

Trump Route Fund Chair Sokolov Buys Second-largest Mine In Armenia

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

An American company headed by Russian-born American investor Konstantin Sokolov has obtained the Teghut copper-molybdenum mine in Armenia. Sokolov was recently appointed by the US State Department to “oversee” the fund for the implementation and development of the Trump Route.

Documents from Armenia’s online register of legal entities, according to RFE/RL, show that Dynamic Frontier Holdings has become the new shareholder of Cuprum RA, the company operating the Teghut mine.

Public records indicate that the company was incorporated in Texas in August 2025 and is not registered in Armenia. Documents obtained by RFE/RL from the Texas tax registry identify Sokolov, who is registered in Florida, as the company’s head.

Previously, RFE/RL reported that Sokolov was in talks to acquire just under a 50% stake in the mine, one of the largest



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Konstantin Sokolov meeting in March 2024 (official photo)

in Armenia, by purchasing the shares from the sanctioned Russian state-owned VTB Bank.

Sokolov is known for a series of acquisitions and investments in Armenia. In January 2024, his Fedilco Group, co-owned with Chinese investor Zhe Zhang, acquired majority stakes in Armenia’s largest telecommunications company, Viva-MTS. Fedilco Group, registered in Cyprus, also has shares in other communications companies in Armenia.

Following the acquisition of Viva-MTS in 2024, the Armenian government acquired a 20% stake in the company later that year in a murky deal whose details remain unclear. The company said it had donated the shares to the government.

The Armenian investigative outlet Hetq reported shortly after the acquisition that there were some questions about Sokolov’s actual role in Viva-MTS, and that other see SOKOLOV, page 3



Argishtikhinili seen from the north (photo Krzysztof Jakubiak)

Polish Archeologists Discover Complex Ancient Water Distribution System in Armenia

By Ewelina Krajczynska-Wujec

Archeologists have identified more than 1,000 kilometers of ancient and modern water-management features near the former Urartian city of Argishtikhinili in Armenia, uncovering evidence of a vast irrigation system that helped transform the Ararat Basin into the agricultural heartland of the ancient kingdom more than 2,700 years ago.

Using satellite imagery and remote sensing techniques, researchers from the University of Warsaw and the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia mapped an extensive network of canals, riverbeds and streams around the archaeological site.

Their findings, published in the jour-

nal *Antiquity* (<https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2026.10344>), shed new light on the scale of hydraulic engineering undertaken during the Kingdom of Urartu, also known as the biblical kingdom of Ararat.

The researchers identified a total of 1,019 kilometers of water-management infrastructure. This included approximately 135 kilometers of probable ancient canals, nearly 420 kilometers of ancient riverbeds and streams, around 429 kilometers of modern irrigation canals and about 36 kilometers of ancient canals still clearly visible in the landscape. Many of the preserved canal sections lie close to Argishtikhinili, indicating they were directly connected to the ancient urban center.

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Netanyahu Blocks Armenian Genocide Recognition Bill After Pressure from Azerbaijan, Haaretz Reports

By Nate Ostiller

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was pressured by Azerbaijan into blocking a bill already approved by the government to officially recognize the Armenian Genocide,



Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar

the Israeli media outlet *Haaretz* has reported, citing an unnamed source.

The reporting follows a month of uncertainty about the progress towards recognition after the Israeli government unanimously approved the proposal,

put forth by Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar, in June. This information comes on the heels of the announcement last week that the government was pulling the bill.

At the time, Sa’ar called the move to recognize the genocide “a moral duty.”

The initial steps were met with widespread skepticism, including in Armenia, with many viewing the possible recognition as a geopolitical game that said more about Israeli tensions with Turkey than a genuine desire to recognize the genocide.

The Israeli government’s approval of the resolution drew intense criticism from Azerbaijan and Turkey, with the latter accusing Israel of seeking to ‘cover up its own crimes’ in Gaza.

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Another Armenian Prisoner in Azerbaijan Rebukes Yerevan

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Yet another former leader of Nagorno-Karabakh jailed in Azerbaijan has accused Armenia’s leadership of being indifferent to the fate of Armenian prisoners.

Major-General Davit Manukyan, who had served as a deputy commander of Karabakh’s Armenia-backed army, challenged Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to publicly comment on “fabricated and false” accusations leveled against himself and seven other former Karabakh Armenian leaders remaining in Azerbaijani captivity.

“Sadly, those [prisoners] who are held here do not feel the breath of the

Republic of Armenia,” he said in an audio message communicated to his family by phone and publicized on Monday, July 20.

The former Karabakh leaders were captured right after the 2023 Azerbaijani offensive that restored Baku’s full control over Karabakh and forced the region’s Armenian population to flee to Armenia. They all denied a long list of war crimes charges leveled against them. Five of them, including Manukyan, were sentenced to life in prison, while the three others received 20-year prison sentences in February this year see PRISONER, page 3



Davit Manukyan, a former deputy commander of the Karabakh Armenian army

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Princess Margaret’s Grandson Proposes To Longtime Love Eleanor Ekserdjian

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Children’s Opera Celebrates Triumph over Evil

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Catholicos to Skip New Parliament's First Session

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — For the first time since 2003, Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II is not expected to attend the inaugural session of Armenia's newly elected parliament, Hraparak.am reported on Saturday, July 18. The parliament will open on August 2.

Under Armenia's constitutional law, both the president and the church leader have the right to deliver opening remarks at the first sitting of a new legislature. However, according to *Hraparak*, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin has not received an invitation.

Members of the ruling Civil Contract party suggested the Catholicos could attend voluntarily, but many of them have previously insulted and criticized him. The church's press office could not be reached for comment.

Karekin II has delivered patriarchal blessings at every inaugural parliament session since 2003.

Yerevan Mayor's Adviser Faces Prosecution

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Public criminal prosecution has been initiated against Kamo Areyan, an adviser to the Mayor of Yerevan. He is accused of abusing his official authority in connection with the transfer of specially protected green areas in the capital.

According to the Prosecutor's Office, on July 20 the prosecutor approved the indictment and referred to the Anti-Corruption Court the criminal case against Areyan, who served as deputy mayor from 2003 to 2009.

The investigation found that Areyan allegedly used his official powers against the interests of the service and participated in the unlawful transfer of two state-owned land plots, each measuring 6,000 square meters, located at the intersection of Azatutyun Avenue and Babayan Street. The plots were included in the list of lands subject to transfer restrictions under Article 60 of Armenia's Land Code.

The investigation established that the land plots had been granted for free permanent use to the Hayrenik-Spyurk Kamurj and Surb Lazar public organizations. At the same time, under a government decision, they had been included in a specially protected area designated for the expansion of Yerevan's green zones and intended for the establishment of a citywide park. Under the Land Code, the plots were not eligible for transfer.

According to the prosecution, he approved draft decisions authorizing the transfer, thereby creating the legal basis for the mayor to adopt the relevant decisions. As a result, the two plots were sold directly to the public organizations for 98.856 million drams each.

DiasporArm at ASOF 2026: Leadership, Knowledge, and Values

YEREVAN (DiasporArm) — During the Armenian Society of Fellows (ASOF) 2026 conference, DiasporArm attended not merely as an observer, but as an active contributor. Its founder Hovel Chenorhokian brought three concrete initiatives to a dedicated side session on diaspora relations, each addressing challenges that ASOF itself places at the heart of Armenia's future: closing the leadership gap, building Armenopedia, and launching Luys — The Armenian Channel.

I. Bridging the Armenian World Leadership Gap

Chenorhokian opened with an unsparing diagnosis: we have no collective leadership. There is no pilot in the cockpit. Across our fragmented communities, we lack a shared long-term vision, the institutional grounds for cooperation, and the structures to coordinate our considerable — but dispersed — resources. Our existing institutions are not the obstacle; they are assets. But they must be encouraged and incentivized to cooperate rather than compete.

The response, he argued, is to create the conditions for thought leadership to emerge: individuals with the vision to see fifty years ahead; the wisdom to overcome our fragmentation and build cooperation across the nation; unquestioned integrity and trust; proven excellence in their own field; and above all, humility — not seeking to become the boss, but choosing to serve.

Such leadership would pursue four objectives. First, making a shared national identity genuinely take hold across all our differences. Second, bridging the structural gap of the Diaspora and organizing our collective resources — because the problem is not Armenian generosity, but the absence of a unified, trusted fundraising structure. Third, setting a level of ambition for Armenia and Armenians on the global stage: influential political leaders, ministers, prime ministers, a strong media presence, Armenian unicorns, Nobel Prize laureates — within twenty years. And fourth, placing on the agenda issues no one else is touching.

One example: the Mekhitarist Congregation. Fourteen clerics remain. The Vatican has appointed an administrator. Yet this Congregation — with chapters in Venice, Vienna, France, Lebanon, and Egypt —

holds material and immaterial assets of immense national value. The issue is on nobody's agenda. It should be on ours.

Given the diminished credibility of our political and religious institutions, this leadership must emerge from our two most solid remaining pillars: academics and entrepreneurs. Qualified individuals exist — people not seeking titles or recognition. We need to bring them to the table.

His call to action was clear: rather than treating this as a panel discussion, ASOF 2026 should mark a milestone — the launch of a task force to identify the individuals who will form the hard core of this leadership. The room responded. The session ran well beyond its allotted time, as discussion gave way to something closer to commitment.

II. Armenopedia: Mapping the Armenian World

During the 2020 war, a phone call came from Armenia: did anyone know an acoustic engineer in the diaspora? Soldiers were dying. A device capable of detecting drones one minute earlier could save lives. No one had an answer — because no one had a map.

That absence is what Armenopedia is being built to fill.

Chenorhokian presented Armenopedia as a global initiative with a precise mission: to uncover the vast Armenian talent pool across over 600 listed specialties; to document each entry in a concise, standardized, and comprehensive format; and to bridge the information gap within the Armenian world.

The database currently holds over 20,000 entries organized across nine chapters: distinguished individuals, students, educational institutions, religious bodies, organizations, communities, commerce, industry, and hospitality.

What sets Armenopedia apart from a directory is its interconnectivity. A student's profile links to relevant researchers, enterprises, and peers — creating pathways to mentorship, internships, and employment. A school's page displays its alumni by graduation year. An enterprise's specialty connects to every global actor in that field. Tables can be sorted by revenues, donations, net worth, academic citations, and H-Index — turning the platform into a genuine strategic instrument for the Armenian world.

Armenopedia's ultimate ambition is to empower Armenians by giving them visibility, fostering interregional collaboration, and strengthening the cultural, educational, and economic ties that bind Armenian communities worldwide.

III. Luys — A Channel of Values for the World

The third initiative DiasporArm brought to Dilijan is perhaps the most ambitious in scope. Luys — the Armenian word for light — is a proposed global network of media platforms dedicated to responsible, inspiring, and values-driven content.

Its mission rests on two foundations: promoting the human and civic values that build strong individuals and societies — discipline, diligence, perseverance, integrity, empathy, high standards — and raising awareness of our collective responsibility toward the environment.

The vision is equally twofold. First, to elevate the value system within Armenia and across the Diaspora. Second — and this is the bolder claim — to position Armenia itself as a beacon of light, ethics, and knowledge in service of the world.

In a media landscape where platforms like TikTok are shaping the values of an entire generation in ways that give us pause, Luys proposes something different: multilingual, engaging content built around human and civic values, delivered through animations, short films, and visual storytelling.

The inspiration is not abstract. Chinese educational social media programs reshaped the values of 1.5 billion people between 2010 and 2020 — moving an entire society toward civility, honesty, and discipline. As a first concrete step, DiasporArm dubbed those Chinese clips into Armenian — symbolically weaving together Eastern and Western Armenian in the process.

Luys is not only an Armenian project. It speaks to universal questions at a moment when, in Chenorhokian's own words, the world is “in search of guidance.” Armenia — small as it is — has the cultural depth, the diaspora talent, and the moral tradition to contribute something meaningful to that search. Luys is the vehicle for that contribution: a form of soft power far more impactful than any PR agency — and one that, with time, can become self-sustaining.

‘Trump Route’ Deal in Conflict With Armenian Law, Says Justice Ministry

By Astghik Bedevian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Some provisions of a US-Armenian agreement to open a US-run transit corridor for Azerbaijan through Armenia run counter to Armenian law, according to the Justice Ministry in Yerevan. The ministry drew this conclusion in a written opinion submitted to the Armenian government. But citing political reasons, it recommended the agreement's approval by the government, which was formalized on July 16.

The deal was signed by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan in early June. It lays out the key terms of the planned Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) that would run along Armenia's border with Iran and connect Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave and Turkey.

It calls for the creation of a joint venture that will manage for at least 49 years a railway, a road, energy supply lines and other infrastructure to be built along the corridor. The US

government will own 74 percent of the TRIPP Development Company (TDC) that will receive “exclusive land use rights, development rights, related permissions, and all other rights” necessary for the transit arrangement.

While upholding Armenia's “full sovereignty and jurisdiction over its borders and customs operations,” the agreement commits the Armenian government to the so-called “front office/back office” model whereby private operators hired by the TDC will provide “customer-facing services” at the border crossings with Azerbaijan. Armenian officials are to be given a “back office” role there.

“It should be noted that according to [Armenia's] Law on the State Border, the processing of persons, vehicles, cargo and other property across the border of Armenia is carried out by its border guards and customs authorities,” the Justice Ministry said in this regard. “Therefore, the authority to check relevant documents and allow passage through the state border is reserved exclusively for state bodies.”

The ministry also found that tax exemptions

that will be granted to the TDC and its subsidiaries contradict Armenian tax legislation. Contacted by RFE/RL's Armenian Service, it declined to say whether it will draft or recommend legal amendments that will bring the US-Armenian agreement into conformity with Armenian law. The deal says that it shall take precedence “in case of any conflict with Armenian law.” It has to be validated by the country's Constitutional Court before being ratified by the Armenian parliament.

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev has said that Azerbaijanis traveling to and from Nakhichevan “should not see the faces of Armenian border guards.” Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has signaled readiness to meet that demand, saying that modern technology will be used to exclude physical contact between Armenian officials and Azerbaijani travelers. Pashinyan has thus given more ammunition to his domestic critics who say that the TRIPP amounts to the kind of an extraterritorial “Zangezur corridor” that is sought by Baku. Aliyev again made the same point last week.



ARMENIA

Armenia Sets New Tourism Record as Visitor Numbers Hit All-time High

YEREVAN (JAM News) — Armenia’s tourism sector has reported a new record. The country welcomed 1.042 million tourists in the first half of 2026. According to Sona Hovhannisyan, head of the International Cooperation Department, the number of tourists who visited Armenia between January and June was 14.8% higher than during the same period last year.

Although this is the highest figure on record, the Tourism Committee expects to break the record again by the end of the year. Officials expect the number of tourists to surpass last year’s total of 2.2 million visitors.

According to the Tourism Committee, visitors from Russia, Georgia and Iran have made up the largest share of tourists traveling to Armenia for many years. As of June this year, that pattern had not changed. The figures are as follows: Around 40% of all visitors came from Russia; 15% from Georgia and 8% from Iran.

Compared with the three leading source markets, visitor numbers from other countries remain relatively low. According to Sona Hovhannisyan, head of the International Cooperation Department, several factors explain why tourists from these countries account for the largest share of arrivals:

“Iran and Georgia are Armenia’s closest neighbors, while Armenia has historical ties with Russia. It is also important that people can travel to Armenia from these countries relatively quickly. The presence of Armenian diaspora communities in these countries also plays a role.”

Hovhannisyan said countries with direct



flights to Armenia, as well as those whose citizens benefit from simplified visa rules, have seen growing numbers of visitors. She cited China as an example, saying the sharp increase in Chinese tourists followed the launch of direct flights between Urumqi and Yerevan, along with the introduction of a visa-free regime.

Hovhannisyan also explained what has driven growth from other countries:

“The significant increase in the number of tourists from Italy is due to the expansion of flights between our countries. The same factor has influenced arrivals from Germany, where visitor numbers had previously declined. The launch of a direct flight from Kazakhstan has also boosted tourist flows.”

Armenia has also recently become a more popular destination for tourists from Spain, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and the

United Kingdom.

Hovhannisyan said visitor numbers from those countries remain well below the figures for Russia. However, she added that the recent launch of direct flights between London and Yerevan gives reason for optimism.

“The peak tourism season is gradually getting longer”

Armenia usually sees the highest number of tourist arrivals during the summer and in September and October. Activity typically begins to slow towards the end of November. According to Hovhannisyan, however, the peak season is gradually becoming longer. She said more tourists are now choosing to visit the country during the winter months.

“It is encouraging to see growing activity during the winter as well. The government is taking steps to support this trend. If this

January’s record figures are sustained and become the norm, we can expect strong tourism for almost the entire year.”

The Tourism Committee is running a number of programs to make Armenia a more attractive destination on the international tourism market.

According to Diana Karapetyan, head of the Marketing Department, Armenia showcased national pavilions at major tourism fairs in Spain, Germany, Romania and Russia this year.

“By the end of the year, we plan to take part in several more international events. Armenian tourism companies attending these exhibitions present highly attractive offers. They promote our country’s cultural events, cuisine and tourist attractions. They also offer tastings, distribute brochures and show promotional videos.”

The committee also works with international media outlets, PR agencies, well-known bloggers and influencers. It organizes familiarization trips to Armenia and runs promotional campaigns. Karapetyan said these efforts have led to more frequent coverage of Armenia in the international media, with growing attention to its tourism appeal and potential.

