



Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II is surrounded by supporters in Yerevan outside the courthouse, on Friday, August 7

Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II Offers Joint Prayer and Patriarchal Message

YEREVAN — On August 7, following the first court hearing in the criminal case against Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and six bishops who are members of the Supreme Spiritual Council, the Monastic Clergy of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the faithful present participated in the Evening Service in the Mother Cathedral of the Only-Begotten of Holy Etchmiadzin. At the conclusion of the service, the Catholicos imparted his blessing and delivered the following Patriarchal message.

Beloved faithful children,
We extend to you Our Patriarchal love, blessing, and appreciation for having first expressed your protest outside the courthouse against the unacceptable actions directed against the Armenian Church, and for now, having gathered together in the Mother Cathedral and offered, with one accord, our prayers to God for our Holy Church and our people.
The Armenian Church is the spiritual cradle and sacred sanctuary of every Armenian. Our Holy Church is the unshakable fortress of our people’s faith, leading them to God and salvation, and the steadfast guardian of Armenian identity and our people’s national and spiritual heritage.

Today, the authorities and state institutions are taking steps to undermine the Church’s authority, restrict her autonomy, and subject her to their will, while
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Judge Recuses Himself from Unconstitutional Attempt to Try Catholicos Karekin II and Six Clerics

ECHMIADZIN — Judge Hakob Manukyan recused himself on August 7, from the trial of Catholicos Karekin II and six clerical members of the Supreme Spiritual Council on the grounds of conflict of interest. Manukyan had been given his license to be a lawyer by Ara Zohrabyan, the defense counsel representing the Armenian Church’s clerics. The case against the head of the Armenian Church, unprecedented in the history of the church, has been widely criticized as an unconstitutional interference in internal church affairs. (See related story about new judge inside.)
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Knights and Daughters of Vartan Advance Their Mission at 108th Grand Convocation

PHILADELPHIA — The 108th Annual Grand Convocation of the Knights and Daughters of Vartan was held in Philadelphia July 29 to August 2, bringing together nearly 200 delegates, members and guests from across the United States. The gathering served as the organization’s premier annual business meeting, featuring strategic planning sessions, leadership workshops, annual reports, elections and special recognitions honoring individuals for their outstanding service, leadership and dedication.

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Man of the Year Harry Cherken (photo Gary Altoonian)

Firebird Opens Region’s Largest AI Data Center in Armenia

By Ani Ghulinyan Firebird officially opened the largest artificial intelligence data center in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region on August 8, marking the multibillion-dollar project that Armenian officials say will position the country as a strategic hub in the global AI economy.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, NVIDIA Vice President Rev Lebedian, Kazakhstan’s Deputy Prime Minister Zhaslan Madiyev, and US Chargé d’Affaires David Allen attended the ceremony in Hrazdan, along with foreign ambassadors, investors, and officials.

“Today Armenia and Kazakhstan are building their own infrastructure to build their own intelligence at home,” said NVIDIA founder and CEO Jensen Huang in a video statement addressed to the guests attending the launch.

The facility represents the first phase of a project Firebird says will eventually deploy more than 70,000 NVIDIA Blackwell and Vera Rubin graphics processing units (GPUs) and reach 300 megawatts of computing capacity by the end of 2027. According to the company, this scale would rank the center among Europe’s largest AI infrastructure platforms.

Pashinyan linked the opening to Armenia’s deepening ties with Washington.

“Exactly one year after signing the US–Armenia Memorandum of Understanding on AI and technology cooperation with President Donald Trump, we are now seeing this major achievement,” he said.

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Azeri Court Upholds Jail Terms For Former Karabakh Leaders

An Azerbaijani appeals court on August 6 upheld lengthy prison sentences against seven former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh captured by Baku in 2023.

Five of them were sentenced to life imprisonment and the two others received 20-year jail terms in February at the end of what Armenian lawyers and human rights activists see as a sham trial. A military court in Baku also handed



Former political and military leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh stand trial in Baku, November 4, 2025

slightly shorter prison sentences to eight other Karabakh Armenians tried together with them.

Ruben Vardanyan, an Armenian-born businessman who briefly served as Karabakh premier in late 2022 and early 2023, was sentenced to 20 years in prison in a separate trial two weeks later. Amnesty International denounced both trials as a “travesty.”

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NEWS from ARMENIA

Lawmaker Questions Armenia's Approach to Amnesty

YEREVAN (Pan.am) — No amnesty bill has been introduced in Armenia for seven years and nine months, Liana Gasparyan, a lawmaker from the Strong Armenia parliamentary faction, said during a parliamentary session. She addressed her remarks and questions to Arusyak Julhakyanyan, the Civil Contract faction's nominee for chair of the Standing Committee on State and Legal Affairs, Panorama.am reported on August 11.

"I believe this is not simply another legislative proposal, but an institution that directly concerns people's liberty and criminal justice policy," Gasparian said.

Julhakyanyan outlined the government's approach, saying it does not consider amnesty an appropriate path and that issues of early release should instead be considered in individual cases.

"We have followed that path and adopted the relevant legislative amendments. Amnesty is not an acceptable path for us. We believe each specific case requires an individual approach," she said.

Foreign Ministry Offers to Meet with Veronika Zonabend

YEREVAN (Pan.am) — The Foreign Ministry has verbally conveyed a meeting proposal to Veronika Zonabend, wife of Ruben Vardanyan, who is being held in an Azerbaijani prison. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ani Badalyan confirmed the information, RFE/RL reported on August 11.

The ministry clarified that a proposal to meet Zonabend had already been discussed before her August 10 statement, but was actually conveyed to her after the statement the previous day in which she said no one from the government had contacted her, despite previous statements that contact had been made.

Asked who specifically from the Foreign Ministry would meet Zonabend, the ministry spokesperson said "the meeting will be organized cooperatively by the competent agencies."

According to RFE/RL, the timing of the meeting is currently being coordinated.

In June, the wife of Ruben Vardanyan, who has been sentenced to 20 years in prison in Azerbaijan, announced a humanitarian initiative under which she intends to organize a visit to Baku by an international delegation of women.

