in Boston; senior



Azg editor Hagop Avedikian speaking



Speakers at the book presentation

editorial columnist of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*; co-founder and contributor of the weekly *Abaka* in Montreal, the English-language magazine *Ararat* in New York, the daily *Azg* in Yerevan, and the literary journal *Gamar* in Beirut.

He was known to world-renowned intellectuals, artists, politicians, diplomats and heads of state. The scope of Azadian’s activities was immeasurable, and his circle of acquaintances and close associates extended across all continents of the globe.

He authored more than 1,500 editorials and numerous books. His analytical thinking and incisive commentaries encompassed political, social, literary, and cultural spheres alike.

The Book of Remembrance contains not only recollections, stories, and farewell tributes, but also photographs that bear witness to the multifaceted activities and rich life journey of Edmond Azadian.

Azadian was the beating heart of Armenia in the diaspora and of the diaspora

in Armenia. Though he lived abroad, he always kept his hand on Armenia’s pulse. His devotion and selfless love were consistently expressed through charitable initiatives and the implementation of numerous projects.

The heartfelt reflections of Azadian’s close friends and of those who experienced his companionship, warmth, and boundless love are brought together in the *Book of Remembrance*, which was compiled and published through the initiative and efforts of members of the Tekeyan Cultural Association in Armenia and throughout the Diaspora.

The volume is an expression of tribute, dedication and appreciation through which contributors and authors of condolence messages bid farewell to a great Armenian and a distinguished intellectual. Yet these words are not immersed in sorrow; rather, they are filled with bright, kind, and warm memories, with Yervand Azadian’s legacy, and with his profound knowledge and love

of Armenia.

Numerous initiatives benefiting the Armenian nation are associated with the name of Azadian. He headed the office of national hero Alex Manoogian.

Together with Manoogian, Azadian quite literally saved Armenian manuscripts stolen from the library of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as well as five or six paintings by Toros Roslin that were being auctioned at Sotheby’s.

There are countless such stories — stories that would bring honor to anyone. Yet



Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, and President of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Armenia Ruben Mirzakhanyan and Corresponding Member of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia,

he carried out everything quietly, never speaking of or drawing attention to his good deeds.

For him, what mattered was the result, not personal recognition.

Yervand Azadian’s devotion to Armenia, the Armenian Diaspora, and the Armenian nation as a whole can be summed up in a single phrase: silent love.

TCA Participates in Pasadena Armenian Festival

PASADENA, Calif. — On Saturday, May 30, the Tekeyan Cultural Association participated in the Pasadena Armenian Festival at Victory Park. Media personality Nataly Tavidian of KNX News 1070 AM served as mistress of ceremonies.

Thirty-one different Pasadena-based Armenian organizations participated in the festival, which showcased Armenian food,

music, dance, art, poetry and culture. Proceeds from the festival were earmarked to support the three Armenian day schools of Pasadena.

UCLA student Aleen Yadegarian of the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter passionately recited “Ode to the Armenian Language”/«Տաղ Հայերէն Լեզուին» by poet Vahan Tekeyan



Aleen Yadegarian of the TCA Metro Los Angeles Chapter passionately recited “Ode to the Armenian Language” by poet Vahan Tekeyan



David Samuelian, accompanied by keyboardist Aram Lapedjian, performed a variety of popular and patriotic songs

an in English and Armenian.

Among the featured singers who performed at the festival were David Samuelian, who was accompanied by keyboardist Aram Lapedjian, Gagik Badalyan, Hratch Gaydzagian, Joseph Krikorian, Salpi Keshlian and Antranig Kzirian (oud and vocals).

Also performing were the AGBU Pasadena-Glendale Noor Ensemble and AGBU Los Angeles Choir.

Mihran Toumajan, Hrant Vartzbekian and Carl Bardakian of the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter served on the organizing committee of the Pasadena Armenian Festival.



ARTS & CULTURE

Georgiy Saakov: Going with the will (On Armenians of Uzbekistan)

SAAKOV, from page 13

1930s. It contained a prayer room, a school and even an amateur theater. The Armenian theater existed until early 1936, when it was forcibly closed by the Soviet authorities together with all other Armenian public organizations. By the early 1940s, the authorities had also shut down the school, while the building of the Armenian Workers' House was first turned into a warehouse and later destroyed.

Many years later, I learned from books that there had been many such Armenian Workers' Houses throughout Central Asia.

I assume that, like many Armenians of Central Asia, your family may also have roots in Artsakh.

Exactly! Born into a traditional Armenian family, I still remember my early years as the happiest period of my life. In our home, Armenian speech was heard through my grandparents, and the values of mutual love, kindness, and harmonious human relationships were cultivated every day. This was also my first experience of connection with Armenian tradition.

My grandmother Astghik and grandfather Markos, who spoke the Karabakh dialect and had received only three years of education in their village school in Hadrut, helped me take my first steps in learning Mashtots' alphabet and literary Armenian. They themselves had not had the opportunity to continue their studies, as they had to part with childhood early in order to help their parents.

Was this not a kind of phenomenon? Their grandson would continue mastering Armenian largely on his own.