“Armenia has established itself on the global tourism market as a safe and reliable destination,” she said.

Two Tsarukyan Companies Officially Seized by Government

By Robert Zargarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The Armenian government has officially seized two of the several dozen companies belonging to Gagik Tsarukyan that were effectively closed by them last week during the opposition leader’s arrest promised by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

One of them is Armenia’s largest cement plant located in the southern town of Ararat. Pashinyan said his government will nationalize the plant when he campaigned for the June 7 parliamentary elections in which Tsarukyan’s Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK) was one of the main opposition contenders. He has since repeatedly pledged to imprison and “dispossess” Tsarukyan as well as the leaders of two other key opposition groups.

The Office of the Prosecutor-General announced on Thursday that a court in Yerevan has agreed to place the plant under the government’s “management and maintenance” pending a verdict on prosecutors’ demand to confiscate Tsarukyan’s assets

worth hundreds of millions of dollars. The office claimed earlier, following Pashinyan’s pre-election pledge, that it had been illegally privatized in 2002.

Pashinyan seemed confident that the court will allow the asset forfeiture when he said last week. “Ararat Cement will be state-owned very soon.”

One of Tsarukyan’s lawyers, Yerem Sargsyan, noted that the court did not even bother to notify him and his colleagues about the injunction. He said this only proves that he acted on government orders.

Meanwhile, Yerevan Mayor Tigran Avinyan told Factor.am that the municipal administration has taken over Multi Wellness, Tsarukyan’s large fitness center located in the city center. He cited the municipality’s decision last month to unilaterally rescind a long-term lease agreement on land occupied by the center. A spokeswoman for Tsarukyan on June 19 described the decision as illegal and said it will be challenged in court.

Law-enforcement authorities searched and sealed off the offices of Ararat Cement, Multi Wellness and dozens of other

firms making up Tsarukyan’s Multi Group conglomerate when they arrested the BHK leader on July 6. Only the cement plant has since been allowed to resume its operations. Thousands of people working for the other Multi Group entities remain out of work.

Armenia’s Investigative Committee, which plays the central role in the criminal proceedings, did not give a clear reason for the shutdowns in written comments to RFE/RL’s Armenian Service sent on Thursday, July 16. Nor did it say when it will allow those companies to reopen.

Tsarukyan was demonstratively arrested on fraud charges that are unrelated to their activities. His representatives as well as other government critics portray Pashinyan’s statements as further proof that the post-election crackdown is politically motivated.

Dozens of other Armenian opposition leaders, members and supporters have also been arrested in recent months, facing various charges denied by them. The arrests continued even after the disputed elections.

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individuals might be more involved in managing the company.

More recently, on 14 July, the Guardian reported that Sokolov has been appointed as the chair of the TRIPP+ enterprise fund intended to “oversee” more than \$200 million earmarked for the landmark Trump Route connecting Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhchivan through Armenian territory.

The Trump Route, or the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), is a central part of the newfound US engagement in the South Caucasus and a key outcome of the 2025 Washington meeting between Trump, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. The historic talks resulted in the initialling, but not the signing, of a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as laying the basis for the Trump Route.

Sokolov came to the US in 1997 aged 21, has a long track record of philanthropy and donating to political parties in the US, primarily the Republican Party.

His largest gift appears to be \$100 million donated to the University of Chicago in 2025 in support of the university’s Booth School of Business, which he graduated from in 2005.

In addition, Sokolov has supported a number of Republican causes and candidates, including \$11 million to Trump’s superPAC during his second term and an undisclosed amount to the White House ballroom project.

(This article originally appeared on July 20 on the news website www.oc-media.org.)

Another Armenian Prisoner in Azerbaijan Rebukes Yerevan

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in trials denounced by Amnesty International as a “travesty.”

They all deny the accusations that include the planning, preparation and conduct of the 2020 war in Karabakh.

Appealing to Pashinyan, Manukyan said: “Since you were Armenia’s prime minister and at the same time commander-in-chief at that time --- and the planning of the war

starts precisely from that level -- I urge you to present your position on these specific accusations,” he said. “Failure to respond will mean that you agree with the false accusations, thereby making not only you but also the entire Armenian people, complicit.”

Two other Armenian prisoners — billionaire Ruben Vardanyan and former Karabakh parliament speaker Davit Ishkhanyan — have similarly lambasted Pashinyan

in their statements from an Azerbaijani prison. Ishkhanyan charged earlier this year that Armenia’s leadership does not want Baku to free the 19 Armenian prisoners. Pashinyan, who is currently on vacation, has not responded to the claims.

The Armenian premier and other officials insist that Yerevan has been doing its best to try to secure the release of the prisoners. Their critics dismiss these assurances.



ARMENIA

Polish Archeologists Discover Complex Ancient Water Distribution System in Armenia

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The findings suggest that irrigation in the region was not limited to isolated agricultural plots but formed part of a coordinated, large-scale infrastructure program designed to support farming across much of the Ararat Basin.

The Kingdom of Urartu began expanding into the basin during the reign of King Argishti I in the eighth century BCE. The ruler founded Argishtikhinili on the edge of the fertile plain, where irrigation became essential for supporting agriculture because of limited natural access to water.

The importance of the water system is documented in surviving Urartian inscriptions carved on stone steles. According to the inscriptions, five main canals supplied water to the city as well as to surrounding fields, orchards and vineyards. One inscription states that the land had remained uncultivated before the canals were built, indicating that the region's agricultural productivity depended directly on the irrigation works.

Over the centuries, natural processes, farming and modern development have altered the landscape, destroying or obscuring many of the ancient canals. To reconstruct the network, the researchers relied on satellite imagery and digital terrain models capable of revealing subtle traces that are difficult or impossible to detect from the ground.

The study was carried out by Nazarij Buławka, PhD, and Professor Krzysztof Jakubiak of the University of Warsaw, together with Inessa Karapetyan, PhD, of the National Academy of Sciences of the Re-



View of Ararat in Argishtikhinili (photo Krzysztof Jakubiak)

public of Armenia in Yerevan.

The researchers analyzed imagery from multiple satellite generations, including photographs taken during the Cold War by the American CORONA and GAMBIT reconnaissance satellite program. Although captured in the 1960s and 1970s, the images preserve a record of the landscape before extensive agricultural mechanization and the expansion of modern irrigation systems, making it easier to identify ancient features that have since disappeared.

The team also used multispectral satellite data, which record wavelengths of light invisible to the human eye. Differences in soil moisture and vegetation caused by centuries of water flow can leave detectable signatures, allowing archaeologists to trace former canals. Digital elevation models capable of identifying changes in ground level of only a few centimeters further helped locate buried embankments, dikes and irrigation

channels.

According to the researchers, the scale of the network points to sophisticated engineering and centralized organization.

Designing canals that carried water across long distances without pumps required precise calculations of terrain gradients to maintain a steady flow. The system also demanded methods for controlling water flow, limiting erosion and carrying out regular maintenance.

"Knowledge of artificial irrigation and the benefits it brings were not surprising when it comes to the Urartians. We know of numerous hydrological structures from the area of present-day Turkey. In the case of the Ararat Basin, the emergence of irrigation systems was something new. This skill was brought by the Urartians, who understood perfectly well that the land around the newly founded city of Argishtikhinili was potentially very fertile. Unfortunately, the lack of access to

water prevented its intensive use. The royal administration had the appropriate resources to change this situation, and thus a network of canals appeared in the valley landscape, thanks to which these areas became the granary of the entire kingdom," Professor Krzysztof Jakubiak of the University of Warsaw said.

The researchers argue that constructing and maintaining such an extensive network would have required a specialized administrative system responsible for managing water resources. Reliable irrigation enabled the cultivation of grain, orchards and vineyards, supporting population growth, trade and the consolidation of the Urartian state.

Despite the new mapping, the researchers caution that not every canal identified necessarily dates to the Urartian period. Some irrigation channels may have been constructed after the fall of the Kingdom of Urartu around 590 BCE and incorporated into later water-management systems.

Establishing the precise chronology of the network will require additional fieldwork, including sediment sampling from canal beds.

"Dating irrigation canals is extremely difficult due to their constant silting during use. To attempt to date the canals' formation, it is necessary to drill holes and collect samples from the canal bottom, hoping that the sediments will contain organic remains that can be subjected to radiocarbon dating," Jakubiak said.

(This article originally appeared in the publication Science in Poland on July 17.)

Armenian Society of Fellows Annual Conference 2026: When Armenian Brightest Minds Gather in Dilijan

DILIJAN, Armenia (DiasporArm) — For three days in June, the Central Bank's conference center in the pine-forested hills of Dilijan became something far more than a building. It transformed into a global hub where some of the sharpest Armenian minds on the planet — scientists, engineers, educators, artists, policy makers — came together around one shared conviction: Armenia can and must compete at the highest levels of global excellence.

This was the fifth annual conference of the Armenian Society of Fellows (ASOF), and if any gathering captures what collective Armenian ambition can look like, this is it.

A Network Like No Other

ASOF is only five years old, yet it has already woven itself into the fabric of the Armenian world with remarkable speed. The Society now counts 382 members spanning 35 countries, including three Nobel laureates, and covers every discipline — from computational sciences and engineering to the humanities, health sciences, cultural heritage, and the arts.

The mission, as ASOF Chair Mary Papazian reminded participants at the opening session, is deceptively simple: to help raise Armenia's educational and research institutions to world-class levels, and to network them globally. What makes ASOF unusual is that it is also deliberately finite — designed to dissolve after 20 years, because the goal is not to build another diaspora organization, but to build capacity within Armenia itself so the country can stand fully on its own.

The Big Announcement: A \$14 Million Bet on Armenia's AI Future

The headline of this year's conference

was the unveiling of ARCS.ai — the Advanced Research in Computational Sciences and Artificial Intelligence center. This is ASOF's most ambitious project to date: a dedicated robotics and AI center with a \$14 million budget over seven years, backed by \$8 million in high-performance computing power, and matched one-to-one by the Armenian government.

As one participant noted, the microchips powering the mobile phones we use every day are already being designed in Armenia. ARCS.ai is the infrastructure that will ensure that story grows.

A Full Agenda, A Wide Vision

Beyond ARCS.ai, the three-day program covered an extraordinary range of topics, reflecting the breadth of what ASOF believes nation-building actually requires.

The Seismic Safety Program — involving over 50 engineers working voluntarily across six task forces — presented concrete steps toward making Armenia's buildings and infrastructure resilient. The shadow of 1988 still looms, and this group is determined it should never be repeated.

The Health Sciences Committee unveiled a strategic plan spanning cancer prevention and screening, electronic healthcare records, medical education, and healthcare governance — with a proposal to the Armenian government planned for 2027.

The Armenian Cultural Heritage (ArCH) initiative presented plans for a first-ever digital inventory of pan-Armenian cultural heritage, alongside a landmark international conference to be held at the Gregoriana University at the Vatican in May 2027 — a deliberate act of soft power, telling Armenia's story to the world at the highest levels.

Sessions on biodiversity and COP17, AI's impact on society and the humanities, higher education reform, and diaspora-Armenia relations filled the remaining hours, with participants moving between parallel tracks across all three days.

One People, Two Entities, Endless Potential

Perhaps the most thought-provoking moment of the conference came from ASOF

and Western Europe generate an estimated \$100 billion annually — yet diaspora institutions collectively invest only around 0.3% of that in our shared identity and future. The potential waiting to be unlocked is enormous.

Hovel Chenorhokian reacted to those figures with a clear statement: what the Armenian world needs is a Leadership with an explicit mission to optimize and mobilize



Executive Director Vatche Sahakian, who painted a striking picture of the diaspora-Armenia relationship. His argument: diaspora and homeland are not competitors — they are complementary.

Armenia has been quietly building state institutions from the ground up. The diaspora, shaped by the immigrant drive to thrive, excels in setting high expectations and thinking globally. Together, the two sides form a natural partnership — one that ARCS.ai is already beginning to prove is possible.

The numbers behind his case were sobering. Armenians in the US, Canada,

the resources of the diaspora — a program he developed further in a dedicated session on the "Leadership Gap of the Armenian World."

Five Years In, Fifteen to Go

ASOF is only a quarter of the way through its planned lifespan, and already the range and scale of what it has set in motion is striking. Dilijan 2026 was not a celebration — it was a working conference, built around the question of what comes next.

The answer, clearly, is quite a lot. To learn more about ASOF and its work, visit asof.am



INTERNATIONAL

Azerbaijan at ‘Real Peace’ with Armenia But Wants It to Change Constitution

By Nailia Bagirova

SHUSHA, Azerbaijan (Reuters) — Azerbaijan and Armenia are at “real peace” and rebuilding trade links after decades of conflict, a senior Azerbaijani official told Reuters, but Baku is insisting on changes to Armenia’s constitution before a final deal can be signed.

The South Caucasus neighbors had been at intermittent war since the late 1980s, mostly over the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh, before reaching a preliminary U.S.-brokered peace agreement last August.

For Azerbaijan, a sticking point to signing a formal deal is the preamble of Armenia’s constitution, which contains a reference to another Soviet-era document calling for the reunification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, then an autonomous region in Soviet Azerbaijan.

The territory had de facto independence and was governed by an ethnically Armenian administration for three decades before Azerbaijan took it in a lightning offensive in 2023. Most of its 100,000 population fled to Armenia.

A lasting peace could reopen trade and transport links across the South Caucasus, strengthening connections between Asia

and Europe while reshaping the regional influence of Russia, Turkey and Iran.

In an interview with Reuters on the sidelines of a forum in the city of Shusha this week, Hikmet Hajiyev, assistant to Azerbaijan’s president and head of the president’s foreign policy department, praised the countries’ progress towards peace, including growing direct contacts and bilateral trade.

“We are living in conditions of real peace. For Azerbaijan and Armenia, peace is not just something written on paper or contained in a declaration — it is a reality,” he said in an interview, pointing to increased supplies of Azerbaijani oil products to Armenia.

Despite the progress, he said Baku maintained its stance on Armenia’s constitution.

“The form of constitutional changes is Armenia’s internal matter,” said Hajiyev. “What is important for Azerbaijan is that the provisions we regard as territorial claims against our country are formally removed, whether through the adoption of a new constitution or another legal mechanism.”

“Once that issue is resolved, we believe there will be no obstacles to signing the final peace agreement,” he said.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has said he wants to hold a referendum to change the constitution and that a draft of the new charter will be published by the end

of this year.

But his Civil Contract party lacks the constitutional majority in parliament needed to call the referendum and it is unclear whether the opposition, dominated by pro-Russian groups, will join him.

Hajiyev said publication of the draft alone would not be sufficient to sign a peace deal.

He also said Azerbaijan had received “serious and positive signals” from the United States that construction work on a planned Washington-backed transport corridor in the region could begin this autumn.

Dubbed the “Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP)”, the proposed 43-km (27-mile) corridor would cut across Armenia and give Azerbaijan direct access to its exclave of Nakhichevan and to its close ally Turkey.

The route would better connect Asia to Europe at a time when Washington wants to diversify energy and trade flows away from Russia because of the war in Ukraine.

“Our position is that this (TRIPP) should be implemented as soon as possible,” Hajiyev said.

He said infrastructure extending to Azerbaijan’s southwestern Zangilan region would be largely completed by the end of 2026, after which it could be connected to planned infrastructure in Armenia and Turkey.

Belgium Conference Focuses on European Parliament’s Stance on Armenian Prisoners in Baku

BRUSSELS, Belgium — Members of the European Parliament, legal experts, human rights advocates and family members of Armenian detainees gathered on July 14 in the European Parliament for a conference titled “Armenian Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan and the Imperative of EU Engagement.”

Co-hosted by MEPs Costas Mavrides and Miriam Lexmann and organized with the support of the European Armenian Federation for Democracy and Justice (EAFJD), the event focused on the continued detention of Armenian prisoners of war and political detainees in Azerbaijan, and the role the European Union can play in securing their release.

Speakers examined the humanitarian, legal and political dimensions of the issue, arguing that the continued detention of Armenian captives undermines both international law and prospects for lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The conference began with MEP Costas Mavrides reaffirming the European Parliament’s firm position, which he states “overwhelmingly” calls for the immediate release of the detained Armenians and reminded the European Commission of its mandate to make such demands, as is stated in multiple EP resolutions, and the necessity to scrutinize the Energy agreements between the EU and Azerbaijan through the lens of international law and human rights. He shared the frustration many in the audience expressed that the geopolitical considerations of the Executive have overshadowed both the will of the European Parliament and the values that are foundational for the European Union. MEP Miriam Lexmann further added that the continued deepening of relations between the EU and Armenia provides avenues for the Commission to take the lead on this issue. Drawing from her personal experience as a representative who was born in Slovakia, she stated that the issue of political prisoners should be met with outmost priority and should not be jeopardized.

Representing the families of those de-

tained, Armen Ishkhanyan, the son of imprisoned former Nagorno-Karabakh parliament speaker Davit Ishkhanyan, spoke about the impact of his father’s imprisonment. He explained that his father remained in Artsakh during the 2023 forced displacement of the Armenian population to help ensure the safe evacuation of civilians before being arrested by Azerbaijani authorities. Since then, he has been sentenced to life imprisonment following what human rights advocates have described as a politically motivated trial.