Noting that Armenian citizens have for years been deprived of regular and independent humanitarian contact with their relatives, Zonabend appealed to Azerbaijan's ombudsperson. She asked for the delegation's visit to Baku to be facilitated, for a meeting to be arranged with Armenian prisoners held at Umbaki prison, and for parcels, photographs and letters prepared by their families to be delivered to them.

Yerevan Given Until December to Call Referendum on EU Entry

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia should call a referendum on joining the European Union by December or risk losing its membership in a Russian-led trade bloc, a senior Russian diplomat warned on Tuesday, August 11.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and the leaders of three other Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) member states effectively set that deadline in a joint statement issued during a May 29 summit in Kazakhstan boycotted by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. They instructed their prime ministers to present "possible consequences" of suspending Armenia's membership in the EEU at their next summit planned for December.

"It is clear that if the call for a referendum is not heeded by that time, the leaders will take this fact into account when determining appropriate further joint steps," Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin told the TASS news agency.

Galuzin said Armenians should specifically be asked whether they want their country to leave the EEU for "the prospect — not entirely obvious — of joining the EU in the future."

Putin insisted that the referendum should be held "as soon as possible" when he spoke with Pashinyan by phone late last month. Pashinyan again rejected the demand during a meeting of EEU prime ministers in Kyrgyzstan last week.

Pashinyan downplayed the fact that his government enacted last year a law declaring the start of a "process of Armenia's accession to the European Union." He said it does not mean that his country "has a chance to become an EU member today." Yerevan must first formally apply for EU membership and then receive a candidate status from the 27-nation bloc, argued the Armenian premier. Galuzin dismissed Pashinyan's "confusing statements" on the subject made in recent months.

For their part, Armenian opposition leaders have described Pashinyan's European integration drive as reckless, saying that the EU will not admit the South Caucasus in the foreseeable future. No EU member state or institution has voiced explicit support for such a prospect so far.

"What was the point of passing the declarative law which proclaimed that we

are starting the EU membership process?" Anna Grigorian, the parliamentary leader of the opposition Hayastan alliance, said on Monday.

Pashinyan implied earlier that his country cannot be kicked out of the EEU without its consent. His critics countered that even if he vetoes its exit from the bloc, Russia will still be in a position to impose crippling economic sanctions on Armenia, which is heavily dependent on it for trade and energy.

Moscow already banned in late May and early June imports of Armenian agricultural products and mineral water. Russian officials have threatened to take other punitive measures such as a sharp rise in the price of Russian natural gas supplied to Armenia,

PUTIN INSISTED THAT THE REFERENDUM SHOULD BE HELD "AS SOON AS POSSIBLE" WHEN HE SPOKE WITH PASHINYAN BY PHONE LATE LAST MONTH.

curbs on Russian tourists visiting the country and tougher requirements for hundreds of thousands of Armenian migrant workers in Russia.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on August 7 again rejected Russia's calls to hold soon a referendum on Armenia's accession to the European Union and said his country wants to remain part of a Russian-led economic bloc for now.

Pashinyan also toned down his criticism of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as he attended a meeting of the prime ministers of EEU member states held in Kyrgyzstan.

"As you know, Armenia adopted in 2025 the Law on the Commencement of the Accession Process of the Republic of Armenia to the European Union," he said in a speech. "The strategic goal of adopting this law is to create an alternative for our country."

"We understand that simultaneous membership in the Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union is impossible.

However, the mere fact of adopting this law does not mean that Armenia has a chance to become an EU member today."

Yerevan, he went on, must first formally apply for EU membership and then receive a candidate status from the 27-nation bloc.

"Without completing most of these steps, holding a referendum on this issue would be meaningless and would mean expecting our citizens to answer a question that simply does not exist at this point," added Pashinyan.

He further insisted that his European integration drive does not contradict Armenia's obligations to Russia and the three other ex-Soviet states making up the EEU. Russian officials have claimed the opposite ever since the Armenian parliament passed the law in question in April 2025.

As Russian-Armenian tensions rose further this spring, they declared that Yerevan can no longer combine its pro-Western foreign policy with EEU membership essential for the Armenian economy. Moscow went on to essentially ban multimillion-dollar imports of Armenian agricultural products. In a July 27 phone call, Russian President Vladimir Putin again told Pashinyan to hold the referendum "as soon as possible."

Putin first voiced the demand following two European summits held in Yerevan in early May. The presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan backed it in a joint statement with Putin adopted at a May 29 summit boycotted by Pashinyan.

The Armenian premier reacted scathingly to that statement in late June. But he said on Friday that he is "grateful to my EEU counterparts for recognizing Armenia's legitimate right ... to create economic alternatives for itself."

Two days after his call with Putin, Pashinyan declared that the Russian sanctions against Yerevan mean the EEU is "paralyzed" and herald "the beginning of the EEU's end." He was more cautious in his speech in the Kyrgyz town of Cholpon-Ata, criticizing the "restrictions" but not mentioning Russia by name.

The Russian Foreign Ministry on Thursday accused Yerevan of trying to "blackmail" Moscow and misleading Armenians about the economic consequences of its drift towards the EU.

Armenian Oppositionist Elected Parliament Vice-Speaker

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A senior member of the main opposition Strong Armenia alliance, Aram Vartevanyan, was elected a deputy speaker of the Armenian parliament on Monday, taking up a position legally reserved for the opposition minority.

The ruling Civil Contract party, which holds 64 seats in the 105-member National Assembly, did not say until the last minute whether it will enable Vartevanyan's election. Dozens of his deputies grilled him on Friday about his political views and past and present political activities. The party's parliamentary leader, Arusyak Manavazian, said shortly before the vote that it will give him enough votes to become vice-speaker.

Vartevanyan's candidacy for the post was swiftly backed by former President Robert Kocharian's Hayastan alliance,

the other opposition group represented in the new parliament. The 36-year-old lawyer was elected to the country's former parliament on the Hayastan ticket in 2021. He subsequently resigned his seat and returned to legal practice.

Vartevanyan has been a member of Strong Armenia leader Samvel Karapetian's legal team for the past year. He has also represented other opposition figures prosecuted by the Armenian authorities. He spoke on Friday about an "unprecedented" number of political prisoners in the country.