My father brought the first Armenian-language textbook for his preschool son from a business trip to Moscow. It was Garibyan's self-study manual. During my school and university years, I was educated in Russian and grew up in an international environment. I made many Uzbek, Russian and Jewish friends, which was a valuable experience.

At the same time, I continued independently taking further steps in learning Armenian. For the first time, I read in Russian the poetry of Silva Kaputikyan, Hovhannes Shiraz and Avetik Isahakyan; the novel *Vardanank* by Derenik Demirchyan; the works of Hrant Matevosyan and William Saroyan; as well as *Seven Songs* by Gevorg Emin.

My generation, as well as the generation before us, often resolved questions of identity through reading Armenian literature translated into Russian, the language of interethnic communication. The Soviet Union had an outstanding school of literary translation.

My list of favorite Armenian authors has remained unchanged, while Saroyan and Emin have become even dearer to me over time. Emin is especially close to me, as we share the same profession — hydraulic engineering. Years later, in 2015, I was awarded the William Saroyan Medal from the Ministry of Diaspora of Armenia.

Please tell us about your personal experience of living as an Armenian in Uzbekistan.

The fact that the Republic of Uzbekistan remains a multinational country, where representatives of more than one hundred nationalities continue to live with legal protection, reflects not only the natural qualities of the Uzbek people — openness, wisdom, flexibility, and respect for individuals of all origins and faiths.

This remarkable nation demonstrated a vivid example of humanism during

World War II, when hundreds of factories were evacuated to Uzbekistan from the German-occupied regions of the Soviet Union, and hundreds of thousands of people found shelter there.

What kind of changes happened within community after Uzbekistan's independence? What element is the main motivator for the national identity and in the return to your roots?

It is a difficult question, but perhaps it is characteristic not only for Armenians in the Spyurk (Diaspora), but also for other ethnic groups, because in the late 1980s

to lose time. I gathered two groups of students and without waiting for a native-speaking teacher to appear began teaching them the Armenian alphabet and language. Those were wonderful years not only of returning to our common roots but also of understanding myself.

In 1993, our Armenian Sunday School was established and quickly attracted a large number of children and adults eager to study their mother language and traditions. Samarkand Armenians of all ages from children to elderly people took part in restoring the building of the Armenian

does the community maintain?

Since the opening of the Armenian Sunday School in 1993, it has remained a vital component of community life. Many successful projects of the Cultural Center were born there, including the dance studio, the Arvest ("Art") studio, and even the Tashkent Armenians Comedy team, which became the champion of Uzbekistan in 2003.

In addition to teaching at the school, I initiated a number of projects, including the amateur theater Dar ("Century"). Together with our young people, we staged performances based on the tales of Hovhannes Tumanyan, works dedicated to Gregory of Narek, as well as our own musical play inspired by the stories of Pelepughi and the songs of Arno Babajanian.

A youth discussion club was also established there, while at the Mer Odjakh ("Our Home") club we organized meetings for readers of the magazine *Depi Apaga*, a periodical of the Armenians of Uzbekistan. These gatherings were held at the Tamara Khanum Memorial Museum.

The magazine *Depi Apaga*, which I have edited since 2008 and which is intended for a broad readership, covers community life and projects in various fields of activity, while also highlighting the strengthening of ties within Uzbekistan's interethnic space and the Armenia-Diaspora connection.

It is worth mentioning that Charles Aznavour inspired our magazine. In 2005, the President invited our distinguished compatriot and renowned chansonnier to Samarkand as a jury member for the famous international folklore festival *Sharq Taronalari* ("Melodies of the East").

What is the main thing you have recognized over the past more than thirty-five years?

It is that a community is a living organism. The community experiences both rises, surges and jolts, declines in activity, and even malady and weakness, confirming the entire physiology of the process and leaving the individual, staying in their own time, alone with their thoughts and attitudes.