Reflecting on more than 1,000 days of separation, Ishkhanyan described the emotional toll the imprisonment has taken on his family. Recalling a conversation with his daughter, he said: “When I asked her what she wanted as a birthday present, she simply answered: ‘I want my grandfather to come home.’”

The conference also examined the legal implications of the detainees’ continued imprisonment. Human rights lawyer Siranush Sahakyan, who represents several of the Armenian prisoners at the European Court of Human Rights, argued that the cases have significance well beyond the individuals concerned.

“The unlawful detention and convictions of Armenian prisoners are not merely a human rights issue, but a defining test of Europe’s ability to uphold the rule of law and the international legal order. While the European Parliament has adopted strong resolutions, they must now be matched by effective political action. Otherwise, impunity will become the norm tomorrow.”

Simon Papuashvili, Program Director for Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus at the International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), said that the release of the detainees should be treated as a prerequisite for any credible peace process.

“Peace cannot be credible while Armenian captives remain imprisoned in Azerbaijan. Their immediate and unconditional release is not a side issue but a basic human-

itarian obligation and a necessary foundation for any genuine peace process. Justice, trust and reconciliation must begin with bringing every captive home safely and without delay.”

Joel Veldkamp, director of Public Advocacy at Christian Solidarity International (CSI), argued that the issue also carries broader strategic importance for Europe.

“A strong Armenia could be a helpful ally to the European Union, as it seeks to navigate an era of growing Turkish influence and weak international norms. In order to empower Armenia, European policymakers would be prudent to look for ways to make the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process less lopsided.

Intervening for the twenty Armenian hostages in Baku would be an excellent place to start.”

Speakers throughout the conference called on the European Union to move beyond statements of concern and use the diplomatic and political tools at its disposal to press for the immediate release of the detainees. They argued that the continued imprisonment of Armenian political prisoners and prisoners of war remains a major obstacle to confidence-building and to a durable peace in the South Caucasus.

In closing, EAFJD President Kaspar Karampetian denounced the hypocrisy of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU’s diplomatic service EEAS and the EU Executive, drawing from the earlier comments of MEP Mavrides, on its energy deals with Azerbaijan, reminding the members of the multiple reports signaling that the sanctioned Russian gas is being syphoned through Azerbaijan and as such the geopolitical maneuvering employed by the Commission is not only immoral but also goes against the values and commitments of the EU.

The conference concluded with a shared appeal for EU institutions to intensify their engagement with Azerbaijan and make the release of all Armenian detainees an immediate priority.

INTERNATIONAL

Citizens of Azerbaijan And Other Countries Deported from Georgia

YEREVAN (news.am) — One hundred and two foreign nationals have been deported from Georgia, local media reported on July 21.

The citizens hail from Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, India, Turkey, Russia, Thailand, the Philippines, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Lebanon, Nigeria, China and Kazakhstan.

The deported individuals have been banned from re-entering the country.

Pashinyan Congratulates New UK Premier

YEREVAN (ARKA) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan congratulated Andy Burnham on his appointment as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom on July 20.

“I warmly congratulate Andy Burnham on his assumption of office as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. I look forward to working closely with you to deepen the strategic partnership between Armenia and the United Kingdom and strengthen the friendship between our peoples,” Pashinyan wrote on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

Burnham assumed the post of Prime Minister on July 20 after an audience with King Charles III.

Students Wins Medals At Chemistry and Math Olympiads

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Two Armenian high school students captured bronze medals at the 58th International Chemistry Olympiad, held in Tashkent on July 10-19.

The global competition brought together 372 students from 93 countries.

Artur Mkhitaryan, a 12th grader at the Shahinyan Specialized Physics and Mathematics School in Yerevan, and Mikayel Aleksanyan, a 12th grader at Vanadzor’s Specialized Mathematics and Science School, won bronze medals.

Meri Virabyan, an 11th grader at the same Vanadzor school, received an honorable mention.

The Armenian team was led by Andranik Davinyan, a researcher at the Center of Organic and Pharmaceutical Chemistry, and Armen Galstyan, dean of Yerevan State University’s Faculty of Chemistry.

In addition, Armenian students have secured one silver and four bronze medals, at the 67th International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO) in Shanghai, China, according to team leader Gurgen Asatryan.

Hayk Manukyan of Quantum College earned the silver medal, while Arsen Makaryan and Sargis Arakelyan of the PhysMath School, along with Tigran Hakheyan and Aren Grigoryan of Quantum College, each secured bronze.



INTERNATIONAL

Turkey Enlists International Students to Promote Government Narratives, Counter Erdogan dissidents

Levent Kenez

ISTANBUL (Stockholm Center for Freedom) — International students studying in Turkey are increasingly being integrated into state-sponsored programs designed to promote the political narratives of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government, drawing criticism that public funds are being used to politically influence foreign scholarship recipients.

The initiatives present the government's preferred version of contemporary Turkish politics while portraying political opponents and dissident movements in exile as threats to the state. State-run institutions, including the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) and the Turkish Maarif Foundation, have expanded activities that bring foreign students into official ceremonies. Turkish authorities defend the initiatives as civic education, public diplomacy and efforts to strengthen international cultural understanding.

One of the most prominent examples of this outreach is the government's annual commemoration of the July 15, 2016, failed coup, an event that has become a cornerstone of Erdogan's political legacy. International students have been integrated into official remembrance ceremonies, museum visits and seminars presenting the government's account of the coup.

These programs frequently characterize the movement led by the late Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen as the mastermind behind the attempted coup. Ankara designates the group as a terrorist organization. The Gülen movement, however, has claimed the coup was a false flag operation orchestrated by Erdogan and Turkish intelligence to justify a widespread purge

of dissidents from the state apparatus and the military.

The Turkish Maarif Foundation, which operates schools in dozens of countries and hosts educational activities within Turkey, has openly promoted student participation in the July 15 commemorations. "The most meaningful way to preserve memory is to pass it on to new generations," the foundation said in a statement marking this year's anniversary.

The foundation announced that its leadership delegation and students visited the July 15 Memory Museum in Istanbul, where they commemorated those killed during the coup attempt and said prayers following Quran recitations by students from Maarif schools around the world.

Separately, pro-government propagandist Nedim Sener wrote on X that he was scheduled to speak on July 16, 2026, at a YTB-sponsored conference along with more than 100 foreign students studying in Turkey to discuss the 2016 abortive putsch.

Government-funded journalists prepare to give a presentation to international students studying in Turkey about the July 15, 2016, coup attempt.

The July 15 anniversary occupies a central place in the political narrative promoted by Erdogan's government. Since the coup attempt, official commemorations have portrayed the events as a defining moment that saved Turkish democracy while reinforcing the legitimacy of the country's current political leadership. Museums, documentaries, educational programs and annual ceremonies present a highly consistent account emphasizing national resistance

against the coup plotters.

Critics, however, argue that these commemorations ignore broader debates surrounding the political aftermath of the coup, including a prolonged state of emergency, the mass dismissal of public sector workers, the arrest of journalists and opposition figures and sweeping constitutional changes that consolidated power in an executive presidency.

The debate over the programs has intensified as government agencies increasingly describe education, scholarships and cultural exchanges as instruments of Turkey's international influence. Public documents and parliamentary testimony show that Ankara views foreign students and diaspora communities as strategic assets capable of advancing government interests abroad.

During testimony before a parliamentary committee in 2024, Abdullah Eren, then-president of the YTB, said the agency actively encourages members of the Turkish diaspora and international students to participate in the politics and civil society of their host countries rather than remaining politically disengaged.

The YTB's 2024–2028 strategic plan similarly outlines goals to strengthen ties between Turkey and overseas communities, expanding programs designed to foster long-term connections with the Turkish state. The document frames diaspora engagement as an element of public diplomacy and calls for closer cooperation with Turkish diplomatic missions and partner institutions.

The government's emphasis on education as an instrument of state influence also extends to Turkish students studying abroad. An article published in July 2025 in Communication and Diplomacy,

a journal run by the Presidency's Directorate of Communications, argued that Turkish government scholarship recipients studying overseas should be regarded not merely as graduate students but as "citizen diplomats" representing Turkey.

Minutes from the Turkish parliamentary subcommittee hearing during which the Turkish diaspora agency made a presentation on the agency's work abroad:

The article proposed providing these students with structured training in cultural diplomacy, social media communication, diaspora engagement and intelligence awareness before they depart for foreign universities.

Among its recommendations was cooperation with Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT) to provide students with briefings on foreign intelligence activities and the protection of state information. While the proposal has not been adopted as official government policy, observers say it reflects a wider state discourse portraying education as an element of Turkey's soft power.

Turkish officials have consistently characterized YTB scholarships, Maarif schools and related educational activities as standard public diplomacy initiatives designed to foster cultural understanding. But critics counter that incorporating politically charged narratives, particularly surrounding the events of July 15, shifts educational programming into the realm of ideological messaging. They argue that presenting a single, state-approved interpretation of highly contested political events to international students compromises academic independence and subjects scholarship recipients to partisan narratives rather than balanced education.

Journalist for DW Turkish Detained again 2 Months after Release

ISTANBUL (Turkish Minute) — Turkish police on Tuesday detained Deutsche Welle Turkish service reporter Aican Uludağ, two months after he was released following 90 days in pretrial detention on charges related to his social media posts, DW Turkish reported on July 21.

"I am being detained," Uludağ wrote in a brief post on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter.

The reason for his detention was not immediately clear, and his lawyers had yet to make contact with him, according to DW Turkish. No official statement had been issued as of the afternoon of July 21.

It was also unclear whether the detention was connected to his ongoing trial on charges of publicly insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, publicly disseminating misleading information and publicly denigrating the Turkish government and the state's judicial bodies.

Uludağ was detained at his home in Ankara on February 19 over several posts on X and subsequently jailed pending trial. He was released under judicial supervision at his first hearing on May 21 after spending 90 days in Istanbul's Marmara Prison in Silivri.

During that hearing before the Ankara 57th Criminal Court of First Instance, Uludağ denied the allegations and said he was being prosecuted for his journalistic work.

"I was detained, but I did not commit a

crime that warrants arrest. ... I am a journalist who is being silenced," he told the court.

"I made general criticisms. I criticized the relationship between the judiciary and politics. As a judicial reporter, I criticized operations in the judiciary on social media. I'd like to know what's criminal about that?" he said.

The court adjourned the trial until September 18.

Uludağ, an award-winning journalist who has worked as a judicial reporter for

18 years, is known for covering corruption cases, politically sensitive trials and human rights violations.

His imprisonment sparked criticism from press freedom and rights groups as well as the German government, which described the allegations against him as "baseless."

Journalists in Turkey frequently face detention and prosecution under broadly worded laws criminalizing insults against public officials, the dissemination of allegedly misleading information and deni-

gration of state institutions.

According to Expression Interrupted, a press freedom monitoring group, 26 journalists are currently behind bars in Turkey.

Turkey fell to 163rd out of 180 countries in the 2026 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) earlier this month, down from 159th in 2025, as the group warned that authoritarianism is deepening and media pluralism is increasingly under threat in the country.

Aliyev Visits Berlin, Signs Strategic Partnership Declaration with Merz

By Aytan Farhadova

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev visited Germany on Monday, July 20, where he met with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz. The two leaders also signed a declaration establishing a strategic partnership document.

Aliyev met with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Chancellor Merz on Tuesday, July 21.

He met with Chair of the Eastern Committee of the German Economy Michael Harms the previous day.

According to the presidential website, the parties discussed the "growing interest" of businesspeople in both countries "in working together," noting that both wished

to explore ways to "institutionalize" such activities.

The parties highlighted "the existing potential in traditional and alternative energy, opportunities in connectivity, transport and logistics, including the Middle Corridor."

During the talks with Steinmeier, Aliyev noted "Azerbaijan's role in Europe's energy security" and also said that Azerbaijan was now "exporting gas to Germany and Austria as well."

Aliyev highlighted EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's recent visit to Baku, stressing the "development of relations" between Azerbaijan and the EU.

Aliyev and Merz signed the strategic and bilateral partnership declaration later that

day.

The pro-government media outlet APA wrote that the two "reaffirmed their mutual desire to deepen their bilateral partnership and cooperation based on mutual trust and shared interests across various fields."

The two also praised the "historic progress" in the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace talks following the August 2025 Washington summit.

The declaration noted the "strategic importance of the partnership between Azerbaijan and the EU" and "the expansion of cooperation aimed at further deepening political dialogue and practical engagement."

(This story originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on July 21.)



INTERNATIONAL

Princess Margaret's Grandson Samuel Chatto Proposes to Longtime Love Eleanor Ekserdjian

By Jessica Green

LONDON (*Daily Mail*) — Princess Margaret's grandson Sam Chatto has announced his engagement to fellow artist Eleanor Ekserdjian, revealing he proposed with a porcelain ring he crafted himself.

The King has been informed and is said to be very happy for the couple, who are planning to wed next spring.

Ceramicist Sam, 29, who is 30th in line to the British throne, is the son of Queen Elizabeth II's niece, Lady Sarah Chatto, and her husband Daniel Chatto.

He shared the news on Instagram, writing: "I'm really delighted to say that Ellie and I are engaged. And we couldn't be happier. I proposed with a porcelain ring which I made."

Ekserdjian, 29, who is known as Ellie, is a painter and film artist, and the pair live together in London.

Lady Sarah Chatto and Daniel Chatto, and Ekserdjian's parents, Professor David Ekserdjian and Susan Moore, are said to be delighted at the news.

Samuel and Eleanor are thought to have met in 2021 while both attending the University of Edinburgh and have been pictured together since 2022.

Eleanor has been warmly welcomed into the extended Royal Family, joining Samuel at the wedding of Peter Phillips and Harriet Sperling in June and at Sandringham for Christmas in 2024.

Her appearance at the royal family's festive celebrations sparked rumors that the artist had already proposed to his future wife because partners traditionally do not attend the service unless they are married or engaged.

Harriet attended with Peter after their engagement in December and Meghan Markle had joined Prince Harry in 2017 while the pair were engaged.

However, the couple never commented on the rumors.

Eleanor also joined Sam at the Mey Highland Games in Caithness, Scotland, in

August last year, alongside his mother and her cousin King Charles.

In 2021, Eleanor confirmed her relationship with Sam to the Diary Editor of the *Daily Mail*, Richard Eden, simply stating, 'We are a couple.'

Inspired by her new love, the arts profes-

pay tribute to his artistic girlfriend, posting a video of her in action at the show.

Both Eleanor, a 'painter and film artist' and Sam, a ceramicist, are graduates of the University of Edinburgh and studied at the Royal Drawing School in London.

Eleanor revealed to Eden that Sam had

married to *Financial Times* art critic Susan Moore.

David is Professor of History of Art and Film at the University of Leicester, focusing particularly on the art of the Italian Renaissance.

He is a trustee of Art UK as well as the Sir John Soane's Museum. The academic was also once a trustee of the National Gallery and of Tate.

Eleanor herself has also completed residencies at the Hauser & Wirth Residency in Braemar and the Sokyō Gallery in Kyoto, Japan.

According to her website, Eleanor is 'an abstract painter and film artist' whose practice 'involves projecting the moving image onto paper or canvas and drawing from and over it, her physical and emotional responses being made visible through rapid mark-making'.

Eton-educated ceramicist Sam comes from an artistic family himself: his mother, the King's cousin Lady Sarah Chatto (nee Armstrong-Jones) often submits her artworks for the Royal Academy's summer exhibition, while his father is the actor-turned-artist Daniel Chatto. His grandfather was renowned photographer Lord Snowdon.

Sam is also a qualified yoga instructor having trained for six weeks in India with then-girlfriend Sophie Pipe, who also studied at Edinburgh University.

Speaking to the *Daily Mail* in 2019, he said: 'I'm working in clay to create functional and sculptural wood-fired ceramics from my home and studio in West Sussex.'

'I've always had a strong affinity with creating objects, having spent much of my childhood crafting imagined landscapes and sculptural models, which naturally led me to clay during my later years at school.'



Eleanor Ekserdjian and Sam Chatto (photo *People* magazine)

sor's daughter had started depicting Sam in her work.

Sam and Eleanor posed for photos together at 'The Alchemist's Feast', the inaugural summer party and fundraiser for the National Gallery's Bicentenary campaign in 2022.

After Christmas 2024, Sam and Eleanor were seen together again in February 2025 at London Fashion Week.

Sam showed support for his girlfriend, whose creative mind brought to life the Banshee of Savile Row runway show.

During the show, she decorated a coat with brushstrokes live on the runway.

Sam later took to Instagram to gush and

become her artistic muse, and included a sketch of him, entitled 'SAM', in a small collection of her works – once displayed at an exhibition at London's Gallery at Green & Stone.

The pair are both passionate about their creative ventures. Sam completed an apprenticeship in Japan under professional potter Yagi Akira just last year.

His partner is just as ardent about her work. She has had her pieces held in several private collections, including the Redfern Gallery in London.

Eleanor's parents are also in the field, with her father being renowned art historian Professor David Ekserdjian, who is

Armenian Studies Scholars Gather for Seminar at Sofia University

SOFIA, Bulgaria — On June 18 and 19, Sofia University hosted 112 scholars from Armenia, Bulgaria, Italy, France, Germany, Austria, Hungary and the United States gathered for the International Conference Armenia: Crossroads of Centuries and Worlds.