Vartevanyan told reporters following his election that he is mindful of "difficulties" awaiting him in the new capacity. He suggested that speaker Ruben Rubinyan will not let him chair parliament sessions.

Rubinyan and his two other deputies are senior members of Civil Contract. No lawmakers representing Strong Ar-

menia or Hayastan voted for them.

Both opposition groups rejected as fraudulent the official results of the June 7 parliamentary elections that gave victory to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's party. They faced calls from many supporters to refuse to take up their seats in order to further undermine the parliament's legitimacy. Their leaders opted against a boycott, saying that their presence in the parliament will not prevent them from trying to topple Pashinyan through street protests.

Strong Armenia and Hayastan also decided to nominate the chairpersons of four of the parliament's 12 standing committees. Under Armenian law, these positions are also reserved for their representatives. Civil Contract indicated on Monday that it will not block their election. The ruling party will install the heads of the most important parliamentary committees.



ARMENIA

Firebird Opens Region's Largest AI Data Center in Armenia

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NVIDIA has announced plans to invest directly in Firebird, following an earlier investment from CoreWeave. Meanwhile, Dell Technologies will supply the servers that will power the facility. The company Perplexity has been named as one of the Firebird's first customers, using the infrastructure to power its AI answer engine. Hrazdan Mayor Sevak Mikayelyan called it "an important and historic day" for the city, adding that the project would put Hrazdan "on the global technology map."

The project has been backed by major investments from six financial institutions. In March, they announced the signing of "the first syndicated loan agreement in the history of Armenia's banking system," roughly \$300 million.

A syndicated loan is usually offered by a group of lenders — in this case Ardshinbank, Acba Bank, Evocabank, Fast Bank, C-Quadrat Ampega Asset Management Armenia Fund, and Amundi-Acba Asset Management Fund — who work together to provide credit to a large borrower. Each of the banks contributes a certain amount to the loan and shares the risk. This, along with billions of direct investments from Firebird and its partners, is meant to fund the data center's construction.

The total investment in all of the phases of the project is estimated to reach \$5 billion, and Firebird says the complete campus will eventually employ 300 people.



The grand opening of the Firebird AI factory in Hrazdan, Armenia, on August 8, 2026, featuring a \$500 million phase-one computing facility powered by NVIDIA accelerated computing alongside executives and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

Part of Firebird's computing capacity will be reserved for Armenian universities, startups, and government-supported research programs.

However, although the project is estimated to have a positive impact on the country's economy and establish Armenia as a player in the AI industry, public discussion in Armenia has raised questions about its potential environmental impact on the

country's water resources and the ability of the power grid to support the work of the data center.

In an interview with Hetq, Firebird co-founder Alexander Yesayan addressed the criticism about the data center's impact on Armenia's energy capacity. He claimed that it is a problem that the country often produces more electricity than it can consume. In his words, the center is even "a

rescue" for the industry, helping to utilize the surplus that would otherwise be wasted.

However, in June, Pashinyan himself informed the parliament that the country no longer had the power surplus it had a year earlier. This means that the project's full capacity will depend on the new generation and storage capacity that is still under construction.

Another major concern is how much additional pressure the water facility would put on the country, which already faces water scarcity. In the same interview, Yesayan said that the Hrazdan site uses a closed-loop water cooling system that recirculates rather than discharges water.

In response to concerns on social media about water management, Hrant Khachatrian, head of the machine learning group at Yerevan State University (YSU), used the example of YSU's small-scale data center to illustrate that neither it nor Firebird uses drinking water for cooling purposes, but rather glycol, which can be used for several years. A mixture of glycol and purified water is the primary coolant used in closed-loop systems to efficiently remove extreme heat from high-density AI GPUs.

The company is simultaneously expanding in Kazakhstan and plans to achieve approximately two gigawatts of AI infrastructure capacity worldwide by 2028.

(This story was originally published by www.oc-media.org on August 10.)

MP Calls for Creating Virtual Artsakh State

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Artsakh National Assembly member Arevik Petrosyan has spoken about electing a new parliamentary speaker, the governance crisis, and the need to create a virtual state of Artsakh, stressing the importance of unity.

She said that when addressing the election of a new speaker of the Artsakh National Assembly, it is necessary, in her view, to revisit developments that took place in Artsakh, as current events have become a continuation of the governance crisis that began there, Pastinfo reported on August 11.

To emphasize her point, the lawmaker recalled remarks by Artsakh's third president, Bako Sahakyan.

"In 2007, after he had just been elected, we met and I asked him, 'How are things going?' Bako Sahakyan had been president for only a few months. He said that if Ar-

menia were not there, everything would completely fail for us, and it would be very difficult without Armenia. He said, 'We cannot govern without Yerevan.' I remember those words well. The point is that the Republic of Armenia always supported our leadership. Artsakh was not governed entirely on its own; Armenia provided substantial support, including state support in terms of governance. Today, all of that is gone. We do not have that support, and the governance problem has further deepened the existing crisis. It continues, while personal factors have also begun to play a major role," she said.

According to Petrosyan, Armenia's leadership was aware of those realities.

"They knew that we were very predictable, knew our behavior, and knew us. They left everything up to us, knowing perfectly well that we would ruin everything. The issue is governance. We

brought the governance crisis from Stepanakert here, and we have been unable to resolve it here either. It remains urgent and continues to deepen. Who 'took' what is irrelevant now. As a lawmaker, I say responsibly that the major looters have stepped aside because there is nothing left to loot here either. There is no money anymore, no large sums. And because there is none, nobody talks about Artsakh anymore," she explained.

The lawmaker also stressed that unless urgent problems are addressed, the Artsakh parliament could gradually dissolve into its surroundings and disappear.

"We have a great deal of work to do. I proposed to State Minister Nzhdeh Iskandaryan that we collect the data of all Artsakh residents. Whatever information exists must be preserved electronically. We should create our virtual state, establish our government and create a website

where people can log in and vote. One day we will grow old and fall ill; we are not eternal. Should the National Assembly not function after us? What will happen in 10 or 20 years? We need to devise a mechanism for electing new lawmakers and new leadership. We must regulate all of this because what we currently have has exhausted its potential," she said, stressing that all Artsakh Armenians should unite around the issue.