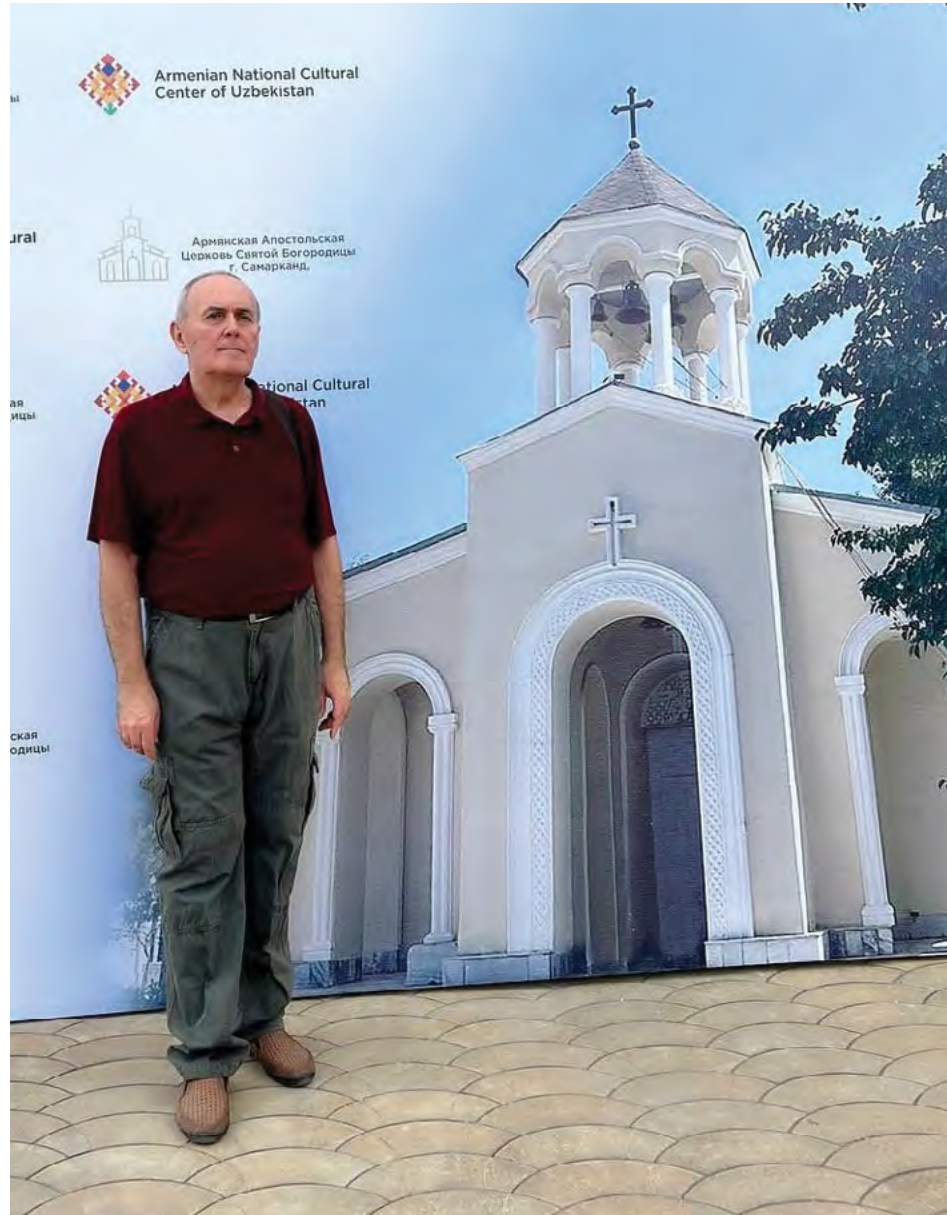
Time creates new preferences, leaving by the roadside what seemed most important yesterday and bringing to the foreground things that would once have appeared impossible to classify as eternal national values.

Once, about fifteen years ago, I met an elderly Armenian woman. She was over eighty and brought her home library of Armenian authors to the Center. Why would a person who had lived in "the most reading nation" decide to part with her books? That is a separate sorrow. The Armenian book, in its collective meaning, has survived wars, revolutions, persecutions, and violence. More than once, it has found itself at the very edge of fate, yet it has always remained one of the nation's sacred symbols. However, over time the call of the crane has become barely audible, and people have stopped reading the books of our metser ("great ones" or "masters") who have passed away. The authors of the new mainstream no longer attain the lofty status of "rulers of minds," even though the writer's word is urgently needed.

During our conversation, I asked that woman in Armenian whether she spoke the language. She replied in Russian that she did not. Before answering, she paused for a long moment, and I felt a crushing emotional blow: an Armenian grandmother who did not speak Armenian.

I remembered how, some twenty years

continued on next page



everyone rushed to their roots with sincere desire. In 1989, at the ending of the Soviet Union, Armenian Cultural Centers appeared in Tashkent, Samarkand, and Andijan. At the starting point of the rebirth of the Armenian community in Uzbekistan stood People's Artist of the USSR Tamara Khanum-Petrosyan. Our outstanding compatriot wished so that the capital's cultural center would find its home under the roof of the recently opened memorial museum dedicated to the actress.

Honestly, the community was born not only under inspiring slogans, but also through real hard working. Most of the founders of the newly opened up Cultural Center were once members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; they were habitually passionately arguing over every detail of the national tradition which had already been forgotten. That was probably a reasonable process. Six decades passed since the Soviet authorities had banned the communities of widely developed national culture. That had really had a negative effect on the national spirit of several generations of Armenians in the diaspora. People had simply forgotten how to live together in their common national interests.

While realizing that the process could drag on for a long time, I decided not

Church of the Holy Virgin, which was built in 1905 and had been closed by decision of the Soviet authorities. In 1995, after decades of forbidding and after reconstruction it opened its doors to parishioners for the first time in modern Central Asia. In 2007, an Armenian Church was also opened in the capital city. Every year the Church of the Holy Virgin in Samarkand and the Church of Saint Philip in Tashkent used to hold celebrations of Christmas, Trndez, Easter, Vardavar, the Blessing of the Grapes and the Day of the Holy Translators.