The conference marked the 30th anniversary of the Armenian and Caucasus Studies Bachelor Degree Program at Sofia University and brought together researchers working across the broad spectrum of Armenian Studies and Caucasus Studies. Ninety-three papers explored Armenian history, language, literature, folklore, culture and religion, as well as contemporary issues concerning the Caucasus and its geopolitical context.

Organized by the staff and students of the Armenian and Caucasus Studies program, the conference reflected three decades of academic development and international cooperation. The principal organizers were Chief Assis. Prof. Dr. Eojeni Sakaz, Chief Assis. Prof. Dr. Antoaneta Anguelova, and guest lecturer Zari Tankaranian, with the support of the Head of the program, Associate Professor Dr. Petar Goliyski, one of its founders, Aram Najarian, and a dedicated team of students.

The conference was opened by Professor Reneta Bozhankova, Vice-Rector of Sofia University; Tsovinar Hambardzumyan, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the Republic of Bulgaria; Associate Professor Petar Goliyski, Head of the Armenian and Caucasus Studies Bachelor Degree Program; and Professor Gergana Petkova, Dean of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology.

In his opening address, Goliyski reviewed the development of the program from its establishment in 1995 to its transformation into the Armenian and Caucasus Studies degree program in 2009. He emphasized that Sofia University remains one of the very few universities worldwide — and one of only two outside Armenia, together with the University of Geneva — to offer a complete undergraduate degree in Armenian Studies.

Hambardzumyan reflected on Armenia's historical role as a crossroads of civilizations, trade routes, religions, languages and intellectual traditions. Drawing on her diplomatic experience in Italy (2020–2024), she also highlighted the enduring contribution of Armenian communities abroad to the cultural, economic and intellectual life of many countries, including Bulgaria.

The opening ceremony was accompanied by the exhibition "The Endless Flight of the Letters," created by guest lecturer Zari Tankaranian and dedicated to the Armenian alphabet.

Papers addressed topics ranging from medieval Armenian history, historiography and epic literature to folklore, linguistics, manuscript studies, intercultural contacts, the Armenian diaspora and the historical relationships between Armenia and neighboring regions. Contributions also examined the cultural and linguistic heritage of Artsakh, Armenian-Bulgarian and Armenian-Italian connections, comparative folklore, identity formation in the medieval South Caucasus, and the historical significance of Armenian material culture. Together, these presentations demonstrated the richness of current scholarship and the increasingly interdisciplinary character of the field.

Beyond the formal sessions, the conference provided valuable opportunities for scholarly exchange and the development of new international collaborations. Researchers from different academic traditions engaged in lively discussions, established new professional contacts and explored possibilities for future joint projects.

Netanyahu Blocks Armenian Genocide Recognition Bill After Pressure from Azerbaijan, Haaretz Reports

NETANYAHU, from page 1
Azerbaijan, which is allied to both Turkey and Israel, called the move "a matter of serious concern" and urged the Israeli government to "reconsider" what it called the "distortion of the historical facts surrounding the events of 1915."

According to Haaretz, Baku's disapproval did not stop at statements, but went as far as to dispatch influential presidential aide Hikmat Hajiyev to pressure Netanyahu to drop the bill.

However, Sa'ar's office denied to Haaretz that Netanyahu had forced the vote to be cancelled, 'but did not provide an alternative explanation' why the bill was not brought to a vote.

'There is a government decision [to recognize the genocide], and it was approved unanimously', Sa'ar told Haaretz.

'It will not be changed, and that is the important and historic fact'.

(This article originally appeared on the website www.oc-media.org on July 20.)



Community News

Applications Open For the Summer 2027 Israelyan Fellowship At Gladstone's Library

Applications are now open for the Summer 2027 Israelyan Fellowship at Gladstone's Library, a month-long residential fellowship supporting advanced work in Armenian studies, literature, and the social sciences. This is the inaugural year of what is intended to be an annual fellowship.

The Israelyan Fellowship provides writers, artists, and scholars with dedicated time and space to focus on a project that is already substantially underway. The fellowship is designed for applicants who can demonstrate significant progress on their proposed work and who seek an uninterrupted period of research or creative activity to bring their project to completion or to a major new stage.

The fellowship includes a fully funded, 31-night residency at Gladstone's Library, the United Kingdom's premier residential library. Fellows receive accommodations, access to the library's collections, facilities, and scholarly community, as well as a contribution toward travel expenses.

Applications are open to writers, artists, and scholars of any nationality working in Armenian studies or on Armenian themes broadly conceived.

The application deadline is October 15, 2026. Applicants will be notified of the selection results by December 1, 2026. The residency will take place during Summer 2027, with applicants invited to indicate their availability and flexibility.

To apply, visit: <https://israelyan-fellowships.org/>

Applications will be reviewed by a steering committee chaired by Dr. Khatchig Mouradian, and including Dr. Andrea Russell, Warden and Director of Gladstone's Library.

Established by Souren A. Israelyan, the Israelyan Fellowship at Gladstone's Library seeks to nurture and sustain Armenian intellectual and cultural traditions while inspiring new forms of scholarship and creative expression. Drawing on his own teenage dreams of studying and growing within the spiritual and scholarly environments of Armenian monasteries, Israelyan envisioned the fellowship as a way to connect scholars and writers with spaces that encourage reflection, research, and dialogue.

Gladstone's Library was selected not only as the United Kingdom's finest residential library but also because of its historic links between Armenians and William E. Gladstone, strengthening the fellowship's mission of bridging past and present.

Applications may be submitted through the fellowship's online application form. Applicants should upload their curriculum vitae, personal statement, project proposal, timeline, and two letters of recommendation for full consideration.

Questions about the fellowship may be directed to application@israelyanfellowships.org



The stem-cell donor during the harvesting procedure. Standing next to her is her sister.

Yerevan Woman Donates Stem Cells to Help Mother Battling Serious Illness

LOS ANGELES — On July 13, 2026, a young Yerevan resident donated bone marrow stem cells for an urgent transplant that might help her mother survive a life-threatening blood-related illness.

The harvesting of the donated stem cells is the 45th such procedure to be performed by the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR). The harvesting took place at ABMDR's Stem Cell Harvesting Center, in the Armenian capital.

Immediately after being identified by ABMDR as a matched donor for her mother, the young woman was admitted to the registry's headquarters for the harvesting. The painless, non-invasive procedure was performed by Dr. Andranik Mshetsyan, the Stem Cell Harvesting Center's resident physician.

"Our young donor's gift of stem cells is significant not only in medical terms, but also as a wonderful manifestation of love and dedication among family members," said ABMDR Executive Director Dr. Sevak Avagyan.

see STEM CELLS, page 9



From left: Dr. Andranik Mshetsyan, who performed the harvesting procedure; staff member Ruben Markosyan; ABMDR Executive Director Dr. Sevak Avagyan; the international courier; and ABMDR Medical Director Dr. Mihran Nazaretyan.

Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston: A Living Tribute Through Public Art

BOSTON — Armenian Heritage Park on Boston's Rose Kennedy Greenway is far more than a public park. It is a living tribute, an extraordinary work of public art: a place of remembrance and reflection, an outdoor classroom and a gathering place celebrating the enduring contributions of immigrants to American life.

In the heart of downtown Boston between Faneuil Hall Marketplace and the North End, Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway is located at one of the city's busiest crossroads. Those who live and work in the city, students and visitors, many from around the world, pass through daily, encountering a place whose message reaches far beyond its physical boundaries. Nearly everyone pauses to read the inscription on the Reflecting Pool, carrying with them its enduring message of remembrance and hope.

Dedicated in 2012, Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway is a gift from the Armenian American community to the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. While rooted in Armenian history, the Park tells the universal story of all who left their country of origin in search of freedom, opportunity and a better life. Its message invites every visitor to reflect upon resilience, gratitude, hope and the common bonds that unite us.

What distinguishes Armenian Heritage Park from so many other public monuments is its unique combination of artistic excellence, public accessibility, educational purpose and community engagement. It is not simply a monument to history; it is a living piece of public art that continually evolves while remaining faithful to its enduring purpose.

At the heart of the Park stands its iconic Abstract Sculpture, a split rhomboid dodecahedron. Annually, a crane lifts, pulls apart and reconfigures its two halves to create a new sculptural shape, symbolic of a new life. This annual reconfiguration is symbolic of all who pulled away, or were forced to pull away, from their country of origin and came to these shores, establishing themselves in new and different ways.

The Abstract Sculpture annually changes while preserving its essential meaning. Each annual reconfiguration symbolizes change, resilience, adaptation and new beginnings, at the heart of the immigrant experience.

As the Boston Globe observed, the Abstract Sculpture is "public art that is both permanent and alive."

The Abstract Sculpture honors the memory of those who lost their lives during the Armenian Genocide and all genocides that have followed. Yet the Park is also a celebration of resilience and renewal. Water flows from the Reflecting Pool beneath the Abstract Sculpture and re-emerges at the center of the Labyrinth, as a single jet of water, symbolic of hope and rebirth.

see HERITAGE PARK, page 12



COMMUNITY NEWS

Bishop Mesrop Visits ‘Yn. Diane Chevian Youth Choir Workshop’

NEW YORK — Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan visited participants in the “Yn. Diane Chevian Memorial Youth Choir Workshop” at St. Nersess Seminary last week, encouraging the young singers and expressing gratitude for the ministry of the program.

The annual workshop brings together young people from across the Eastern Diocese to develop their musical gifts while deepening their understanding of the Armenian Church’s rich liturgical tradition.

Reflecting on his visit, Bishop Mesrop said he was inspired by the enthusiasm and commitment of the participants. “Hearing these young voices lifted my spirit and reminded me of the incredible gifts they bring to our Church,” he said. “I am so grateful to have spent time with these future leaders of our Church and witnessed their dedication and passion.”

The Primate also thanked St. Nersess Armenian Seminary Dean Fr. Mardiros Chevian, program director Fr. Haroutioun Sabounjian, Diocesan Sacred Music Council chair Fr. Hovhan Khoja-Eynatyan, and

the entire workshop staff for their devoted leadership. “Your commitment and passion are truly commendable,” he said. “You are shaping the future of our Eastern Diocese.”

Offering words of encouragement to the young participants, Bishop Mesrop urged



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan speaks with young attendees

them to continue using their talents in service to God. “When you use your gifts to honor God, He will open doors you never imagined,” he said. “Keep shining, keep singing, and know that God’s favor is upon you!”



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan and attendees and staff

Yerevan Woman Donates Stem Cells to Help Mother Battling Serious Illness

STEM CELLS, from page 8

Present during the procedure were, in addition to Dr. Avagyan, ABMDR Medical Director Dr. Mihran Nazaretyan and other lab personnel. Also present were ABMDR Board of Advisors member Taleen Khatchadourian and her daughter, Jacqueline Khatchadourian, of Los Angeles. Jacqueline had just completed a two-week internship at the ABMDR Lab.

Shortly after the harvesting procedure, the donated stem cells were flown to Germany, personally delivered by a specially-licensed international courier. It was in Germany that the donor’s mother was to undergo a potentially life-saving transplant.

“Every transplant is a challenge, involving the work of many specialists. But once the process is set in motion, everyone involved focuses on a single goal, which is to get the donated stem cells to the patient as quickly as possible for helping them survive a potentially fatal illness,” said ABMDR President Dr. Frieda Jordan.

Anyone in good health between the ages of 18 and 50 can register with ABMDR as a potential bone marrow stem cell donor, for a chance to save someone’s life. Given the unique genetic makeup of ethnic Arme-



From left: ABMDR Medical Director Dr. Mihran Nazaretyan, the donor’s sister, the donor, and the international courier who personally delivered the donated stem cells to Germany

nians, ABMDR needs to maintain a robust global registry of Armenian donors.

For more information, call (323) 663-3609 or visit abmdr.am.



Tekeyan Cultural Association, Inc.

Dr. Nubar Berberian 2026 Annual Awards



Dr. Nubar Berberian, intellectual, journalist, activist and editor of many ADL daily newspapers for more than 50 years passed away at the age of 94 in November 23, 2016. In his Will, Dr. Berberian directed his Trust Fund managers to appropriate awards every year to college students of Armenian descent worldwide who major in either International Law or Political Science.

ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Eligible recipients are college students of Armenian descent who major in either International Law or Political Science.
- 2) Applicant must be enrolled in a full-time graduate program in a fully accredited college or university in the world.
- 3) Applicant must provide all of the information requested on the application form.
- 4) Applicant must submit a copy of his or her most recent college transcript.
- 5) Applicant is to include a small head and shoulders self-portrait.
- 6) Application could be received by requesting from Tcadirector@Aol.com.
- 7) Applicants should submit applications electronically (via email) to: Tcadirector@Aol.com,
- 8) The deadline of receiving the applications is **September 26, 2026.**
- 9) The administrators and managers of the fund will vote the qualified winners in **October, 2026** based on the merits of each applicant.
- 10) The winners will receive their awards in **November, 2026**
- 11) Winning applicants are not eligible to apply again.
- 12) This announcement is published in Armenian, English, French and Spanish.

Watertown, MA, July 20, 2026

Donation

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* thanks Dean Shahinian for his ongoing support of our newspaper and for his recent donation of \$10,000.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Carmel's Florence (Flo) Thomasian Snyder-Speck's Ageless Lifetime Celebration Marks Centennial

PEBBLE BEACH, CA — A dinner party in honor of Florence Thomasian Snyder-Speck's Ageless Lifetime Celebration was held on Saturday, June 20 at the Pebble Beach Club, marking her centennial. More than 150 friends and family members attended. Many were prominent members of Carmel and the Monterey Peninsula community.

A Friday night celebration was held at the Hallaian home in Carmel. Family members and cousins gathered together to surprise Flo with a joyful "BATTER UP" Dodger Party in honor of this special occasion. "We served amazing Dodger Hot Dogs for dinner with Cracker Jacks, peanuts and popcorn. Dessert was ice cream sundaes in miniature Dodger Helmets," said Chris Hallaian, Flo's niece.

Thomasian Snyder-Speck remembers the moment in 1958 when she returned from a trip to Hawaii, turned on the television, and learned that the Brooklyn Dodgers were relocating to Los Angeles. Seizing the opportunity, she quickly picked up the phone and secured a job with the team, becoming their first female employee when the team moved to California in 1958. Her remarkable experience inspired her book, *Lady in the Locker Room: Madcap Memoirs of the Early LA Dodgers*, where she recounts how a young woman with no knowledge of baseball found herself working for a Major League Baseball team. The memoir highlights Flo's pioneering and ground-breaking role as one of the very first female staff members hired by the Los Angeles Dodgers.

A native of Los Angeles and a first-generation Armenian-American, she graduated from USC in 1950 with a degree in journalism. She was a member of Delta Zeta Sorority (Alpha Iota Chapter) at USC.

She worked for a time at the Los Angeles Times before uprooting to Hawaii, working at a resort on the island of Oahu running events. However, in the fall of 1957, she found herself back home with her parents. The headlines that fall were full of the Brooklyn Dodgers' impending move from New York to Los Angeles. Until that point, major league baseball was missing a big footprint on the west coast. Walter O'Malley, the Dodgers owner, famously made the big move and settled the franchise in the west, striking deals with the city and committing to building what would become the current Dodgers Stadium. And Flo had one of the best seats in the house to take in all the action. "It all seemed so exciting, and even though I knew little of major league baseball, since it didn't exist in California, I understood that having the Dodgers in Los Angeles was a huge acquisition," Flo writes in her memoir.



Florence Thomasian Snyder-Speck surrounded by photos and memorabilia of her years with the Los Angeles Dodgers

After spending nearly two years at the Los Angeles Times, she had good sports department contacts, so she put them to use and set out to see if her skills could be of use to the team as it made the monumental move to the City of Angels. "I kept calling

and showing up at Wrigley Field uninvited. Of course, not THE Wrigley Field in Chicago where the Cubs now play, but the one in L.A. which bore the same name and their farm team played until the Dodgers bought it in 1957," Flo writes. "I simply wouldn't go away. And my incessant pestering of the Dodgers finally paid off." Flo was hired as one of the first front office staff by Harold "Lefty" Phillips, the team's West Coast scout, who was managing the newly Dodgers-owned Wrigley Field.

Flo learned that she brought immense value to the team because of her local connections. Most of the team members from New York moving west were unfamiliar with California and knew little about the area. "I became a sort of combination tour

director and information center," Flo shares in her memoir. Her background working in events, and the fact she was a hometown girl, helped her make connections for Dodgers' personnel as they settled in the Los Angeles area. She helped the players and staff find places to stay, homes to rent, schools for their children and provided suggestions on the best places to shop or eat.

Part of the Team

The first year that the Dodgers made the move to Los Angeles wasn't an easy one — for either the team or Flo. Walter O'Malley was having a hard time finding a suitable space for the team to play while they waited for the eventual, now iconic, Dodger Stadium to be built. Things finally fell into place in January 1958 when the team reached an agreement to use the Los Angeles Coliseum. At the same time, Flo found her place and quickly became an integral part of the public relations team under Dodgers vice president Red Patterson, who had a reputation for being loud and demanding. Working in the communications office seemed like it was the center of the hurricane, with requests for information coming in steadily on the new hometown team.