Petrosyan believes that under the current circumstances, a speaker of the Artsakh National Assembly could be elected by consensus.

"For example, I proposed a very young candidate, Aramays Aghabekyan. He is young, energetic, will not 'pocket' money, has a vision, is forward-looking and knowledgeable. But many disagreed with me. In any case, we need to unite around that body," the lawmaker said, adding that Ashot Danielyan was also a very suitable candidate.

Arevik Petrosyan also said that despite having no personal sympathy for Samvel Babayan, she believes that, under the current circumstances, Artsakh needs a leader like him.

"Samvel Babayan has a major advantage. Back in Stepanakert, during the final months, I proposed several times that Arayik Harutyunyan appoint Samvel Babayan as state minister. We could at least have tried that. At the National Assembly's final joint session on August 28, 2023, when we discussed our issues throughout the night, I again proposed appointing him. Today, we have no one else with his background, and most importantly, he possesses information. He led our army during the most difficult period and worked with leaders such as Robert Kocharyan, Vazgen Sargsyan and Serzh Sargsyan," she said, stressing that personal considerations should be set aside.

Armenia Sets 500,000-dram Birth Grant for Every Child

YEREVAN (Pan.am) — For every child born on or after September 1, the one-time birth grant will amount to 500,000 drams, regardless of the child's birth order, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs announced on August 11.

Applications can be submitted online through the E-Social platform or at any territorial center of the Unified Social Service.

The ministry presented answers to the most frequently asked questions from citizens concerning benefits related to childbirth.

It noted that state support provided in Armenia following the birth of a child includes maternity benefits, the one-time birth grant, childcare benefits until the child turns two, and a monthly benefit of 50,000 drams following the birth of a third

or subsequent child in a family. State assistance is also available when a child is born into a family repaying a mortgage.

Both employed and unemployed citizens are eligible for maternity benefits.

The maternity benefit for unemployed people is set at 172,698 drams. For employed people, the amount is calculated according to the procedure established by law, based on their average monthly salary.

Until the child turns two, a monthly childcare benefit of 31,600 drams is provided to a parent who is not on childcare leave, 37,500 drams to a parent who is on childcare leave, and 69,100 drams to a rural resident parent on childcare leave — the combined total of 37,500 and 31,600 drams.

Thus, a parent living in a rural community may receive 69,100 drams per month until the child turns two if the parent has been continuously registered in a rural settlement for at least one year and the child is also registered in a rural settlement at the time of application.

Applications for the childcare benefit can be submitted after the child reaches 70 days of age. Applications can be filed online through the E-Social platform or at any territorial center of the Unified Social Service.

Following the birth of a third or any subsequent child in a family, the 50,000-dram benefit is paid monthly until the child turns six.

Applications can be submitted online or at any territorial center of the Unified Social Service.



ARMENIA

Catholicos Karekin II Offers Joint Prayer and Patriarchal Message

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also distorting the understanding of national identity and reshaping sacred symbols and cherished memorials in pursuit of temporary political expediency. Indeed, throughout history, the autonomy of the Church has been one of the foremost guarantees of a nation’s well-being and the strengthening of the state.

It is with deep sorrow that We witness our Holy Church and her clergy being subjected to persecution by the authorities.

Through unlawful and fabricated criminal proceedings, several clergymen, a national benefactor, and other devoted sons and daughters of the nation and the Church have been arrested and deprived of their liberty.

We have just returned from the first court hearing in the proceedings initiated against Us and members of the Supreme Spiritual Council - two archbishops and four bishops - on baseless and unjust charges. The hearing did not take place because the presiding judge recused himself.

Dear faithful, We are filled with faith

and determination to defend Our lawful and just rights, guaranteed both by the Constitution of our state and the fundamental principles of international law.

With this awareness and sense of responsibility, and with love for Our nation and Homeland, We shall continue to fulfill the mission entrusted to Us by the Lord despite every hardship and obstacle, for, as the Psalmist says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1). Without doubt, Our trust is in God, and while Our ministry is devoted to the pious Armenian people throughout the world and to Our beloved Homeland.

At this hour of our prayerful unity, We express with paternal love Our appreciation to you, to all Our devoted children in Armenia and throughout the Diaspora, to national and public organizations, attorneys, and representatives of the academic, educational, cultural, and political spheres — all who, in these difficult circumstances, steadfastly and zealously support the Mother Church and her mission for the

good of the nation.

We must remain steadfast and, together, make tireless and determined efforts so that lawlessness, discrimination, and intolerance may cease in our country, and that the rhetoric of hostility and hatred may find no place.

We must continue our tireless efforts so that our Homeland and national life may be renewed in the spirit of brotherly love and harmony; that truth, the rule of law, and justice may prevail in our lives; that the age-old ordinances and traditions of the Church may be honored; and that the religious feelings of the faithful may not be offended.

My Patriarchal exhortation to all of you is to remain vigilant and prudent, not to yield to provocations or malicious schemes, but to stand firm in faith and hope, for God brings forth good for His Holy Church and His faithful people even from every evil design and every trial.

It is through trials that our faith is strengthened, our steadfast devotion to God, our Homeland, and the Church is

manifested, and our unwavering fidelity to our sacred national and spiritual values is affirmed.

Therefore, in the face of external and internal threats, let us strengthen our national unity, enrich our path through deeds of devotion to our Homeland and service to our people, and, as the Apostle exhorts us, “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” (Ephesians 6:10).

We believe that, by the mercy of God and through the selfless devotion and love of our people, our Holy Church will overcome these trials as well and secure new achievements in the course of her mission, for the welfare and glory of all Armenians.

Our eyes are fixed upon God, and our efforts are directed toward building our Homeland and serving our people. May God bless the Armenian State and preserve our people—in the Homeland and throughout the Diaspora—in peace and tranquility, today and always and forever.

May the grace, love, and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and with us all. Amen.