Some years later, at first sight, the picture seems to present an ideal canvas, charming in its colors. Although the state of Uzbekistan and its government provide not only moral support but also financial assistance, and do a great deal for us and for other ethnic communities operating in the country, it must nevertheless be observed that there is no genuine revival visible on the so-called "road to the temple" in its broader sense. The Sunday school is no longer filled with students, and the Church is overcrowded only during the major holidays of Christmas and Easter. On ordinary days, only about one percent of the fifty thousand Armenians in Uzbekistan remain active members of the community.

What infrastructure and projects



ARTS & CULTURE

Jazzical Komitas Performed In Newport

By Ann Glickman

NEWPORT, R.I. — One of Newport's magnificent castles — the Belcourt, owned by Carolyn Rafaelian — was the site of a concert organized jointly by the Cultural Committee of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church, and the Belcourt of Newport.

The concert, titled “Jazzical Komi-

tas,” featured pianist, composer and arranger Joel Martin, renowned for his concert performances throughout the United States and abroad. The concert program consisted of original arrangements of songs by Komitas, Armenian folk songs and hymns, as well as works by other Armenian composers. Martin's performance style and unique arrangements filled the hall with a profound sense of connection to the sublime.

The program also featured the vocalist and international competition laureate Anahit Zakaryan, who, performing alongside Joel Martin, delivered a masterful rendition of Armenian music.

Following the concert, a lavish reception was held, hosted by the Church's Cultural Committee and Bar, Board Bistro of Newport.



Joel Martin on the piano, with Anahit Zakaryan singing

from previous page

earlier, while observing the process of native language loss in the diaspora, I had written an article entitled “Looking for the Grandmother,” paying tribute not only to the true guide to the mother tongue but also to the guardian of the traditional hearth and strong family home.

And now that grandmother is absent from the family, and there is no one left to teach the household how to remain Armenian. This is a tuning fork of identity, reflecting many dimensions of national life at once. It is pointless to search for the guilty party, since a tuning fork does not identify culprits, but it does compel one to reflect on many things.

Once, the Paris-based professor of mathematics and doctor of history Claude Mutafian formulated a highly accurate and difficult-to-dispute principle for our time: “To be Armenian is a choice.” He was referring to the younger generation of the diaspora, burdened by doubts, reluctant to public self-revelation, and possessing a worn or fragile identity, yet still privately asking themselves: Who am I?

Some willingly join flash mobs under slogans such as “Let us dance Kochari.” A memorable nationwide gathering of this kind took place in 2015. Others, with less demanding tastes, eagerly attend concerts of popular Armenian music often labeled rabiz. As one writer once observed, “In dance reside the character and soul of a people.” Dance requires no language, while song merely touches the ear.

It must be admitted that in transitional societies, where national stereotypes and markers of belonging become highly

flexible, the unconditional primacy of the native language as the principal factor of identity — and as the “most important of the arts” — no longer proves fully effective. And yet, it should.

“We are not given to foresee How our word will respond” the good Russian poet Tyutchev exclaimed and then continued, “If we are not given it, then let us live...” And the matter in all its drama remains with someone. Having passed through centuries and the trials of a slipping identity, this someone continues to study his native language as a foreign one, has already learned survival skills, but still doesn't know how to live after losing important foundational meanings and feeling as a dissatisfied single person. In the current turning-point era with its “fast food and poor digestion” genetics seems a weak helper. But how, after all, can one “recognize you, understand you, embrace you with love?”

Child of gorges and ravines,
O homeless Armenian,
O strange, strange Armenian,
O strange...

These lines by my beloved Gevorg Emin draw a line under my thoughts. It turns out that all that remains is to rely on the living environment in all its warm and careful diversity — the family, the church, the Sunday school, and the community with its meaningful cultural projects. We are all eventually shaped by what we keep before our eyes.

And also, on one's own considerable efforts and decisions. It is a difficult task. A very difficult one. But everything is in our power, in our will, if only there is desire.

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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

JUNE 11 — Music in Color concert series featuring master oud virtuoso John Berberian and acclaimed contemporary artist Antranig Kzirian, this special evening brings together two generations of musicians in a dynamic exploration of sound, improvisation, and cultural expression. Sponsored by Nancy R. Kolligian. Thursday, 7 PM, Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown.

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

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

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

Poetry & Music at LA Public Library

POETRY, from page 13

Ani Sinanyan was born into a family of musicians. She was a finalist in the Youth Talent Festival in 2010, earning the opportunity to perform at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall in New York. Ani earned her bachelor's degree in 2022 from the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music, where she studied under Movses Pogossian and Varty Manouelian. In 2024, she completed a master's degree at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Currently, she is touring internationally as a solo violinist for the Piano Rhapsody concert series. She also performs

Conservatory of Music. In 1996, she began her collaboration with the Russian Composers Union, premiering and recording contemporary compositions and performing with the Moscow Percussion Ensemble. Her international performances have included solo and chamber music, where she has been highly praised for her colorful textures and sensitive touch.