Flo was heading to spring training at Dodgertown in Vero Beach, Florida. For a young woman with little baseball knowledge, she knew this was the big leagues. Flo spent six weeks with some of the world's most famous sports heroes of the day. But, as one of the newest to the team, she was also on the receiving end of some of the more outlandish pranks while there. One particular memory had her searching all over in the hot Florida

sun for the "keys to the batter's box." Wanting to be helpful, Flo went on a wild goose chase that had her going from infielder Don Zimmer to slugger Duke Snider to find the missing keys. She finally got the gag, and all these years later, she can't watch a baseball game without a chuckle when a batter steps up to the plate and into the white-lined batter's box to face the pitcher.



Florence Thomasian Snyder-Speck with the members of her extended family at her Ageless Lifetime Celebration

continued on next page

COMMUNITY NEWS

Living History

Flo connected with baseball's superstars of the day, supporting them so they could shine, including arguably baseball's perfect pair of pitchers: lefthander Sandy Koufax and right-hander Don Drysdale. "As impressive as their playing records were," Flo shares. "I leave those numbers to the statisticians and instead simply recount the utter delights in just knowing these two great guys and some of the fun we had."

In her memoir, Flo recounted her unique experiences as a woman working in a heavily male-dominated sport. She remembered Sandy Koufax as one of her favorite players to work with, describing him as incredibly dedicated (“he played his arm off”), deeply polite, and a true gentleman. Koufax was the youngest player ever to be inducted into the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame in 1972 at 36 years old.

Because the team was establishing its roots in a new city, Flo became part of a tight-knit community with the players. She frequently socialized, attended dinners and shared double dates with the players and their families, gaining an insider's view of legendary figures like Koufax, Don Drysdale and Tommy Lasorda.

After leaving the Dodgers in 1968, she

became a public information officer for California's Department of Justice, which took her to Sacramento. Meanwhile, Dale Speck, a high-ranking officer with the Los Angeles Police Department, was recruited by legendary California Attorney General Evelle Younger to head the department's Division of Law Enforcement.

“During the first staff meeting Dale and I both attended,” Flo says, “we looked across the room at each other and there was an instant connection. That night we had dinner together at Frank Fat’s famous restaurant. From then on, there was nobody else for me.”

This experience led to her appointment as a public information officer for the Department of Justice in Sacramento and subsequent appointment as California's first Director of Tourism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Flo returned to Dodger Stadium in 2008 as they celebrated their 50th Anniversary in Los Angeles.

"I wasn't prepared for the wave of emotion that engulfed me when I stepped into the mammoth new reception area of my former baseball home," she writes. "Baseball in the 1950s and 1960s didn't recognize the presence of women in the hierarchy — let alone permit access to the locker



Florence Thomasian Snyder-Speck with niece, Chris Hallaian display the gifts the Los Angeles Dodgers sent her in celebration of her 100th birthday

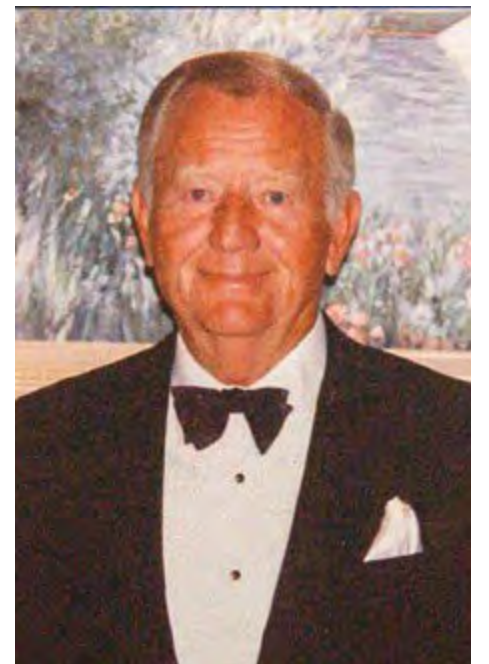
room women reporters have today.” However, individuals like Flo opened doors for change. Meeting her in the press box during her return visit was a young female executive. When Flo looked at this talented young woman, she marveled at how progressive baseball had become. “Women are in positions of responsibility at all levels

of the game, and I salute them," she concludes.

Although officially retired in Carmel, Flo remains active as a volunteer on many local boards and charities and is a member of the Carmel Woman's Club.

In gratitude for what Flo calls “the constant, compassionate, and quality care” her late husband Dale received at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, she made a substantial donation to Montage Health Foundation to support the Laboratory Services department’s “continued excellence.”

“Philanthropic gifts like Flo’s are crucial to driving innovation and ensuring the highest quality of care at Montage Health,” says Michele Melicia Young, director of



Dale Speck, late husband of Flo Snyder-Speck

Montage Health Foundation. “They empower us to continuously enhance our services and provide exceptional care. Flo’s generosity will leave a legacy, particularly in our Laboratory Services department, and support our ongoing commitment to compassionate, top-tier patient care.”

In his 25-year career at LAPD, Dale progressed by taking every promotion exam for which he qualified and never failed to score at the very top. In 1962 he took the Captain's exam and at the young age of 36 was assigned Captain at LAPD's Communications Division at Parker Center. Continuing advancement led to his appointment as Deputy Chief, followed by promotion as one of three Assistant Chiefs to Ed Davis. The two contemporaries he served with were George Beck (father of recently retired chief Charlie Beck) and the late Daryl Gates.

In July 2018, Dale, who ended his justice career as Deputy Attorney General before going into private practice, died in the Carmel community where he and Snyder-Speck retired. He was 92.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston: A Living Tribute Through Public Art

HERITAGE PARK, from page 8

Every feature of the Park contributes to its message. Visitors become participants rather than mere spectators. They walk the Labyrinth, symbolic of life's journey, with one path leading to the center and the same path leading out. Many experience the Park in a deeply personal way.

Surrounding the Labyrinth are the four words: Art, Science, Service and Commerce, recognizing the many ways immigrants have contributed to American life and culture.

Architectural historian Jane Whitehead captured the Park's significance in *Forget Me Not*, ArchitectureBoston, Boston Society of Architects, 2012:

"Luckily, the project had a designer, Don Tellalian, AIA...who was sensitive to the imperatives of civic space...the design uses abstract, geometric forms...it evokes the broader historic struggles of all immigrants...offers multivalent possibilities for interpretation shaped by visitors' own histories..."

Beyond its artistic and commemorative significance, Armenian Heritage Park serves as one of Boston's most innovative outdoor classrooms. Inspired by the Park's design and geometric features, year-round public programs foster dialogue, understanding, friendship and appreciation among people of every culture, ethnicity



and generation.

Through the acclaimed curriculum, *Geometry as Public Art: Telling A Story*, Boston Public School students and many others discover how geometry, public art, immigration, family history and storytelling intersect. The Park becomes a classroom where mathematics, art and personal history come together in meaningful ways.

Throughout the year, Armenian Heritage Park offers public programs that invite participation and builds community and common ground. Annual programs include the Day of Remembrance, honoring the victims of the Armenian Genocide and all genocides. This program is planned by the Greater Boston Armenian Genocide

Commemoration Committee. The annual Reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture, when the two halves of the split rhomboid dodecahedron are lifted by a crane and reconfigured into a new sculptural shape; Celebrate Public Art! featuring participation in World Labyrinth Day: Walk as One in Peace and Harmony; Welcome Reception for New Citizens following their Naturalization Ceremonies at Faneuil Hall; Celebrating What Unites Us!, the monthly series showcasing countries of origin by sharing immigrant experiences, signature dishes and music; Celebrate Armenia! a joyful celebration of culture, music, dance, cuisine, storytelling and community in honor of Armenia's Independence Day; weekly

Movement & Walking Meditation offered in collaboration with the Boston Public Health Commission; Under the Moon, evening gatherings featuring music and fellowship around the moonlit Labyrinth; Giving Thanks: Together in Celebration that includes a winter clothing drive benefiting Action for Boston Community Development; and the annual Candlelit Labyrinth Walk: In Peace & Harmony offering reflection and community during the holiday season.

As America commemorates its 250th anniversary, Armenian Heritage Park stands as a symbol that the American story continues to be shaped by generations of immigrants whose courage, creativity, service and dreams have strengthened our nation.

Armenian Heritage Park is an initiative of the Armenian Heritage Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, comprised of representatives of Armenian American parishes and organizations throughout Greater Boston.

For information about the Foundation, the Park and upcoming programs, visit ArmenianHeritagePark.org, follow Armenian Heritage Park on social media, or sign up to receive announcements about programs and the Foundation's upcoming gala, Celebrating Contributions of Our Nation's Immigrants! on September 24, at the InterContinental Boston to benefit the Park's Endowed Fund for Care and Maintenance.

OBITUARY

Garbo Afarian Founding Member of ACEF

WASHINGTON — Garbo Afarian, a visionary architect of both structures and unforgettable journeys, passed away peacefully on June 29, 2026.

Born in Beirut, Lebanon, on November 10, 1941, to Aram Garabed Afarian and Araxie (Vartabedian) Afarian, Garbo's youth was deeply enriched by the vibrant Armenian cultural organizations of his beloved hometown.

After graduating from Nshan Palandjian Djemaran High School in 1959, he immigrated with his family to New York City in 1960. There, he attended the City College of New York, earning a degree in architecture. After two years in architectural practice, he relocated to Washington, DC, to join his sister, Mirra, and her husband, Hamo Dersookian.

In Washington, Garbo discovered his true passion: opening the world to others through travel. He founded his own agency, The Travel Escape, where his meticulous attention to detail, unwavering dedication, and genuine love of exploration earned the trust and admiration of countless clients. His career took him to every corner of the globe, allowing him to immerse himself in diverse cultures, histories, and traditions. Yet no destination held a more special place in his heart than Armenia, where he felt a profound connection to his heritage and was



truly, vibrantly alive.

Garbo was deeply devoted to his parents, cherished his sister, Mirra, and adored his nephew, Sevan. His family was the center of his world. A faithful and devoted member of Soorp Khach his church, Garbo served on the Board of Trustees for many years, giving generously of his time, talents, and leadership. He was also an active member of the Hamazkayin Cultural Association, where he

performed in several theatrical productions, bringing joy, laughter, and warmth to audiences and the community he loved.

Garbo had a remarkable presence and an infectious warmth that lit up every room he entered. His kindness, humor, generosity, and unwavering spirit touched countless lives.

Garbo was one of the founding members of the Armenian Community Events Planners (ACEP) of Washington, Maryland and Virginia, a cultural entity formed after the 100th Anniversary Commemorations of the Armenian Genocide by few members of both St. Mary and Soorp Khach churches.

Garbo was one of the visionaries who established ACEP with the belief that bringing Armenians together through culture, friendship, and shared traditions would strengthen the community for generations to come. His passion for uniting Armenians was evident in everything he did, from helping organize countless cultural events to creating memorable New Year's Eve Galas that brought joy to so many.

Beyond his dedication and hard work, Garbo is remembered for the warmth he brought to every gathering. He filled ACEP meetings with humor, kindness, and an infectious spirit that made everyone feel welcome. His laughter, generosity, and unwavering commitment to the community left a lasting impression on all who had the privilege of knowing him. His legacy lives on in the friendships he nurtured, the traditions he helped build, and the vibrant community he worked so tirelessly to strengthen.

Garbo is survived by his sister Mirra and her husband Hamo Dersookian, his nephew Sevan Dersookian and the Afarian and Vartabedian families.

The funeral services took place on July 6, at Pumphery Funeral Home in Metesda, MD, officiated by Rev. Sarkis Aktavookian of Soorp Khach Armenian Apostolic Church and Rev. Hovsep Karapetyan of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church. In lieu of flowers donations were made towards the fund of a new Soorp Khach Church.

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Arts & Culture

Perfumer Francis Kurkdjian awarded France's Legion of Honor

PARIS — Master perfumer Francis Kurkdjian has been named a Knight of the Legion of Honor, France's highest national distinction, as part of the country's 2026 civilian honors list, *Le Figaro* reported on July 15.

Kurkdjian has a long history with fragrances. At age 26, he created *Le Male* for Jean Paul Gaultier, one of the world's top sellers. He later created *Narciso Rodriguez* for Her with Christine Nagel and *Burberry Her*. In 2009 he founded his own fragrance house, *Maison Francis Kurkdjian*, and released *Baccarat* in 2013, which has become an astounding success, one of the best selling fragrances globally. He sold the company to the luxury behemoth LVMH in 2017. He is currently the creative director of perfume at Christian Dior.

The awards recognize 619 individuals for their contributions across fields including culture, science, healthcare, business, sports and pub-



Francis Kurkdjian

lic service. The decrees were signed by President Emmanuel Macron.

Kurkdjian, one of the world's most acclaimed perfumers, was honored alongside a number of prominent figures from the arts and culture. Other newly appointed Knights include writer Philippe Besson, actresses Rachida Brakni and Clémentine Célarié, filmmakers Xavier Giannoli and Rebecca Zlotowski, artist Eva Jospin, fashion designer Paloma Picasso and actress Natalie Portman, who was recognized as a foreign national residing in France.

The 2026 promotion includes 518 Knights, 79 Officers, 16 Commanders, 4 Grand Officers, and 2 Grand Crosses. The recipients represent a broad spectrum of fields, including business, healthcare, culture, scientific research, sports, the nonprofit sector and local government.

Among institutional figures, Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank (ECB), has been elevated to the rank of Grand Officer. Serge Haroche, Nobel Prize-winning physicist, and historian Michelle Perrot have been awarded the Grand Cross, the highest distinction of the order. Actor Pierre Arditi and Patrick de Carolis, Mayor of Arles and former CEO of France Télévisions, have been named Commanders.



Jeremy Dalmas and Nyree Abrahamian (photo Karine Armen)

A Heartwarming Documentary about Longing for Home

By Karine Armen

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GLENDAL — A documentary called “Daughter of the Crying Man” screened on Tuesday, June 30, at the Armenian Arts. The film's producers Nyree Abrahamian and Jeremy Dalmas had a question-and-answer session with Prof. Shushan Karapetian after the screening.

The two also host the podcast “Country of Dust.”

The documentary film was originally produced for the podcast without any visuals. But when Nyree Abrahamian found many videos of her father's trips to Musa Dagh, Turkey, she and her partners, Jeremy Dalmas and Gohar Khachatryan, decided to compile the footage into a film. Still, the film contains many scenes without photos or images to avoid forcing irrelevant ones.

The film starts in 2002 in Toronto with a dark screen and narration by Abrahamian. She tells a story about how the family gathered to watch a video of a friend's visit to Musa Dagh. She beautifully describes the excitement and ambience of the family warmth in the room.

Abrahamian includes a short history of the Armenian community of Musa Dagh. They left in 1915 and returned after World War I. The region was then under French control, and in 1939, they transferred control to Turkey. The

see DOCUMENTARY, page 15



From left: Professor Shushan Karapetian, Nyree Abrahamian, and Jeremy Dalmas (photo Karine Armen)

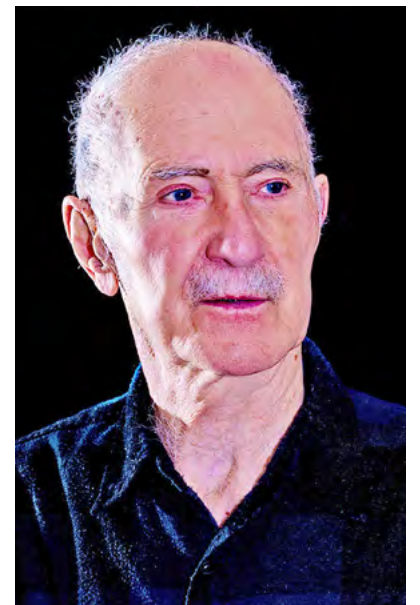
Composer Hayg Boyadjian's Work Performed In Yerevan

BOSTON — The performance of Hayg Boyadjian's recently finished Symphony No. 3 took place this spring as part of a high-profile orchestral evening celebrating Armenian musical heritage in Yerevan.

The Armenian State Symphony Orchestra was conducted by Fernando Oscar Gaggini.

Boyadjian's symphony was performed during the second half of a program that also featured French-Armenian composer Stephan Elmas's Piano Concerto No. 2 in D minor, performed by soloist Heggine Rapyan.

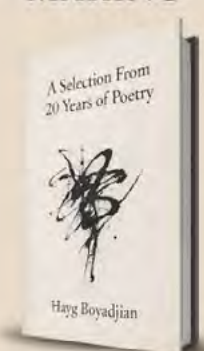
While specific movement analyses for Boyadjian's Symphony No. 3 are



Composer Hayg Boyadjian

emerging following its recent debut, Boyadjian's orchestral work typically reflects a distinctive multicultural identity. As noted in profiles regarding his similar large-scale pieces like his Cello Concerto, his music acts as a “fusion of several musical elements” rooted in his diverse background — being of Armenian descent, born in Paris, raised in Buenos Aires, and spending his adult career in the United States.

UNVEILING A VOICE 20 YEARS IN THE MAKING



In addition, Boyadjian's book of Poetry, titled *A Selection From 20 Years of Poetry*, was recently released and is available on Amazon books.

ARTS & CULTURE

Children's Opera Celebrates Triumph over Evil

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — In times of political conflict, where aggressive forces wield superior military and geopolitical power to subjugate weaker forces, the strategic choice the latter face often appears as between appeasement and resistance.