Judge Recuses Himself from Initial Attempt to Try Catholicos Karekin II and Six Clerics

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The alleged basis for the case is non-compliance with a court order reinstating Bishop Gevorg Saroyan, former Primate of Aragatsotn Diocese, whom the Catholicos had defrocked on January 27, 2026. This court order itself is an unconstitutional interference in the internal affairs of the church.

Hundreds of supporters of the Catholicos greeted him, yelling “Vehapar, Vehapar” [Your Holiness, Your Holiness], as he approached the Vagharshapat courtroom. Supporters of the Catholicos throughout the world in social media (including, for example, the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party publication Baikar)

later praised the judge’s withdrawal from the case and hoped other judges would follow his example.

Even though this case is evidently unconstitutional, it is expected that it will still be transferred to another judge in Vagharshapat, who would set a new trial date.

Meanwhile, statements criticizing the indictment, which dates back to February of this year, and calling for its withdrawal have been issued by many Armenian Church bodies and organizations like the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU; see the full English-language text in this issue), Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia, and the heads

of several Armenian dioceses, including, so far, the Dioceses of the Eastern United States, Canada, Germany, Iraq, Romania, and Syria.

The Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul expressed its solidarity with Catholicos Karekin II and stated that the court case “deeply offends the patriarchal dignity of the Armenian Church.”

Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia called the indictment “unacceptable and condemnable” and called on state officials “to show respect for our church and the person of His Holiness [Catholicos Karekin II].”

The AGBU, after calling for the withdrawal of the indictment, declared “we believe [it] has no basis in law or in our historical traditions.”

Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate, and the Diocesan Council of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America stated: “We believe that bringing matters of ecclesiastical governance before the civil courts is inconsistent with centuries of precedence and the constitutional recognition of the Armenian Church’s

right to self-governance.”

The World Council of Churches, a global fellowship of Christian churches, in its August 7 statement wrote, “we express our concern about undue interference in inner church matters.”

Catholicos Karekin, after a service on the evening of August 7, delivered a sermon in Echmiadzin expressing thanks to his supporters. He declared, “Today, the authorities and state institutions are taking steps to undermine the Church’s authority, restrict her autonomy, and subject her to their will, while also distorting the understanding of national identity and reshaping sacred symbols and cherished memorials in pursuit of temporary political expediency. Indeed, throughout history, the autonomy of the Church has been one of the foremost guarantees of a nation’s well-being and the strengthening of the state.”

However, he said, “We are filled with faith and determination to defend our lawful and just rights, guaranteed both by the Constitution of our state and the fundamental principles of international law” (see the text of this speech in this issue).

Another Judge Assigned to Case Against Armenian Church Leader

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A 29-year-old judge has been assigned to preside over the trial of Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II just days after one of his colleagues recused himself from the unprecedented case denounced by Armenian opposition and Diaspora groups.

Karekin and six archbishops and bishops went on trial on Friday, August 7, amid Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s continuing efforts to depose the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The accusations leveled against them stem from the defrocking in January this year of another, pro-government bishop involved in Pashinyan’s controversial campaign. Their lawyers maintain that Armenian courts and law-enforcement bodies have no jurisdiction over internal church affairs. The Armenian constitution guarantees the ancient church’s independence and separation from the state.

The case was initially assigned to Hakob Manukyan, a judge of the court of first instance in the Armavir province. He recused himself from it moments after the start of the trial, citing a conflict of interest.

Court records posted on the Datalex.am national judicial database confirm Manukyan’s reported argument that he received his lawyer’s license from Karekin’s chief lawyer, Ara Zohrabian, at a time when the latter headed Armenia’s national bar association. This fact “may raise doubts about

my impartiality in this case,” he said.

Some critics of the Armenian government have suggested that Manukyan simply did not want to become the first Armenian judge to try a Catholicos. Even Soviet authorities had never prosecuted any of Karekin’s predecessors.

Datalex.am also shows that another Armavir judge, Serzh Rushanyan, has taken over the case. Rushanyan, who took the bench in 2023 at the age of 26, has yet to set a date for the next court hearing.

The criminal proceedings against Karekin have been condemned by not only the Armenian opposition but also key Armenian Diaspora organizations. One of them, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), said last week that they “raise serious questions about religious freedom and respect for the rule of law” in Armenia. The World Council of Churches (WCC) likewise deplored the Armenian authorities’ “undue interference in inner church matters.”

Pashinyan began pressuring Karekin to step down shortly after WCC hosted in May 2025 an international conference in Switzerland on the preservation of Nagorno-Karabakh’s Armenian religious and cultural heritage. Addressing the conference, Karekin accused Azerbaijan of committing ethnic cleansing in Karabakh and illegally occupying Armenian border areas.

AGBU Statement on the Indictment of The Catholicos of All Armenians

The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) released the following statement on the eve of the trial of the Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II in Yerevan:

The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) is deeply concerned about the persecution of the leadership of the Armenian Church. The Government of Armenia’s criminal indictment of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and six other bishops — arising from an internal ecclesiastical matter concerning the leadership of a diocese — raises serious questions about religious freedom and respect for the rule of law.

AGBU respectfully calls for the withdrawal of this indictment, which we believe has no basis in law or in our historical traditions. As it has done in the past, AGBU stands ready to play a constructive role in resolving this situation, if called upon.

Under its Constitution and national laws, the Republic of Armenia recognizes the Armenian Apostolic Church as the National Church, acknowledges its right to self-governance, and protects religious freedom. Accordingly, questions concerning the suitability of bishops for ecclesiastical office are appropriately addressed through Canon Law and the established processes of the Church.

AGBU respects Armenia’s democratically elected government, its political authority, and the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Armenia. At the same time, AGBU remains steadfast in its respect for our Armenian Church and its leadership, as elected in accordance with Canon Law and ecclesiastical authority, and for the Church’s enduring role in preserving Armenian identity around the world.

August 5, 2026



INTERNATIONAL

Mecca Defense Pact: New Opportunities For South Caucasus and Azerbaijan

BAKU (JAM news) — The joint defense agreement signed in Mecca on August 7 marks an important step towards shaping the region's security architecture, establishing collective defense commitments between three leading Muslim-majority states.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed the agreement. It stipulates that an armed attack on one party will be treated as an attack on the other two.