Ziba Perez, the Young Adult Librarian at the Los Angeles Public Library, said, “I loved hearing the students' poetry. I'm a young adult librarian. I work with high school students, so



Violinist Ani Sinanyan and her mother, pianist Zhanna Sinanyan (Karine Armen photo)

with her family's contemporary group, “Trio Syn Thesis,” which competed in and won the 2022 UCLA “Call for New Works” in the categories “Music of Armenia” and “World Jazz and Intercultural Improvisation Ensemble.”

Zhanna Sinanyan is a pianist, instructor and accompanist. She graduated from the State

having them here reading their passionate poetry aloud was really great.” She continued, “Also, I loved having the violin with the different cultures. It was a great mother-daughter duet. My father is from Iran, and my mother is from Mexico, so I appreciate music from all parts of the world myself.”

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**

SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE
UNITED STATES

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

Baikar Association, Inc.

755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA
02472-1509

Telephone: 617-924-4420

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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

ISSN 0004-234X

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

Other than the Editorial, views
and opinions expressed in this
newspaper do not necessarily
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publisher.

Rubio's Transit through Yerevan

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

State Secretary Marco Rubio's May 26 visit to Yerevan became the first visit by a US Secretary of State to Armenia since Hillary Clinton's 2014 trip. However, this was a "transit" visit: the Secretary of State was returning from India and, following the example of Donald Rumsfeld's 2001 visit, spent only a short time in Yerevan.

At the time, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld met first with Defense Minister Sargsyan and then with President Kocharyan at the presidential residence. In this case, however, Rubio did not meet with Pashinyan, which was rather unusual. The main purpose of the visit, as became clear, was the signing of several interim documents, which took place at Zvartnots Airport while the secretary of state's aircraft was being refueled before continuing its journey.

In particular, the parties signed the Charter on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Armenia and the US, the Framework Agreement on Strategic Cooperation regarding the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), and the Framework Memorandum on Ensuring Supply in the Extraction and Processing of Critical Minerals and Rare Earth Elements. These are important documents, and it would be interesting to understand their nature and the United States' motives for signing them with Armenia.

On TRIPP, the United States has two main priorities in the South Caucasus: the implementation of the TRIPP project and increasing pressure on Iran. Incidentally, TRIPP itself is also viewed within the broader context of US policy toward Iran. From this perspective, Rubio's decision not to visit Baku is, in my opinion, not accidental.

TRIPP passes through Armenian territory and is primarily taking shape as an Armenian-American project.

Azerbaijan's position on both TRIPP and Iran is already well known to Washington, leaving little need for additional clarification. Therefore, the main focus of the Yerevan talks may center on developments surrounding Iran and the future of TRIPP.

Regarding TRIPP, one important aspect constantly remains outside our attention. TRIPP is an important element of American regional strategy, but it is not the only one. Its goal is to transport Central Asian energy resources to Europe through the South Caucasus and Turkey, bypassing China, Russia, and Iran. This concept has been openly stated. However, the key point is the following: China seeks, and has partly succeeded, in establishing control over Central Asia's energy resources, and it needs export routes to Europe, something that could be realized through the Belt and Road Initiative and other routes.

The United States, in turn, seeks to create difficulties for China in this regard by limiting its export capabilities and using various tools in different countries, ranging from sanctions to its own regional projects. In other words, if China is taking control of energy resources in Central Asia, then in a natural competitive

response, the United States is asserting control over alternative transit corridors for its export to Europe.

It is evident that the main obstacle to exporting resources from Central Asia to Europe was the fact that, after reaching Azerbaijan via the Caspian Sea, these resources would reach Turkey through Iran, since the connection between Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan passed through Iranian territory, which did not align with Washington's interests. With the existence of TRIPP, this corridor is secured through Armenia, thereby bypassing Iran. At the same time, it bypasses Russia and creates complications for Chinese exports by limiting the availability of alternative routes.

Regarding natural resources, it is well known that the United States and China are engaged in serious competition over mineral resources and especially critical minerals. In this area, Washington has two main objectives and strategic interests: reducing its own dependence on Chinese minerals while simultaneously establishing influence over the mining sectors of resource-rich countries. That is why the United States has signed similar agreements with Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, Congo, Australia, Kazakhstan, and dozens of other countries. Incidentally, one of the justifications for American interest in Greenland has been precisely its mineral wealth, something the Trump administration has spoken about openly on multiple occasions.

As far as the signing of a strategic relations document with Armenia, it is important to understand that the United States categorizes its key international relationships with different countries as follows: Alliances (South Korea, UK, Canada), Strategic Partnerships (Armenia, Vietnam, Kazakhstan), Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships (India), Comprehensive Partnerships (Indonesia, Singapore), and Major Non-NATO Allies (Israel, Australia) NATO member Allies and just friendly countries. In other words, it should be understood

that Armenia has moved one step higher within these categories. However, there is no possibility of an alliance-level relationship, along with all the implications that would entail.

In other words, the agreements signed with Armenia serve Washington's broader objective of advancing its own interests in the South Caucasus and the wider region, which is a natural course of action for any major power. At the same time, the United States is actively taking advantage of several key factors, including a weakened Russia, ongoing developments surrounding Iran, and the fact that China still lacks sufficient instruments of influence in the South Caucasus to effectively compete with the United States. Washington is using this window of opportunity quite effectively to promote its strategic interests, including through Armenia and other regional partners.