In the small town of Nor Hachn, Armenia, a children's opera recently premiered its musical-theatrical contribution to this age-old debate. Taking a page from a fairy tale written by beloved national poet Hovhannes Tumanyan (1869-1923), "Chari Verjeh," or "The End of Evil," Garen Garibyan, founder and director of the children's opera group, has presented a powerful depiction of the struggle against tyranny, in which the intended victims, unified in defying an insidious aggressor, fight for their rights and claim victory.

Garibyan, who had worked for decades in America as a singer, actor and director, returned to Armenia after independence and in 1992 set up the Shushi Music School and Music School Society. His work with children flourished until 2020 with Azerbaijan's aggression. He moved with his staff, the children and all theater requisites to Stepanakert and started anew. The second music school, inaugurated in 2022, lasted only a year, again due to Azerbaijani aggression. In September 2023, they joined the rest of the Artsakh population on the deportation route to Armenia. This time they left everything behind, except personal belongings they could carry.

Refusing to capitulate to depression, Garibyan and his wife appealed to earlier supporters in Germany for financial help. The Association for the Promotion of an Ecumenical Memorial to Genocide Victims in the Ottoman Empire (FÖGG), co-founded by human rights proponent Tessa Hofmann, fundraised to provide resources to restart his opera project. The Mirak-Weissbach Foundation also joined the campaign. This time, refugee children from Artsakh joined with local youngsters and the group of 35 young musicians started singing and acting under Garibyan's direction.

The first opera they produced and performed in spring of 2024, was also inspired by Tumanyan; entitled, "The Wolf," it also depicted the struggle between good and

evil.

The plot of the new opera, "The End of Evil," presents a familiar conflict between a tyrannical ruler and his subjects. At first, they try to control his wrath by appeasing him, but to no avail. Only with the arrival of an outsider endowed with wisdom does the strategy shift. The outsider rejects the ruler's ultimatum, deploys wisdom instead of sacrifices, and succeeds in leading the tyrant to his downfall.

Tumanyan wrote his fairy tale with a cast of animals: the Tyrant is the Fox, the vic-

is mixed.

The action opens with the Cuckoo, who happens upon a tree and finds in it a hollow where she settles with her three newborn chicks. The Fox comes onto the scene, claims ownership of everything, the mountain and the tree, and threatens to return with an axe to chop down the tree unless the Cuckoo hands over one of her chicks. Out of fear and with a heavy heart, she complies. But the Fox is not satisfied. He returns once again and demands another chick, and the Cuckoo, still intimidated by his threats, sac-

to chop down the tree. In short, she should stay firm and not be afraid.

When the Fox returns for the third time and repeats his claims to own the mountain and the tree, the Cuckoo denounces him in song, as a liar and deceiver, a ruthless, insatiable beast. She sends him away, declaring that she is no longer afraid. Yes, she tells the Fox defiantly, it was the Crow who revealed the truth to her. The Crow returns just in time and lures the Fox into a bush where a dog, lying in wait for him, pounces upon the evil beast. Before leaving



The Cuckoo, in tree, laments the fate of her chicks

tim is the Cuckoo, who lives in the hollow of a tree, the outsider is the Crow, and the tyrant's Nemesis is the Dog. Author Anush Asakhanyan adapted Tumanyan's fairy tale for the stage, and composer Jenny Asatryan created the music.

As in their first opera production, some leading parts are portrayed by young girls, the Cuckoo, a female, by Shushan Grigoryan, the Fox, by Marie Bishoposyan, and the Crow by Lily Martirosyan. The large chorus

rifies the second of her brood.

It is only when the Crow, a bird of wisdom, happens on the scene that the dynamic shifts. Hearing the Cuckoo's weeping, he asks and learns of the Fox's evil threats and actions. The Crow gives her courage, telling her the Fox's claims are lies; How can the Fox say the mountain is his? Or that the tree is his? The Crow declares that they belong to everyone. And not only that; he tells her the deceptive Fox has no axes

the scene, the Crow draws the lesson, that sooner or later evil will be punished.

A second, shorter piece performed by the young opera group was also based on a fairy tale, this time of Russian origin, and very popular in Armenian. Titled "Grandpa and the Turnip," it was adapted for the stage by composer Daniel Ghazaryan, and tells the story of an old man who plants a turnip that grows so big that he cannot harvest it alone. Only a massive group effort can solve the problem. If existing forces unify and in a common effort deploy whatever resources are available, no matter how meager, then they can achieve their goals.

Again, the children displayed remarkable talent and competence, showing on the stage that the message of the opera applies to their own performance. The cast included Shushan Grigoryan as Dad, Marina Nazaryan as Grandmother, Anush Isakhanyan as Granddaughter, Marianna Aghajanian as the Dog, Victoria Gevorgyan as the Cat, and M. Mirzakhanyan as the Mouse.

Fables and fairy tales are the tools to teach moral social behavior to children (and adults); in the pieces chosen by Garibyan, the message is that perseverance, unified resistance to evil, and the refusal to capitulate to intimidation or superior force are necessary to establish a moral order in society. And no one has proven that better than Garen Garibyan. After having viewed the video of these operas performed by the children of Nor Hachn, Tessa Hofmann congratulated the director: "It is an overwhelming, moving testimony to your cultural work in music education and, at the same time, to your tireless energy: wherever you go — or have been forced to go — you take that energy with you. You are a role model to me, and I bow down before you."



The Fox demands that the Cuckoo, in tree, sacrifices her chicks



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



(Photo courtesy of <https://www.simplyleb.com/recipe/hareesa-soup/>)

A Taste of Fresno's Keshkeg – An Armenian Tradition

FRESNO — This updated keshkeg recipe by Marty Ohanesian is featured in A Taste of Fresno Armenian and American Cuisine Cookbook by the Ladies Society of St. Paul Armenian Church in Fresno.

Keshkeg (Harissa, Herriseh) is named one of the Top Ten Most Popular Armenian Dishes by TasteAtlas, a world atlas of food and drinks, and an encyclopedia of flavors. Considered a national dish of Armenia, keshkeg is a thick porridge made by slowly simmering dzedzadz (dried or roasted whole wheat kernels) together with fatty pieces of lamb or chicken meat. According to Armenian tradition, it is said to have been invented in the Ararat plains -- the origins of the dish can be traced back to ancient times, as well as to St. Gregory the Illuminator, the patron saint of Armenia, who would offer it as a charity meal.

Andrew Janjigian, the former long-time test cook at Cook's Illustrated magazine writes:

"Harissa — also known as herisseh, harisa, or keshkeg — is a wheat berry and

meat porridge. The meat in question is usually chicken or lamb (occasionally beef), and the wheat is usually korkot, or 'shelled' wheat, meaning wheat berries that have had their tough hulls removed, making them (somewhat) quicker to cook. The meat and the wheat berries are combined with water or stock and then cooked and stirred over a low flame for hours until both break down into a uniform, amorphous, stodgy porridge. None of those sound like positive attributes for a main dish, but the process seems to alchemically transform these simple ingredients into a thoroughly satisfying, deeply savory whole. And once you top the harissa with its mandatory Aleppo pepper-spiced browned butter, the dish absolutely sings."

The Art of Armenian & Middle Eastern Cooking blog writes, "Even to this day, harissa is considered a charity meal, and is traditionally prepared each year for Easter, as well as to commemorate the Musa Ler resistance during the Armenian Genocide of 1915. When it comes to the method of preparing, there are two diverging opinions; one claims it is forbidden to stir harissa until it is cooked all the way, while the other insists it should be stirred as soon as the wheat is half-cooked."

Serve keshkeg with melted butter, cumin and ground pepper.

"Every year in mid-September and on the Feast of Holy Cross, Armenians of Musa Ler gather together (especially in Anjar village, Lebanon), prepare Harissa in large pots and pay tribute to the fallen heroes, also celebrate the victory of our forefathers."

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/2 cups dzedzadz, skinless whole wheat kernels found in Middle Eastern markets, also known as hulled uncooked wheat (Note: farro, wheat berries or pearl barley can be used as a substitute if you cannot find hulled wheat).
- 3 or 4 cups fresh cooked chicken or turkey meat, shredded
- 1 quart chicken broth
- 1 1/2 quarts water
- 4-5 tablespoons butter, to taste
- Salt, black or white pepper, and cumin, to taste
- Aleppo pepper, sumac, or paprika, to taste

PREPARATION:

Wash the dzedzadz, then soak overnight in hot water. The following day, drain excess water from dzedzadz. Mix together dzedzadz, chicken or turkey, chicken broth, and water in a deep pot. Bring to a full boil and reduce heat to low. Remove any foam that arises to the surface.

Simmer on a very low heat, covered, for about 4 hours without stirring, until almost all liquid is absorbed. This mixture has to be beaten with a wooden spoon or by immersion or stick blender until dzedzadz is smooth and mushy. Add salt, if needed.

Melt butter in a small pan until a nut-brown color; add salt, pepper, cumin, Aleppo pepper or paprika to taste; pour some of this sauce over the center portion of each serving.

Note: Shredded lamb or beef roast can be used in place of poultry. Pair with a side of pickled vegetables and fresh pita bread or lavash flatbread. Leftover keshkeg freezes well, just defrost and reheat with a little extra liquid to adjust for flavor.

Serves 4-6

ORDER TODAY: To purchase A Taste of Fresno Armenian and American Cuisine Cookbook for holiday gifts for family or friends, contact: St. Paul Armenian Church, 3767 N. First St, Fresno, CA 93726, (559) 226-6343. Each cookbook costs \$20.00 plus shipping and handling. All checks should be made payable to: St. Paul Armenian Church Ladies Society.

A Heartwarming Documentary about Longing for Home

DOCUMENTARY, from page 13
Armenians felt vulnerable, and another exodus took place. Her grandparents also left Musa Dagh in 1939 and went to Syria, Lebanon and eventually Canada. Her grandfather's sister, Zaruhi, stayed behind. One uncle traveled to Musa Dagh and the nearby Armenian village and found Zaruhi. There are still some Armenians in that region, specifically in the village of Vakifli.

Currently, Abrahamian lives in Armenia. She is a poet and the creator and producer of the "Country of Dust" podcast. She also cofounded the Tumanyan International Storytelling Festival. She said, "I was anxious when the film came out. I am proud of what we made, but I feel exposed." She continued, "What if somebody listens to the story and holds judgment against my family and me. I felt a responsibility to tell the story that feels true to everyone in my family."

In 1939, when Abrahamian's grandfather was leaving, he handed the key to his house to a Turkish man who worked at the orchard. During a visit to Musa Dagh, Abrahamian's father visited his ancestral house. Later, Nyree visited

that house and captured the breathtaking view of the mountains. She narrated her opinion about forced displacement.

Dalmas is from the San Francisco area but spends many months in Armenia. He is an audio producer who spent five years reporting with NPR affiliate KALW in San Francisco and has worked with the Guardian, CBS, Wired, Vox and many other outlets. Dalmas said, "I wanted to help Nyree to tell her story. Sometimes the best way to let her tell her story was to keep things instead of cutting them out."

Karapetian is director of the USC Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies, a leading center focused on the contemporary Armenian diaspora and the Republic of Armenia. She has a podcast which includes interviews with Armenian writers, actors, and other active members of the community. She mentioned that producing each episode is challenging and time-consuming.

"Daughter of the Crying Man" is a film about longing for home, family, migration, and culture. Abrahamian had traveled to Musa Dagh several times, but when her father died, she went to scatter his ashes along with her two brothers.



From left: Nyree Abrahamian, Professor Shushan Karapetian, and Jeremy Dalmas (photo Karine Armen)

The event was well attended, and the audience was curious to learn more about the Armenians living in Vakifli.

The event ended with a reception where the audience asked more questions and networked with the producers.

ARTS & CULTURE

Jo Corbeau

The Armenian Voice of French Reggae



By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Jo Corbeau, born Georges Ohannessian in Marseille in 1946, is a French singer, songwriter, performer and artist of Armenian descent.

After studying at the Schools of Fine Arts in Marseille and later in Paris, he founded the group Albert et sa fanfare Poliorcétique in 1971, which created one of the first French rock operas, “La Malédiction des rockers.” It was during this period that he adopted the stage name Jo Corbeau, performing at numerous festivals as well as on radio and television.

In 1974, he joined the magazine *Actuel* as an illustrator and scriptwriter, collaborated with Jazz Hot, and took part in the film “La Route,” shot in India and Bali. From 1978 onwards, he devoted himself to reggae, composing several notable songs, including Reggae Lussac, Rock à Marseille and Le Rasta de Mourepiane. In 1982, he joined the Antillean band Men in the Hill, recording several reggae tracks with them. He later continued his musical career by founding the Djibrill Sound System and Jo Corbeau Illimited Compagnie, producing songs such as Savon de Marseille and Red Rock Reggae.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, he remained active with new projects, including the group Dub Olympique, and released several albums and recordings that further established his unique place on the Marseille reggae scene. Jo Corbeau also writes poetry, some of which is devoted to Armenian themes.

We met in one of Yerevan’s parks, where our conversation took place in French. Throughout the interview, Jo would occasionally slip Armenian words and expressions into his speech.

Today, July 17, I am speaking with Jean-Georges Ohannessian, better known as Jo Corbeau. But why “Corbeau” (raven)?

It’s a vision I had during meditation. The raven was the first animal Noah sent out of the Ark, before the dove. He opened the Ark; the raven flew away and never came back. So now, I’m the one who has returned.

How would you define your professional activity and your place in the history of French music?

I belong to the generation that started out with rock ‘n’ roll. Later, I became interested in blues, jazz and all the contemporary music of the time, until the day I discovered reggae through Bob Marley in 1977. I attended one of his concerts, and from that moment on I decided that I wanted to make this kind of music myself. I was among the very first musicians in France to perform reggae in French. Between 1977 and 1980, I formed my first bands and took part in

the birth of an entire movement that grew around reggae.

But that’s not all. I also studied at the School of Fine Arts. I worked as a painter, decorator, press illustrator, poster designer, and comic-book artist. So, I have pursued artistic work throughout my entire life. I have also performed in street theatre, created performance art, and engaged in all kinds of artistic projects. It’s important to know that I am a singer-songwriter. I don’t perform other people’s songs — I sing my own lyrics set to my own music. Then, together with the musicians, we work out the arrangements.

I know you are particularly attached to the first French rock opera, “La Malédiction des Rockers” [The Curse of the Rockers], which came after the legendary “Jesus Christ Superstar” (1971).

Oh yes... In fact, I’d like you to understand what inspired that rock opera. We were the first to produce what was officially recognized as a genuine French rock opera. The inspiration came from a great rock singer whom I admired in my youth — Gene Vincent, the American rock ‘n’ roll singer. We wanted to pay tribute to him and to the entire generation of the first rockers. It was quite a surreal production, blending many different elements, with characters constantly appearing and disappearing. This eventually became the album “La Malédiction des Rockers,” released in 1973. It brought us great success. We performed in major venues, including the Bobino theatre in Paris. It was a wonderful period.

Now let’s talk about your song in Armenian. I believe it was the first time an Armenian born in France had written a song in Armenian, wasn’t it?

I believe so, at least chronologically. More importantly, it was written in a style completely unrelated to traditional Arme-

nian music, since it was reggae. Reggae has an entirely different rhythm. I was inspired by the great Jamaican artists — Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff and many others. This culture reached Europe only later and initially flourished mainly within Afro-Caribbean communities.

I incorporated this music into my own cultural identity. The song is called *Arévin Tsain* (The Voice of the Sun). One day I told myself that I absolutely had to write a song in Armenian. But to do that, I needed inspiration from Armenia itself. I spent an entire night listening to the Armenian records I had at home immersed in those sounds of liturgical chants, the Divine Liturgy, music by ashoughs, zurna music... At dawn, the sun rose and filled my room with light. At that very moment, the song came to me all by itself. It was extraordinary because, in truth, I speak Armenian very poorly and have never really mastered it. Yet something profoundly mystical happened. When I saw the sun, I thought of Jah. In the Rastafari philosophy — I would call it more a philosophy than a religion — Jah is the name of God. The Rastafari movement emerged in Jamaica under the influence of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, who at his coronation received the titles King of Kings. That is why, in my song, I sing: “Jah...” After that, the words simply flowed. I was writing almost without thinking. All of this came spontaneously, as though inspired by something greater than myself.

I composed *Arévin Tsain* in 1989, which I performed at a benefit concert for the victims of the Armenian earthquake.

Please tell us a little about your family.

My father’s name was Dikran and my mother’s was Haigoui. On my father’s side, the Ohannessians came from Ordu, on the Black Sea coast in the Pontus region. My mother, née Tchakerian, came from an entirely different area — Gürin, near Sivas, in

Anatolia. During the Armenian Genocide, all of my grandparents were killed. On my father’s side, only my father managed to escape. His entire family had been arrested, but he got away alone. He was still just a boy, probably 14-15 years old. He reached Constantinople and then managed to leave using papers issued by the French consulate. Eventually he arrived in Marseille, like thousands of other Armenians.

On my mother’s side, the family owned major silk businesses. They produced large silk scarves. The Turks took everything and looted it all. My grandfather was massacred, while my grandmother fled with my mother and my uncle Agop into the Syrian Desert. She died there. My own mother buried her somewhere in that desert. Then my mother and her younger brother were taken in at Aleppo. They were later placed in an orphanage in Damascus before being transferred to Jerusalem. It was from there that she was finally able to leave for France and settle in Marseille.