The agreement also has the potential to influence the future security architecture of the South Caucasus.

The agreement builds on the Saudi-Pakistani Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement signed in September 2025. Official statements describe it as a purely defensive mechanism that does not target any country, including Iran, and has no religious or sectarian basis.

The parties stress that the agreement remains open to expansion. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said that, technically, the deal resembles Article 5 of NATO. He said the parties plan to establish a ministerial-level committee and a secretariat based in Saudi Arabia. Erdogan's vision includes expanding the initial three-member group and potentially involving other countries, including Egypt.

The strength of the agreement lies in the complementary advantages of its members. Turkey has NATO's second-largest army and a developed defense industry, particularly in unmanned aerial vehicles. Saudi Arabia has significant financial resources, energy reserves and a unique symbolic status in the Muslim world. Pakistan, meanwhile, has a large and experienced military and is the only Muslim-majority country with nuclear weapons.

At the same time, the agreement does not establish an integrated command structure like NATO's. The parties are still working out its operational details.

In comments to Report on August 9, Fidan said he did not rule out a similar joint defense agreement with South Caucasus countries.

He highlighted Turkey's strategic role as a link between the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Mediterranean and Europe. He also said that completing the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia could open new security and economic opportunities. In the future, this could create conditions for a similar mechanism.

The statement does not amount to an official invitation. However, it opens the door to discussions about long-term scenarios

for the region.

Azerbaijan already maintains close relations with all three members of the agreement. The 2021 Shusha Declaration provides for mutual assistance with Turkey. Turkey, Azerbaijan and Pakistan also cooperate in a trilateral format, including summits held in Lachin in 2025. Defense industry cooperation is expanding, while Saudi Arabia's investment interest is growing. Although Baku remains outside the formal agreement, it maintains privileged relations with all three capitals.

Israel is a particularly important issue in this context. Some social media posts have claimed that Azerbaijan would supposedly "give up recognition of Israel" if it joined the agreement.

Azerbaijan's strategic partnership with Israel — including arms supplies that played an important role in the 2020 war, oil exports, intelligence cooperation and technology — is long-standing and stable.

There is no evidence in official sources that the members of the Mecca agreement have demanded or made it a condition for Azerbaijan to sever ties with Israel or withdraw its recognition of the country. Baku has repeatedly shown that it can act as an unofficial mediator between Turkey and Israel. Formal participation in the agreement could test this balance, but Azerbaijan's current policy prioritizes a flexible, multi-vector foreign policy. Claims that "Azerbaijan must give up recognition of Israel to join the agreement" are not supported by specific evidence and remain rumors for now.

Benefits and Risks

Potential benefits for the South Caucasus and Azerbaijan include stronger collective deterrence, expanded defense industry and technological capabilities, an influx of Saudi capital, synergies with the Middle Corridor, stronger symbolic ties between Turkic and the broader Muslim worlds, and greater strategic autonomy amid questions surrounding external security guarantees.

Azerbaijan could benefit from closer ties among its partners without formally joining the agreement, while retaining room to maneuver in its relations with the West, Israel, Central Asia and other partners.

There are also risks. These include the possibility of becoming involved in Middle Eastern conflicts, including tensions involving Iran; potential pressure on relations with Israel and Azerbaijan's image in the West; and possible negative effects on the peace process with Armenia or ties with Iran and Russia. Another risk is the new format's institutional immaturity, particularly the absence of a clearly defined

commitment to automatically deploy military forces.

Azerbaijan's tradition of an independent, non-aligned foreign policy makes full membership in the agreement in the near future unlikely.

Azerbaijan's multi-vector foreign policy does not mean automatically distancing itself from new regional initiatives. Baku seeks to balance the interests of its partners and tends to join new platforms when suitable opportunities arise. Azerbaijan's decision in 2026 to join the Board of Peace, established at the initiative of US President Donald Trump, as a founding member provides a practical example of this approach. Close ties with Turkey and Pakistan, the trilateral Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan format and the Shusha Declaration could also increase Baku's interest in the Mecca format.

The 2026 war with Iran demonstrated the practical limits of this balance more clearly. Azerbaijan officially declared neutrality, repeatedly stressed its support for Iran's sovereignty and said its territory was not being used against third countries. However, several international media outlets, including CNN, reported that Israeli special forces and intelligence structures were allegedly deployed on Azerbaijani territory during the war. Baku called these claims "completely unfounded".

Several think tanks, including the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), described Azerbaijan's position as a "carefully maintained balance between its officially declared neutrality and practical rapprochement". Turkey's decision not to take part in the war and its advice to Baku to maintain a cautious position also influenced this approach.

This dynamic takes on additional significance in the context of the Mecca agreement. The agreement's principle that "an attack on one is an attack on all", along with Saudi Arabia's response to Iranian strikes during the war, shows how collective defense commitments can operate during periods of real tension. Azerbaijan's deep strategic partnership with Israel, its allied relations with Turkey and Pakistan, and its expanding ties with Saudi Arabia have led some experts to believe that this rapprochement could increase Baku's interest in formats similar to the Mecca agreement.

For Azerbaijan, therefore, the main question is not so much whether to join the agreement, but how to benefit from closer ties among its existing partners — Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Israel — without taking on formal commitments. This is precisely the flexibility that its multi-vector policy provides.

INTERNATIONAL

Armenia, Lithuania Discuss Strategic Partnership Implementation

YEREVAN (Pan.am) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan held a telephone conversation with Lithuanian Prime Minister Mindaugas Sinkevicius, on August 11, congratulating him on his appointment as prime minister and wishing him success in carrying out his responsibilities.

The Lithuanian prime minister, in turn, congratulated Pashinyan on his reappointment as prime minister. He expressed confidence that joint efforts in the near future would provide new impetus to cooperation between the two countries.

The two discussed ongoing work toward the joint declaration on the strategic partnership between Armenia and Lithuania. Both sides emphasized the importance of further expanding and deepening ties established across various sectors.

They also discussed issues related to the development of relations between Armenia and the European Union.

CSTO May Consider Suspending Armenia's Voting Rights on Nov. 11

YERVAN (Panorama.am) — The issue of depriving Armenia of voting rights in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) may be discussed at the organization's summit scheduled for November 11, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin said this, TASS reported on August 11.