(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



Opposition Member Detained in Criminal Case

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Public criminal prosecution has been initiated against Alik Aleksanyan, a member of the Strong Armenia party, and he has been detained, according to Haykakan Zhamanak.

Armenia's Investigative Committee stated that A.A., a supporter of S.K. and founder and executive head of the NGO "Preservation of National Values in Our Way", allegedly hired approximately 1,400 citizens through the NGO's offices across Armenia between September 2025 and May 2026. Investigators claim the employment arrangements, including service contracts and other civil agreements, were used as a formal cover to recruit participants for rallies and public gatherings organized by supporters of S.K., the NGO, and the Strong Armenia party.

According to investigators, more than 400 of those individuals simultaneously held jobs at other companies.

The preliminary investigation found that between October 8, 2025, and March 31, 2026, approximately 1.6 billion drams, 230,000 euros, and 75,000 U.S. dollars, allegedly obtained through criminal activity, were transferred to the NGO's bank accounts from the Tashir Charitable Foundation, Intego Energo, and Tashir Capital under descriptions such as "donation" and "loan."

Investigators allege that during the same period, Aleksanyan sought to legitimize particularly large sums of money of alleged criminal origin by disguising them as salaries and payments under civil contracts. According to the committee, employees were financially incentivized and directed

to participate in demonstrations and rallies organized by supporters of S.K., the NGO, and the Strong Armenia party between September 2025 and May 2026.

The investigation claims that most of the hired individuals either never attended work or visited NGO offices only once or a few times per month, often without understanding the nature or purpose of their supposed duties. Investigators further state that these individuals were later dismissed without the NGO carrying out the objectives specified in its charter.

According to the committee, a total of 703.8 million drams was distributed as salaries and equivalent payments, while 59.4 million drams was paid under civil-law contracts, for a combined total of approximately 763.3 million drams.



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Russia, the U.S., and the EU Should Keep Out Of Armenia's Domestic Affairs

No foreign country should meddle in the internal affairs of Armenia — a sovereign and independent country. Its people are the only ones entitled to choose their government leaders and determine their policies.

Ironically, those Armenians who have been screaming day and night about Russian intervention remain completely silent when Western countries (the European Union and the United States) blatantly intervene in Armenia's domestic affairs. Those who think that Western interference, as opposed to Russia's, is harmless and acceptable, are either ignorant of, or naïve about, international affairs.

Foreign leaders (whether from the East, West, North or South) do not offer anything to Armenia out of the goodness of their hearts. They are simply pursuing their self-interests.

The problem is that Armenia's leaders, throughout history, have not distinguished themselves by their knowledge of international relations. Armenians ignore, to their detriment, developments around the world that may affect their lives or their very survival. When you are a small and weak country, you cannot afford to be oblivious to events taking place around you. Otherwise, you become vulnerable to external threats. What you need to do is strengthen yourself as much as possible and then, using skillful diplomacy, seek to minimize those threats.

Armenians, justifiably, have a very negative view of Turkey and its leaders. However, we must admit that Turkish leaders, like their Ottoman predecessors, are very skillful in international politics. For centuries, Ottoman sultans were able to pit major foreign powers against each other and repeatedly switched sides to protect their empire's interests. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's actions are a continuation of that traditional tightrope walk. Erdogan has exceptional skills in maneuvering in troubled international waters. Armenia does not have now, and rarely had in the past, a leader with similar skills.

The second problem is that Armenians approach foreign relations emotionally -- based on who they like and who they dislike. International relations cannot be compared to personal relationships. You can interact even with your enemies if doing so benefits your country.

The third problem is that Armenians, throughout their history, have always expected a foreign power to come and rescue them from their enemies. Ar-

menians may have had such unrealistic expectations at the beginning of their history. However, after thousands of years of being subjected to invasions, mass killings, and even genocide, one would think that they would finally wake up and, having seen that no foreign power has ever come to their rescue, conclude that no one is going to help them.

Regrettably, Armenians have never learned the necessary lessons from their tragic history. Even today, they are expecting some foreign country to defend them. In recent decades, Armenians vainly hoped that Russia would protect them, as if it were obligated to do so. All countries only protect their own interests, not those of others. Being utterly disappointed by Russia's lack of action during the 2020 Artsakh War, and even more so during Azerbaijan's invasion and occupation of parts of the Republic of Armenia's territory in 2021 and 2022, most Armenians started looking elsewhere in vain for their country's protection. Their disappointment was based on the fact that Armenia and Russia, along with several other former Soviet republics, had signed a mutual defense treaty -- the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization). That treaty was supposed to protect the Republic of Armenia. However, Armenians forget that treaties are often considered just pieces of paper. All countries place their national interests ahead of any treaty obligations they may have.