My parents came from completely different regions. Had there been no Armenian Genocide, they would never have met, and, in truth, I would never have been born. They met a few years later in Marseille and got married. My brother Onnig was born first, then my sister Paris (Parisette). I came much later. By the time I was born, my brother was already 18 and my sister 15. You could say I was a bit of an accident. Or rather, as people say, it was God’s will. I was born and raised in Marseille, in a fairly close-knit Armenian community. Families tended to stay among themselves, associating with people from the same region or with relatives and acquaintances they had already known.

Were Armenian traditions preserved in your family?

Yes! The Easter. We dyed eggs red, and I loved that tradition. We also went to

continued on next page

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ARTS & CULTURE

from previous page

church. But I lost my mother when I was only five years old. That is probably why I lost much of my Armenian. Before I turned five, I didn't even speak French—I spoke only Armenian. When I went to play with the other children in the parks of Marseille, I would come back to my mother saying: "I talk to them, but they don't answer me." I didn't understand that I was speaking Armenian while they were French.

After my mother's death, my sister took care of me. She was still very young herself. She looked after my father, my brother, and me, before eventually getting married. Little by little, I became integrated into French society. My father was not really involved in Armenian parties or community organizations. We went to church at Christmas and Easter, and that was about it. Of course, I still saw my relatives—my godfather, my uncles, and the rest of the family. But as a child I didn't particularly enjoy those family gatherings because they were always sad. People spoke only about the Genocide and everything that had been lost. For a child, it was hardly cheerful. That is probably why I integrated into French society so quickly.

I also know that you were related to the writer Zareh Vorpouni.

He was my first cousin. His mother was my father's sister. So, I knew Zareh very well. He lived in Marseille with his brother Laurent (or Nurhan) and sister Mélanouche. We saw one another frequently, especially at Christmas. We often spent the holidays at their home. Zareh moved to Paris while he was still young. Within the family, people regarded him as something of an eccentric. His brother, on the other hand, was very business-minded and owned a furniture manufacturing company. I saw Zareh often, but at the time I had no idea that he was a writer. I only discovered this later, when I moved to Paris to continue my studies at around the age of twenty. He welcomed me into his home together with his wife, Lily, who was from Alsace. They were both extraordinary people.

Zareh had opened the first macrobiotic restaurant in France. He was a disciple of the Japanese master George Ohsawa, the founder of a dietary philosophy based largely on grains and vegetarian food. The restaurant was located in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés district of Paris. I visited them very often. They welcomed me with great generosity, and it was there that I truly came to know them.

Both Zareh and Lily were deeply engaged in a spiritual quest, and towards the end of their lives they became close to the Bahá'í Faith. I knew Zareh until his final days. He was an exceptionally kind man. But since he wrote exclusively in Armenian, I never really knew what he was writing. It was only recently, thanks to Houri Varjabédian's translations, that I was finally able to discover his literary world. Only then did I realize how modern his thinking had been.

I also vividly remember their apartment in Paris, right in the heart of the Latin Quarter. You had to climb a long staircase to reach the attic. Up there, beneath the roof, there were books everywhere. Lily painted constantly, and the walls were covered with her artwork.

I also know that Zareh had been a prisoner in Germany during the Second World War, just like his brother Laurent. During his captivity, Laurent had a relationship with a German woman, and they had a son whom I also came to know.

How did Armenian traditions — or the Armenian spirit — return to your life?

It happened much later. I think it really began during Sergei Parajanov's trial. In France there was a great deal of support

for him, with demonstrations and various campaigns. I joined that movement because I had seen his films, and they had deeply influenced me as an artist. Sayat Nova (The Color of Pomegranates) affected me profoundly. That was when I first began discovering the legendary troubadour Sayat-Nova. From then on, I became much more seriously interested in Armenian culture.

At the same time, there was also an extraordinary group called Zartonk. They performed Armenian pop music, and I found it absolutely fascinating. Suddenly, I felt myself drawing closer to my cultural roots. My sister also played an important role in that process. She was much more involved than I was. She had learned to read and write Armenian and was taking Armenian courses at university. Every time I visited her, she deliberately spoke Armenian with me to help me understand it. Little by little, I began to recover the language.

Do you think you have passed this Armenian spirit on to your children?

Of course. My wife is of Moroccan descent on her mother's side and Senegalese on her father's. She is not particularly religious, but she has a deeply spiritual outlook. Both of us have a very universal vision of spirituality. My children do not speak Armenian. They know a few words, but that's all. Yet fate had it that both of my sons-in-law are Armenian. I had absolutely nothing to do with it. My daughters never attended an Armenian school or really took part in community life. My younger daughter, Ornella, attended Armenian language classes at the Armenian church for a while on Wednesdays, but she was far more interested in horseback riding, so it didn't last very long. One day my daughter Anastasia told me, "I'd like you to meet my boyfriend." It was Missak, a wonderful young man. Later, for Anastasia's birthday, Missak invited several friends, including Maxime. Today, Maxime is the father of my grandson Billy. As for Missak and Anastasia, they have a little boy named Yeraz. What's truly remarkable is that there has been a connection between our families for a long time. Maxime's grandfather was my brother Onnig's best friend when they were young, so I already knew his family. His great-aunt was also a very close friend of my sister. They were the Kazarian family, with whom we had always been close.

This is your second visit to Armenia, isn't it?

The first time I came was in 2004, as part of a delegation from the Regional Council of Marseille, invited as an Armenian. I represented the artists in the delegation. We brought many positive things to Armenia. Among other initiatives, we donated equipment to the fire service, supported tourism, and helped with numerous projects. For me, it was an opportunity to visit Armenia for the first time. This time is different. My children, together with my son-in-law and his wife, gave me this trip as a gift because I'll be turning eighty in December. So, this was my birthday present. I am fortunate to have Missak with me. He is an extraordinary guide. He organized everything, day by day. We rented a car, and he drove nearly 1,200 kilometers. Thanks to him, we discovered absolutely magical places.

My visit to the Matenadaran deeply moved me. It is so beautiful... I left it filled with wonder. It was also there that I became even more interested in Armenian culture.

I was deeply moved by the beauty of Armenia's monasteries. Even during my first visit, Etchmiadzin and the khachkars had left a lasting impression on me. I have enormous admiration for this architecture, its beauty, and its powerful spirituality. At Tatev, I experienced an immense, deeply



CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

JULY 26 — CELEBRATING WHAT UNITES US! Highlights Uganda. Sunday at 4pm Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. in collaboration with the City of Boston Office of Immigrant Advancement RSVP appreciated, hello@armenianheritagepark.org

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.

JUNE 27-SEPTEMBER 13 — Armenian Museum of America, "Father" exhibit by Diana Markosian tracing her journey through photography, video, and archival materials, exploring themes of loss, identity, and belonging. Markosian creates a poignant narrative that resonates across generations and diasporic experiences. U.S. debut. Curated by Anahit Gasparyan. Sponsored by the JHM Charitable Foundation. Please visit: <https://www.armenianmuseum.org/diana-markosian> Thurs.-Sun., 12pm-6pm 65 Main Street, Watertown.

AUGUST 2 — Saints Vartanantz Annual Church Picnic, 12 Noon – 5:00 p.m., Music – Food – Dancing featuring the Jason Naroian Ensemble. 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford.

AUGUST 9 — UNDER THE AUGUST MOON. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Sunday at 7:30pm Featuring Dan Teager's Black Sea Salsa Combo and their unique. Sound of Latin and Middle Eastern Jazz. Meet & Greet, old friends and new. Refreshments

AUGUST 11 — An evening of conversation with Chris Bohjalian and Nancy Kricorian celebrating the launch of Bohjalian's latest novel, The Amateur. 7 p.m. Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown. For details & to RSVP, visit <https://www.armenianmuseum.org/events/celebrating-the-amateur-chris-bohjalian-with-nancy-kricorian> or call 617-926-2562 x102.

AUGUST 23 — CELEBRATING WHAT UNITES US! Highlights Barbados. Sunday at 4pm Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Sunday at 4pm .in collaboration with the City of Boston Office of Immigrant Advancement RSVP appreciated, hello@armenianheritagepark.org

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

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

SEPTEMBER 19 —CELEBRATE ARMENIA! Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Saturday, 1pm-8pm. Joyful celebration of culture, tradition and heritage through music, dance, cuisine. Storytelling and community in honor of Armenian Independence Day. 1pm-8pm.rain date: September 27

SEPTEMBER 24 — Celebrating Contributions! Gala to benefit the Armenian Heritage Park's Endowed Fund for Care and Maintenance. Honoring Raffi and Nina Festekjian, Distinguished Leaders in Philanthropy, Business, and the Arts. InterContinental Boston, 6 p.m. Reception. 7 p.m. Dinner and Program. For reservations: ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support or email: hello@armenianheritagepark.org

NOVEMBER 15 — GIVING THANKS! TOGETHER IN CELEBRATION. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Sunday at 2pm./Meet & Greet. Share the Warmth: Bring a Winter Hat, Scarf or Gloves for the ABCD Winter Drive, Seasonal Refreshments. RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

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.

DECEMBER 6 — CANDLELIT LABYRINTH WALK: IN PEACE & HARMONY Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Sunday at 4:45pm. Meet & Greet. Walk the Candlelit Labyrinth Walk. Enjoy Hot Chocolate & Sweet Treats. RSVP appreciated. hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

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.



moving emotion. We also visited a place that I had dreamed of seeing for a long time. I had discovered it on the Internet, and it had fascinated me for years. We travelled all the way to Syunik to visit Karahunj. There, I was captivated. This ancient site is like a universal testimony to humanity's past. Throughout the world, we find these great megalithic monuments. It reminds me

of Stonehenge in Britain and the Carnac alignments in Brittany.

Finally, what probably surprised me most was the extraordinary diversity of Armenia's landscapes. These immense gorges, the mountains, the rocks that sometimes resemble natural sculptures... It was there that I truly understood the meaning of the proverb: "We are our mountains."

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
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SINCE 1932



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Is Armenia Being Forced to Choose Between the West and Russia?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In previous articles, I have addressed the issue that Armenia has consistently sought to maintain multidirectional relations with both Russia and the West, without making a choice between them. This diplomatic approach worked for many years, and it succeeded not only because of Armenia's diplomatic efforts, but also because of the simple fact that relations between Russia and the West had never been as tense and hostile as they are today.

Not only Armenia, but dozens of other countries were able to take advantage of this opportunity and sought to avoid antagonizing either the West or Russia, trying not to choose one global power over the other or to lose relations with either side. Of course, there were some exceptions. There were countries that made such a choice and began facing problems either in the form of Western sanctions or various types of pressure from Russia. Nevertheless, all the other countries were able to avoid making such a choice.

Today, however, the situation is fundamentally different from the one that existed in the post-Cold War world.

And now a very natural question arises: are either of the two opposing centers of power forcing Armenia, as well as a number of other countries in a similar position, to make a final choice in favor of one vector or the other?

In other words, is Russia forcing Armenia to make a definitive decision? And is the West also pressuring Armenia to make a final choice and ultimately sever its ties with the other side?

already made its decision.

Of course, Armenia has the right to independently determine its foreign policy and set its foreign policy priorities, and Armenia should naturally exercise that right.

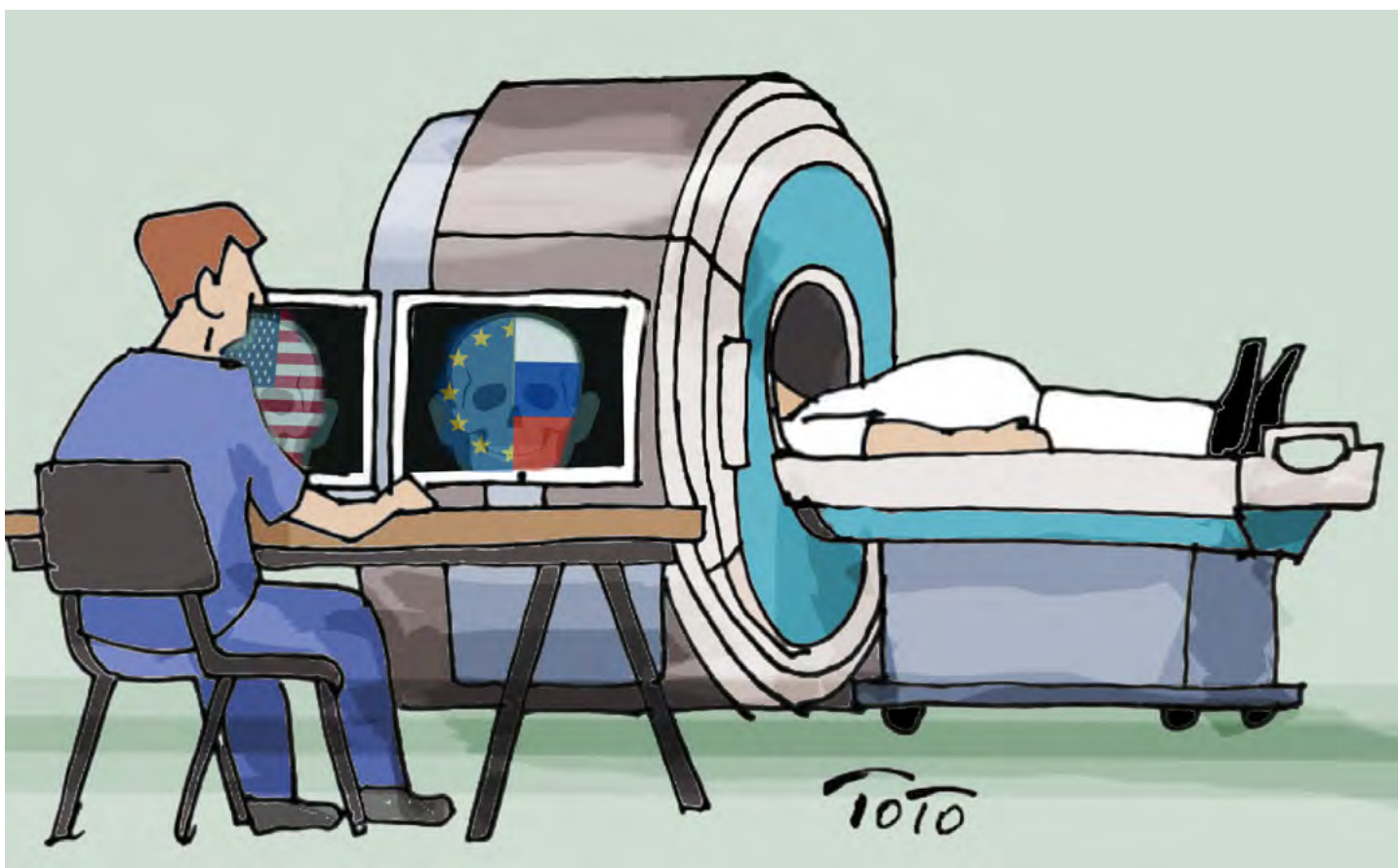
I believe that for Armenia it would be much more natural to maintain and deepen relations equally with both poles, which could bring economic benefits to the country. Nevertheless, if Armenia has to make a choice, that choice should be made based on its national interests, rather than as a result of pressure applied by global actors.

In other words, Armenia should try to withstand all forms of pressure, conduct pragmatic calculations, and make a clear political decision — a decision that should be final.

If Armenia decides to move toward the West, then it will naturally lead to a weakening of relations with Russia, including in the economic, political, and military spheres.

If Armenia has clear calculations that it will not face serious problems in transforming its economic structure and reorienting itself toward Europe, then, of course, this could be a good opportunity for Armenia to move closer to the European family.

Unlike many countries that have faced such challenges when making a choice between Russia and the West, Armenia does not share a common border with Russia. From a security perspective, this provides Armenia with certain advantages — something that cannot be said in the same way about Georgia and Ukraine. Therefore, at least this particular risk does not seem to exist in Armenia for the time being. However, it is



Making such a choice would be extremely difficult, risky, and problematic for Armenia. Regardless of which direction Armenia ultimately chooses to pursue, both a significant deterioration in relations with Russia and a major rupture in relations with Europe would present serious challenges.

Therefore, it is critically important for Armenia to preserve a balanced foreign policy. If Armenia is indeed forced to make such a choice, the decision will be extremely difficult, given the wide range of factors that must be taken into account. The approaches of the West and Russia toward Armenia also have very different manifestations. While the West is trying to encourage Armenia through investments, financial flows, projects such as TRIPP, the peace agenda, financial assistance, and other instruments, Russia is following an entirely different path.

Russia is attempting to exert pressure on Armenia, including in the economic sphere. The fact that the Russian president did not congratulate Armenia's prime minister and his political party on victory can also be viewed as a political gesture. Another political signal can be seen in the fact that the Armenian prime minister and the Russian president have still had no contact following the elections held in Armenia. This may lead to the conclusion that either Russia has information about the path chosen by Armenia, or it assumes that Armenia has

extremely important to carefully consider that this is a competition, and ultimately one of the two competing sides will prevail. The other side will then take actions based on the outcome of this competition and its own interests as the losing side.

Armenia must also be fully prepared for such a scenario. In any case, if Armenia is presented with such a demand to make a choice, that decision could come within a relatively short timeframe, and Armenia must be prepared to make any choice that may be required. I would not be surprised by Armenia choosing any particular direction, because I understand that any choice will bring both new opportunities and new challenges.

In terms of opportunities, naturally, the West would provide much greater prospects, since Armenia has never been integrated with the West in any significant way unlike integration with Russia economically, militarily and strategically.