"Any decision concerning the possible application of restrictive measures against one of the organization's members falls entirely within the competence of the Collective Security Council, which comprises the heads of CSTO member states and is authorized to make such decisions on the basis of the organization's Charter. As for your question, the applicable provisions are contained, in particular, in Articles 20 and 25. The Council's next meeting will be held in Moscow on November 11," he said, responding to a question about applying the relevant Charter article concerning failure to fulfill obligations.

According to Galuzin, the CSTO Charter is an international treaty that must be implemented in good faith by all parties, including the obligation of each member state to contribute to financing the activities of CSTO bodies.

"Yerevan's refusal to participate in the organization's work and its failure to sign annual decisions concerning its budget merely mean that it is not exercising a right it possesses, but do not terminate Armenia's obligations to make its national contribution on time.

"Based on the principle of maintaining institutional effectiveness, any international organization has procedures stipulated by its founding documents for such cases. The CSTO is no exception," Galuzin said.

Azeri Court Upholds Jail Terms For Former Karabakh Leaders

RULING, from page 1

Vardanyan did not appeal against his sentence, unlike the seven other former Karabakh leaders. As one of them, Davit Ishkhanyan, explained in June, they did so merely to pave the way for their appeals to international courts.

"It is clear to all of us that the [appeals court] verdict has been made a long time ago and it is not the judicial panel that makes that verdict," Ishkhanyan said in a fresh statement communicated to his family by phone and publicized ahead of the ruling's announcement. "That body will only announce what has already been decided."

The former Karabakh Armenian leaders

were captured right after the 2023 Azerbaijani offensive that restored Baku's full control over Karabakh and forced the region's Armenian population to flee to Armenia. They all deny a long list of war crimes charges levelled against them.

"We give worthy rebuffs to those arguments and false claims that concern the past, present and issues of honor of our people and that undermine our people's national pride with false information, fabricated justifications," said Ishkhanyan.

Prospects for the release anytime soon of these and other Armenian prisoners remained uncertain even after the initialing of an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty in Washington last August. Neither the treaty

nor a separate declaration signed by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan at the White House commits Baku to freeing them.

Pashinyan and other Armenian officials insist that Yerevan has been doing its best to try to secure their release. Their critics dismiss these assurances.

Vardanyan has likewise accused the Armenian government of being indifferent to the prisoners' fate. He has repeatedly lambasted Pashinyan in statements from an Azerbaijani prison released through his family. Ishkhanyan has gone farther, saying that Pashinyan's administration does not want Baku to free them.

Six Children of an Armenian Refugee, and the War They Chose: A London Family in WWII

By Jorge Posbeyikian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

There is a Spitfire in the Imperial War Museum in London, serial number R6915. The pilot who flew it shot down four German aircraft and twice brought it home so badly damaged he was forced to land. He was the son of an Armenian who had fled the massacres at Smyrna, and a Frenchwoman who once bought a derelict biplane at auction and stood it in the back garden for her children to play in. He was killed over the Libyan desert at age 24.

His brother was executed at Flossenbürg, five weeks before the war in Europe ended. On the wall of his cell, before he died, he tapped out a message to his wife in Morse code. A Danish prisoner memorized it and carried it out of the camp.

One sister ferried Spitfires across England. The youngest lived until 2017 and spent her life building a theory of how human groups survive.

Six children. Four of them went to the war.

And here the historian meets a wall: with the single exception of the youngest, not one of them left any account of why — no diaries of conviction, no letters of explanation. Their reasons must be read almost entirely from what they did, as though a cryptic mantle had been drawn over their thoughts, leaving only their acts exposed. It is the question the story asks in its first breath rather than its last: what makes six children of a refugee from one genocide run, all of them, toward the fire of another — and can we ever really know?

The Father

Berge Rupen Agazarian reached Britain in 1911 as a teenager with almost nothing, having escaped the persecution of the Armenians at Smyrna. He built an electrical engineering firm, married a Frenchwoman, Jacqueline Le Chevalier, and had six children. He died in 1944, in the United States, where he had gone to open opportunities for his sons after a war whose end he did not live to see — and he never learned what had become of his second son.

The airplane came from the mother's side. In 1923 Jacqueline bought a war-surplus Sopwith Pup at a Croydon auction for five pounds and stood it in the garden as a plaything. Three of the four boys would end up in the Royal Air Force.

Noël

He went up to Oxford in 1935, after Trinity College had turned him down. The

reason, as he told it, was his blood: the college could not take him because “in 1911, when the last coloured gentleman had been at Trinity, it had really proved most unfortunate.” He went to Wadham instead, and became a friend of Richard Hillary, who would immortalize him in *The Last Enemy* as “cosmopolitan, intelligent, and a brilliant linguist.”

Five years after that rejection he was flying a Spitfire over the Channel in defense of the country whose oldest university had turned him away for his ancestry. Through the Battle of Britain he shot down German aircraft over Portland and Portsmouth; one of his Spitfires, R6915, survives in the Imperial War Museum today. In 1941 he was posted to North Africa. On May 16, over Libya, he was shot down and killed at twenty-four. His squadron's logbook records it without ceremony — the take-off time entered, the landing time left blank: “F/O Agazarian has not yet returned.”

Jack

The second brother joined the Special Operations Executive (SOE), Churchill's secret service for sabotage and resistance behind enemy lines. Trained as a wireless operator under the code name Marcel, Jack parachuted into France at the end of



Jack Charles Stanmore Agazarian (1915–1945). SOE wireless operator, Prosper network; executed at Flossenbürg, March 29, 1945.

1942 and made his way to Paris to join Prosper, Britain's most important network in the country.

Prosper collapsed within weeks — not through treachery so much as its own dangerous improvisation: too few radio operators, too many agents sharing the same flats and cafés. By the summer of 1943, the arrests had begun. Jack, sent back into France to find out what remained, was arrested walking into a meeting the Germans themselves had arranged. He was tortured at Fresnes prison and, his historian records, told them nothing. He was moved to Flossenbürg and executed there on March 29, 1945.