After being understandably disappointed by Russia, one would have thought that Armenians would conclude that no one is going to come to Armenia's rescue, and stop searching for a new savior. Instead, they continued their eternal search. They are now hoping that France, the European Union, or the United States will be their new saviors. However, if Armenia comes under attack, neither the EU nor the United States will come to its rescue. It is naïve to expect that these foreign countries would risk their soldiers' lives to defend Armenia's borders. That is the obligation of Armenia's leaders.

Rather than vacillating between East and West, it is in Armenia's interest to establish mutually beneficial relations with all countries in the world, without expecting any of them to come to its rescue. However, to accomplish such an important task, Armenia needs competent leadership.

I suggest that Armenians ignore the frivolous endorsements of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan by President Donald Trump, Vice President JD Vance, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio — a blatant example of foreign interference in Armenia's domestic elections. I hope their endorsements meet the same fate as Vance's personal visit to Budapest, Hungary, on the eve of the elections in April to support Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who suffered an overwhelming defeat.

What Armenians need is action, not empty words. Trump, Vance, and Rubio did not lift a finger to obtain the release of Artsakh leaders illegally detained in Baku since 2023. Nor did they condemn Pashinyan's persecution of the Armenian Apostolic Church. This shows that their multiple declarations about protecting Christians around the world are nothing but hot air.

Who Gets to Decide if Civil Society Is 'Legitimate' in Armenia?

By Arpy Manusyan

As Armenia's June 7 elections approach — elections characterized by a hyper-politicized environment and the ever further personalization of power — democratic pluralism has become increasingly constrained. The consolidation of authority around Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, as well as the absence of credible democratic alternatives or the articulation of any democratic agenda beyond anti-government positioning, has reduced the space for genuine public and political debate, undermining a fundamental element of democracy.

Moreover, civil society has become increasingly fragmented, a trend that intensified following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, as deep societal trauma and questions of legitimacy have weakened shared agendas. Widespread public mistrust, driven by narratives delegitimizing civil society and its limited embeddedness within the public, has hindered meaningful engagement and reduced the diversity of voices in Armenian political and social debates.

These factors have sustained several recurring narratives about civil society, narratives that are repeatedly reactivated and reshaped, especially during elections. Rather than developing organically, these narratives are strategically reproduced at key political moments when

legitimacy and representation are in question. As a result, they define who is considered entitled to speak and whose participation is viewed as suspect or illegitimate.

The shifting “real vs fake” narrative

Ahead of the elections, a number of political actors, media platforms, and former civil society representatives are attempting to redefine the institutional and value boundaries of what constitutes “real” civil society. One key distinction that has emerged is the shifting authorship of the “real vs fake” civil society narrative.

Under the previous government, this discourse was primarily articulated from within civil society itself. It was civil society actors who actively produced the distinction, often pointing to GONGOs, as well as anti-democratic actors, as illegitimate forms of civic engagement that distorted the field from within trying to co-opt the human rights agenda and develop “parallel civil society”. In that sense, the boundary between “real” and “fake” was drawn by those who positioned themselves as defenders of democratic progressive human rights agendas and who criticized “anti-movements”, conservative, and right-wing campaigns.

In the current context, however, this narrative has undergone a significant transformation. The question of “fake civil society” is no longer produced exclusively, or even primarily, by civil society actors themselves — instead, it is increasingly being reproduced by former civil society figures, publicly respected intellectuals, political actors, and the media who question the very existence of civil society and its agency.

As a result, the framing has become detached from its earlier normative grounding and has turned into a more diffuse and politically charged discourse. Rather than serving as an internal mechanism of self-regulation within civil society, it now circulates across multiple, often antagonistic, political and social camps. In this highly polarized environment, the narrative is no longer externally imposed on civil society alone; it is also reproduced from within, contributing to fragmentation and reinforcing broader cycles of mistrust and delegitimization.

According to this discourse, civil society is only “legitimate” if they occupy a space of permanent, hard re-

sistance to the state. Conversely, any engagement that supports state-led democratic reforms or peace agenda is dismissed as “co-optation”. A key mechanism in this process is the discourse of resentment, which is used to delegitimize civil society groups and to question their local agency and authenticity.

The candidacy of long-time human rights defender Nina Karapetyants in the upcoming elections crystallizes this narrative. By framing her transition to politics as a rescue mission from a “co-opted” civic field, she reinforces the narrative that independence is no longer possible within the civil society landscape. In multiple media interviews, she has dismantled the credibility of her former colleagues, and has even agreed with hosts who cynically declared the death of Armenian civil society. By mourning this death, they invite the audience to stop expecting anything from the civic sector, effectively clearing the stage for purely partisan politics.

Karapetyants's critique often touches on selective silence. She claims that CSOs, which were vocal about human rights abuses under the former government have become “conveniently quiet” regarding current issues like police brutality, judicial independence, or the lack of transparency in constitutional reforms, claiming that they are “the authorities” handpicked civil society.” Her narratives are particularly damaging to civic space because they can be seen as coming from an insider or a trusted source.