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



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

What happened to Israel's Recognition of The Armenian Genocide? Fact vs. Rumor

On a daily basis, we are all inundated with so much misinformation that it is becoming almost impossible to distinguish fact from fiction. For those of us in the news business, the challenge is even greater. Whereas regular people can pass on baseless rumors to their immediate circle, the mass media bears a much greater responsibility because it risks spreading false information to thousands or even millions of people, unless it first verifies the facts.

A recent example of a story that evolved from fact into rumor was the Israeli Foreign Minister's announcement last month that his government would recognize the Armenian Genocide. The news spread like wildfire throughout the international media. There were endless commentaries and analyses about why Israel decided to recognize the Armenian Genocide after decades of refusing to do so.

Shortly after the Israeli Foreign Minister's announcement, the government (Cabinet) unanimously approved the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and decided to forward the measure to the Knesset (Parliament) for final approval.

Not surprisingly, the Turkish government furiously denounced the decision of Israel's Cabinet, accusing it of trying to divert the world's attention from the atrocities being committed in Gaza. Ironically, this accusation came from the Turkish government, which has gone to extraordinary lengths for over a century to cover up the genocides of Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks.

Siding with Turkey's denial of the Armenian Genocide was the government of Azerbaijan which has itself committed several mass murders against Armenians. As the saying goes, "birds of a feather flock together." Azerbaijani officials expressed their objection by reminding Israel's leaders of the billions of dollars' worth of Israeli weapons they had purchased and that, in return, had sold to Israel a large share of its imported oil. Neither Azerbaijan nor its ally Turkey, which serves as the conduit for the Azeri oil exports to Israel, mentions its own role in supplying the fuel for Israel's war machine.

The objections from Azerbaijan and Turkey triggered the false rumor that the Israeli government had abandoned the Knesset's consideration of the Armenian Genocide, even though there was absolutely no official confirmation from Israel.

The fact is that the Knesset's agenda was packed with several major issues during the last few days of its session, leaving no time to consider the Armenian

Genocide. The Knesset went into recess last Friday until October, when new elections are scheduled to take place. It remains to be seen whether the next Knesset will take up this issue.

Even though Israel's decision to recognize the Armenian Genocide was not intended to please the Armenian government, it must have been disappointing to hear the lackadaisical reaction of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Those who have followed Pashinyan's previous shameful statements in recent years questioning the facts of the Armenian Genocide should not have been surprised to see him disregard Israel's Cabinet decision. "We see no need to respond because we believe that refraining from entering into the issue of the weaponization of the Armenian Genocide is in the interests of the Republic of Armenia," Pashinyan stated.

However, when the US government recognized the Armenian Genocide, Pashinyan did not consider it to be "weaponization." On the contrary, he was highly enthusiastic about the US Senate's acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide in 2019. He wrote on X (then Twitter): "US Senate Resolution 150 is a victory of justice and truth. On behalf of the Armenian people worldwide, I express our profound appreciation to the Senate for this landmark legislation. This is a tribute to the memory of 1.5 million victims of the first Genocide of the 20th century and a bold step in promotion of the prevention agenda. #NeverAgain."

Pashinyan then added: "On behalf of the Armenian people, I want to thank all members of the US Senate [and] ... the House of Representatives.... We must address words of appreciation to the Armenians of the United States, to all those organizations and individuals who contributed to this important and historic decision." It is noteworthy that Pashinyan expressed his gratitude to the Armenian-American community for this recognition, in stark contrast to his subsequent anti-Diaspora statements.

Later, on April 24, 2021, when US President Joe Biden acknowledged the Armenian Genocide, Pashinyan again reacted very enthusiastically: "It is an important day for all Armenians. Following the resolutions adopted by the US Congress in 2019, President Biden honored the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. The US has once again demonstrated its unwavering commitment to protecting human rights and universal values.... Today we pay tribute to the 1.5 million martyrs, victims of the Ottoman Empire's criminal policies during WWI. The ideologies that led to the Armenian Genocide are still alive today, as demonstrated by the atrocities committed against the Armenians of Artsakh during the recent war."

In addition to reversing his position on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, Pashinyan has, in recent years, contradicted himself on dozens of other issues. Most notably, in 2019, speaking in Stepanakert before thousands of cheering Artsakh Armenians, he declared: "Artsakh is Armenia. Period." After the 2020 war, however, he took the exact opposite position by acknowledging that Artsakh is part of Azerbaijan.

The Middle Corridor Problem

Since 2022, China has poured diplomatic and commercial energy into the Middle Corridor — the trans-Caspian route linking China to Europe via Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus and Turkey — deliberately bypassing sanctioned Russian rail lines. Beijing has treated this corridor as a hedge for its Belt and Road ambitions: a way to keep goods moving westward even if Russia remains a sanctioned partner. It could also be a long-term strategic lifeline in the event of a conflict with the West.

Georgia and Azerbaijan have long been essential nodes in that plan. Armenia, historically on the periphery of these calculations, now looks more consequential as Georgia increasingly tilts toward Russia. It is noteworthy that a Chinese company recently withdrew from involvement in developing a deep-water port at the Georgian Black Sea town of Anaklia.

A durable Armenia-Azerbaijan peace, anchored by the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity, would open new transit options through Armenian territory and stabilize the wider corridor that Chinese logistics firms and state planners have been counting on.

But it would do so on terms set substantially by Washington, not Beijing — a dynamic that Chinese planners are unlikely to welcome even as they benefit from the added stability. Expect China to continue quietly investing in Central Asian and Caucasian infrastructure to maintain its own leverage over the corridor's future, even as it lets Washington absorb the diplomatic cost of brokering peace.

Japan's Quiet Diversification Play

Japan's stakes are less about Belt and Road competition and more about supply chain diversification. Tokyo has spent the past several years deepening ties with Central Asia through its "Central Asia plus Japan" platform, partly as a hedge against overreliance on Chinese-controlled trade routes and partly to diversify access to critical minerals and energy. A more stable South Caucasus, freed from the risk of renewed Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and less susceptible to Russian or Iranian disruption, makes that overland bridge to Europe and the Gulf considerably more attractive for Japanese trading houses

and manufacturers looking to de-risk from both Russian and Chinese chokepoints.

Iran's weakening position compounds this. Tehran has long served, however imperfectly, as an alternative transit and energy partner for Asian economies wary of relying entirely on Gulf sea lanes through the Strait of Hormuz. An Iran squeezed from its northern flank and increasingly isolated in the Gulf is a less reliable partner for that role, pushing Asian energy planners — including in Beijing, despite its 25-year strategic partnership with Tehran — to further diversify overland options through the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The Constitutional Fight Ahead

None of this is guaranteed. The Armenian election outcome is a beginning, not an endpoint. Pashinyan's Civil Contract party won 49.8 percent of the vote, good for 64 of the 105 seats in parliament, retaining its majority but falling short of the two-thirds supermajority needed to amend Armenia's constitution. This complicates efforts to finalize an Armenia-Azerbaijani peace deal.

Azerbaijan has conditioned its agreement to the peace deal on a tweak to Armenia's constitution, removing language that can be construed as a territorial claim on Nagorno-Karabakh, which Azerbaijan regained control of in 2023.

The Constitution contains no direct language claiming Azerbaijani territory. The problem lies instead in its Preamble, which adopts the principles and national aspirations of Armenia's 1990 Declaration of Independence — a document that explicitly references the December 1, 1989, decision on the "reunification" of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, an Azerbaijani territory. As a result, Armenia's constitutional framework is linked to a foundational document that contains a claim to internationally recognized Azerbaijani territory.

Without a constitutional amendment, any peace agreement risks being reversible by a future government, undermining the durability that transit-dependent economies in Asia need before committing serious capital to the region. Crucially, constitutional reform is neither exceptional nor unprecedented. States have repeatedly amended their fundamental laws in pursuit of peace

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China and Japan Calibrating Trans-Caspian Trade Strategies

By Kamran Bokhari

The results of Armenia's parliamentary election in June dealt Russia's bid to reassert its grip on the South Caucasus a serious blow, and the reverberations are not confined to Moscow, Washington and Brussels.

For Beijing and Tokyo, both of which have quietly built stakes in the region as an overland bridge between Asia and Europe, the election's outcome, which reaffirmed Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's authority, carries real geo-economic weight.

Pashinyan's decisive victory represents a clear popular rejection of his Kremlin-aligned opponents and a significant failure for Moscow's attempt to install friendlier leadership in Yerevan. It is also, by extension, a setback for Tehran. Iran was once a fervent supporter of Armenia due to shared hostility towards Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's secular majority Shi'a society is a direct repudiation of Tehran's heavy-handed authoritarian Islamist governance.

Iran and Russia alike have a defense and security agreement and a regional partnership that relies heavily on the same opposition to Western and Turkish influence that Armenian voters just repudiated. With Russia badly weakened by the war in Ukraine and Iran preoccupied with its lingering confrontation with the United States and Israel, both traditional powers in the South Caucasus are more constrained than at any point in decades.

That vacuum matters enormously for Asian economies that have spent the last several years searching for trade routes that do not run through Russian or Iranian territory.



COMMENTARY

Recognition Was the First Step: Now Israel Must Use Its Influence to Promote Justice for Armenians

By Mihran Kalaydjian

Israel's recognition of the Armenian Genocide marked a historic turning point. It ended decades of official silence and acknowledged a truth that historians, scholars, and survivors have long affirmed: the Ottoman Empire carried out the systematic extermination of more than one million Armenians beginning in 1915.

The decision came far later than it should have. For decades, successive Israeli governments balanced historical truth against geopolitical interests, wary of damaging relations with Turkey or disrupting regional strategic calculations. Others feared that recognizing the Armenian Genocide might somehow diminish the singular horror of the Holocaust. History has demonstrated the opposite. Acknowledging one genocide strengthens the universal commitment to preventing all genocides. Memory is not a finite resource; it grows stronger when shared.

Israel deserves credit for correcting the historical record. But recognition should not be viewed as the end of Israel's moral responsibility. It should be the beginning.

Today, Israel has an opportunity to use one of its most valuable diplomatic assets its close relationship with Azerbaijan to encourage respect for human rights, preserve Armenian cultural heritage, and promote lasting peace in the South Caucasus.

No one questions that Israel has legitimate strategic interests in Azerbaijan. The partnership has provided energy cooperation, intelligence sharing, and an important regional counterweight to Iran. Every nation has the right to pursue its security interests.

Strategic partnerships, however, should never require moral silence.

Israel's influence in Baku gives it a unique ability to encourage moderation at a time when Azerbaijan's international reputation is increasingly shaped not only by its geopolitical importance but also by concerns over human rights, cultural destruction, and political repression.

Among the most troubling examples is the systematic destruction of Armenian cultural and religious heritage. The medieval Armenian cemetery at Julfa, once home to thousands of intricately carved khachkars, was erased despite international condemnation. Since Azerbaijan assumed control over Nagorno-Karabakh, churches, monasteries, cemeteries, and other historic Armenian sites have faced mounting concerns over damage, alteration, or destruction.

These monuments are not merely Armenian treasures. They are part of humanity's shared cultural heritage. Once destroyed, they cannot be rebuilt, and their loss diminishes the historical legacy of an entire civilization.

Israel understands this better than almost any nation. Israelis have worked tirelessly to preserve Jewish holy sites and protect archaeological evidence that affirms the Jewish people's historic connection to their homeland. That same principle should apply universally. The preservation of cultural heritage should never depend on politics or nationality.

Equally troubling is Azerbaijan's continued detention of Armenian political leaders captured following the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Among them is Ruben Vardanyan, the internationally respected philanthropist and former State Minister of

Nagorno-Karabakh, whose imprisonment has drawn concern from legal experts, human rights organizations, and governments around the world. Other former Armenian officials also remain imprisoned under circumstances that have raised serious questions regarding due process and the fairness of the proceedings.

The continued detention of prisoners long after active hostilities have ceased does little to advance reconciliation. Instead, it deepens mistrust and reinforces international concerns about Azerbaijan's commitment to justice and the rule of law.

President Ilham Aliyev has sought to position Azerbaijan as a modern, influential, and reliable international partner. That aspiration is understandable. But lasting international respect is earned not only through economic growth, military strength, or diplomatic alliances. It also depends on respect for human rights, protection of cultural heritage, and adherence to international legal norms.

Israel is uniquely positioned to help move Azerbaijan in that direction.

True friends do not simply offer praise. They provide honest counsel when it matters most. Israel has the diplomatic access and credibility to encourage Azerbaijan to protect Armenian religious and cultural sites, ensure humane treatment of detainees, reduce inflammatory rhetoric, and pursue confidence-building measures that can contribute to a more stable and peaceful South Caucasus.

Such engagement would not weaken the strategic partnership between Israel and Azerbaijan. On the contrary, it would strengthen it by demonstrating that security cooperation and moral leadership can co-exist.

The Armenian and Jewish peoples share histories marked by persecution, displacement, and genocide. Both understand the consequences of hatred left unchecked and the devastating cost of international indifference. That shared historical experience creates not only empathy but also responsibility.

Recognition of the Armenian Genocide was an important act of historical justice. It affirmed that truth should never be sacrificed to political convenience.

The next step is ensuring that the lessons of history are applied in the present.

Israel can continue to deepen its partnership with Azerbaijan while encouraging policies that reject ethnic hatred, protect irreplaceable cultural heritage, respect fundamental human rights, and advance genuine reconciliation. Doing so would strengthen Israel's own moral standing while contributing to greater stability throughout the Caucasus.

History remembers nations not only for acknowledging past atrocities but also for using their influence to prevent future injustices.

Israel has taken the first step.

It now has an opportunity to lead by example once again.

[This article was received before it became clear the Knesset would not vote on the recognition prior to its recess.]

(Mihran Kalaydjian is a public affairs, government relations, and strategic communications professional with more than two decades of experience in legislative affairs, public policy, and civic leadership. An Armenian-American community leader and columnist, he writes extensively on government accountability, education, public policy, democracy, and issues affecting Armenia, Israel, and the Armenian diaspora.)

Russia Blocks ‘Armenian’ Flower Imports From Iran

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Russia has told Iran to stop supplying it with cut flowers, saying that they were most probably grown in neighboring Armenia and cannot be sold in the Russian market due to Moscow's sanctions against Yerevan.

In what may have been a related development, the Rosselkhoz nadzor agricultural watchdog has also banned five Turkish companies from exporting fruits to Russia.

“In 2026, the volume of [flower] imports from the Islamic Republic will significantly exceed that of the same period last year,” the Russian government agency said in a statement on Friday. “Phytosanitary certificates list Iran as the origin of the products. However, in terms of their external characteristics and packaging, they are identical to those previously imported from Armenia.”

It said it has therefore asked the Iranian Agriculture Ministry to stop issuing export licenses to local flower companies “until bilateral negotiations are held and the issue is clarified.”

Armenia's flower industry has expanded rapidly in the past decade on the back of exports that reached \$53 million last year. Russia absorbed over 85 percent of those exports. Most of the 700 or so flower greenhouses operating there have therefore been hit hard by the Russian trade restrictions.

On Thursday, July 16, Rosselkhoz nadzor announced a ban on apricots,

cherries and other fruits imported by five Turkish firms, alleging a “systematic detection” of dangerous pests in them. The watchdog did not openly voice suspicions about their Armenian origin.

The ban came during the peak period of cherry and apricot harvesting in Armenia. Many local farmers growing these fruits complain that their price has fallen significantly due to the Russian sanctions. According to unconfirmed Armenian press reports, Turkish and Georgian firms have re-exported Armenian apricots and cherries to Russia in recent weeks.

Citing sanitary grounds, the Russian authorities essentially blocked in late May and early June multimillion-dollar imports of Armenian fruits, vegetables, mineral water, flowers, fish and some alcoholic beverages. Moscow imposed the sanctions amid its growing warnings about the economic cost of Armenia's deepening ties with the European Union.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan ruled out any change in his pro-Western foreign policy after his disputed victory in the June 7 parliamentary elections. He claimed to have reached unspecified “understandings” with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin during their July 6 meeting held on the sidelines of an international trade exhibition in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg. Moscow has not reversed or eased any of its sanctions since then.

China and Japan Calibrating Trans-Caspian Trade Strategies

STRATEGIES, from page 19 and strategic interests. Ireland's constitutional changes under the Good Friday Agreement remain the most prominent example, becoming the bedrock of peace settlement with the UK. Greece, for years, insisted on constitutional changes from Macedonia – ultimately leading to the Prespa Agreement and North Macedonia's path towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

Pashinyan's most viable path is likely a narrow, issue-specific coalition built around the peace-related provisions, framed as technical prerequisites for international normalization rather than partisan concessions. Whether he can secure the handful of additional votes needed will determine whether Armenia's westward drift and the broader opening of the South Caucasus corridor become irreversible.

Why Asia Should Watch Closely

For governments and firms across Asia weighing where to route the next decade of Eurasian trade, energy, and mineral flows, the outcome of Armenia's constitutional fight is not a peripheral post-Soviet story. It is a live test of whether one of the few remaining alternative corridors between Asia and Europe can finally be stabilized – and of who will set the terms.

Chinese and Japanese planners alike have strong incentives to see the peace process succeed, even if neither is in a position to control how it unfolds. Moscow is already working to prevent it. Tehran is watching nervously. Beijing and Tokyo would do well to watch just as closely and strive for a South Caucasus that finally works.

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