Media as both target and gatekeeper

In the pre-election context, key representatives of the ruling Civil Contract party regularly assume the role of arbiters in “evaluating” the activities of Armenian media, subjectively drawing boundaries between “real” and “non-real” media. Some MPs, through their social media pages and party-affiliated podcasts, actively engage in discussions that classify media outlets and journalists as “good” or “bad”, label certain sources as “trash”, and even declare “the death of journalism.” Moreover, Parliamentary Speaker Alen Simonyan has used the term “foreign agent” in reference to media outlets, implying that without the current government's

see LEGITIMACY, page 20



Who Gets to Decide if Civil Society Is ‘Legitimate’ in Armenia?

LEGITIMACY. from page 19
restraint, such actors could legitimately be treated and labelled as foreign agents. Even in such a context, this is particularly concerning given the term’s frequent instrumentalization in electoral contexts and within broader hybrid warfare narratives, where such labels are routinely deployed as political tools, and, in some cases, move beyond the discursive level to become institutionalized repressive legal frameworks such as in Russia and Georgia.

When political actors label individuals, groups, or institutions as “agents” without clear evidence, the term shifts from analysis to denigration, fostering public distrust and fear. In this context, criticism, independent journalism, or civic activism may be recast as “external influence”, which restricts public debate and limits legitimate political action. Such verbal targeting poses systemic risks by introducing state influence into a field that relies on professional self-regulation and independence. When political authorities assert the right to determine the “authenticity” of media actors, they set a precedent that may extend to other areas of public life, including civil society.

Early signs of this trend are already apparent in pre-electoral contexts. Although state officials often justify interventions in

the non-state sector by citing financial transparency issues, such actions risk undermining independent democratic oversight and accountability. Indeed, a recent RSF report shows that Armenia has dropped in the global press freedom ranking, falling from 34th to 50th. According to the report, the country’s media landscape remains highly polarized, while journalists continue to face hate speech and political pressure. The number of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) in Armenia is also growing.

Paradoxically, despite its own vulnerability to delegitimization, the media often becomes an active participant in the very discourse that defines and polices legitimacy, including, in this case, the legitimacy of civil society itself. The media does not merely reflect existing narratives but actively participates in their construction and reproduction. Importantly, such harmful narratives are not confined to overtly partisan or anti-democratic outlets but can also emerge from media actors who themselves are being targeted, stigmatized, or labelled by political actors.

In this context, CivilNet’s recent documentary on civil society, while framed in a seemingly neutral and non-positioned voice, ultimately reproduces the familiar instrumen-

tal discourse of the “co-opted” civil society.

Largely constructed through a narrow interpretive lens, the documentary links the transformation of activism directly to activists’ proximity to post-revolutionary authorities and to the war’s aftermath. In doing so, the film overlooks a range of broader structural and generational factors that have transformed activism both globally and in Armenia including that many of the once highly visible activists have simply grown older and moved into different roles and directions, while younger generations appear less inclined toward traditional forms of street activism, often favoring other modes of engagement instead.

At the same time, the documentary advances a reductive portrayal of NGOs as being driven primarily by donor agendas, addressing externally defined priorities and thereby stripping civil society organizations of their agency. In this way, despite its reflective tone, the film reinforces a limited and somewhat deterministic understanding of civil society, reducing a complex and evolving field to a narrative of decline.

According to American sociologist Mark Granovetter, all actions are rooted in social relationships. When civil society operates mainly within policy and advocacy networks rather than engaging with the

everyday realities of socioeconomically vulnerable communities, it can appear distant and elitist, and thus more vulnerable to delegitimization. This disconnect is often exploited by anti-democratic actors, right-wing groups, and “newcomers” who use the language of social justice and national dignity to appeal to those marginalized by liberal reforms.

The crisis facing civil society stems not only from external attacks but also from weakened connections to the broader society. To regain legitimacy, civil society must strengthen its local accountability, diversify its resources, and renew its focus on social and economic justice that matters in daily life. At the same time, it should actively challenge increasing pressures that seek to limit or define its role, whether through criticism, attempts to dictate its function, or efforts to restrict its legitimate activities. Defending the public sphere requires both a strong presence and a willingness to contest narratives that threaten civil society’s autonomy and democratic role.

(Arpy Manusyan is a scholar and social researcher examining civil society, activism, civic agency, and human rights through critical and public sociology, with a focus on Armenia. This commentary originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on June 1.)

Ex-defense Minister Says Samvel Karapetyan Provided Aid to Army in 2020 War

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Former Armenian Defense Minister David Tonoyan said on June 1 that businessman and philanthropist Samvel Karapetyan provided substantial support to the Armenian Armed Forces during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war.

Speaking to reporters, Tonoyan described Karapetyan’s assistance as “significant and diverse,” adding that the support was highly beneficial to the military during the 44-day conflict.

“That support was multifaceted and substantial. It can be assessed as quite useful,” Tonoyan said.

Tonoyan noted that Karapetyan had supported the armed forces before 2018.

When asked to provide details about the nature of the assistance, Tonoyan declined, citing security concerns and confidentiality requirements.

Tonoyan added that any assistance to the armed forces deserves recognition, particularly during the 2020 war, when individuals and organizations contributed to Armenia’s defense efforts.



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