And there, on the wall of his cell, he tapped out his last message in Morse — to Francine, his wife, herself an SOE courier



A Sopwith Pup of the type Jacqueline Agazarian bought at auction in 1923 which stood in the family garden

who had worked beside him in Paris under the name Marguerite.

As for the message he had tapped out, we do not know. Every source records the same two facts — that the message existed, and that it reached her. In a story whose subject is the cryptic mantle over what these six thought and felt, it is almost too fitting that his last words, like his reasons, should be unreadable.

The Others

Levon, the eldest, was the one who came back — flying Hurricanes over Calcutta, then patrolling behind Japanese lines in Burma with Wingate's Chindits. Monique began the war nursing the burned faces of aircrew at East Grinstead, decided to fly anyway, talked her way past a medical that judged her too short, and ferried Spitfires until 1945; told later that pilots were not to fly while pregnant, she took to crossing the airline booking hall with her handbag held in front of her.

And Yvonne, the youngest by a decade — ten years old when the war began —



Monique Agazarian (1920–1993), Air Transport Auxiliary ferry pilot — note the ATA wings

went on to build a theory of how human groups survive, and traced it, in her memoir, to the nursery floor, where “one or other of ‘the boys’ would climb over my nursery gate and give me lessons on strategy.” Two of them were dead within five years. She named her own son Jack.

The Question, Heavier

A boy escapes the destruction of the Armenians and reaches England with nothing. Thirty years later, four of his children are in uniform against a regime carrying

out an extermination of its own — and he dies without learning what became of them. They were not fighting for a country that had entirely accepted them: one of them had been refused a place at Oxford for his blood, and died for England all the same. The point is not that Britain deserved them. It is that they chose it anyway — and that the choice was made by a whole household, not by one exceptional child.

Which returns us to the question we began with, still unanswered and now heavier: what does a family transmit, that four children out of six should make the same decision, alone, and never explain it? The mantle stays drawn. We are left, as Yvonne was, with their acts — and with a Morse message on a wall that no one alive can read.

Sources & Method

Three registers are kept distinct. Facts — dates, units, places, awards — come from the sources below. Open controversies — whether Prosper was carelessly lost or deliberately sacrificed — are left unresolved. Inferences about what these six thought or felt are declared as such: with the exception of Yvonne, none of them left any testimony of their motives. The content of Jack's Morse message is not reproduced because it exists in no public record.

Principal sources: Imperial War Museum — sound interview with Marie Monique Agazarian (catalogue 9579) and the Private Papers of Flight Lieutenant J. C. S. Agazarian (Documents.16204); RAF Operations Record Books (AIR 27), No. 274 Squadron; Dulwich College War Record 1939–1945; Croydon Airport Society. Published works: Richard Hillary, *The Last Enemy* (1942); M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in France*; Francis J. Suttill, *Shadows in the Fog* (2014); Susan P. Gantt, “In Memory of Yvonne Agazarian, 1929–2017,” *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* (2018); Richard Riding, “Aggie's Airline,” *Aeroplane Monthly* (Nov. 1987).

Image note: the photographs are period images gathered from public collections (Imperial War Museum, Croydon Airport Society, and public-domain sources by age). The IWM licenses its own image of Spitfire R6915.

Research, historical interpretation, and the selection and arrangement of material — and final responsibility for them — are the author's. Drafting assistance: AI language model (Claude Opus 4.8, Anthropic); every fact was checked against the sources listed at the end.



Noël le Chevalier Agazarian (1916–1941). Battle of Britain fighter pilot, No. 609 Squadron; killed over Libya, May 16, 1941.

Community News

Armenian Assembly Welcomes Senate Committee Advancement of S.2432 Honoring Former Secretary of the Navy Paul Ignatius

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America welcomes the recent advancement by the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of legislation introduced by Senator Adam Schiff (D-CA) to designate the United States Postal Service facility in Glendale, California, as the “Paul Ignatius Post Office.”

The bipartisan measure S. 2432 honors former Secretary of the Navy Paul Ignatius, whose extraordinary lifetime of public service, leadership, and dedication to the nation has left an enduring legacy. A companion bill introduced by Congresswoman Laura Friedman (D-CA) passed the U.S. House of Representatives in June.

The bipartisan measure S. 2432 honors former Secretary of the Navy Paul Ignatius, whose extraordinary lifetime of public service, leadership, and dedication to the nation has left an enduring legacy. A companion bill introduced by Congresswoman Laura Friedman (D-CA) passed the U.S. House of Representatives in June.

The bill would designate the post office at 6444 San Fernando Road — where Ignatius worked as a temporary clerk while a college student, on the same street his grandfather built their family home nearly a century ago — as the “Paul Ignatius Post Office.”

“We welcome the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs for advancing this well-deserved tribute to Secretary Paul Ignatius,” stated Armenian Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny. “This bipartisan legislation ensures his legacy of integrity and patriotism will be remembered for generations to come. We thank Senator Schiff for his continued leadership on this measure, first introduced in the 117th Congress, and look forward to Senate passage.”

Born in Glendale to Armenian parents from the Kharpert region, Secretary Ignatius served as the 59th Secretary of the Navy from 1967 to 1969 under President Lyndon B. Johnson, and previously served as Assistant Secretary of the Army and Under Secretary of Defense under President John F. Kennedy. He was the highest-ranking Armenian American in the U.S. government during his tenure. He later served as President of The Washington Post and President of the Air Transport Association.

In September 2023, the Armenian Assembly presented Secretary Ignatius with the George Deukmejian Award during a special tribute in Washington, D.C. Upon his passing on November 6, 2025, a memorial service was held at the Washington National Cathedral, and he was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery.



Leon Semonian and his daughter Wendy Semonian Eppich with a birthday cake (photo courtesy Semonian family)

Leon Semonian Inspires As He Celebrates His 95th Birthday

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN, Mass. — Birthday parties for most 95-year-olds are generally sedate affairs, but Leon Semonian is not like most people. His birthday bash at the Oakley Country Club in Watertown on July 12 featured guests of all ages and a belly dancer, with whom he danced energetically. Semonian is a well-respected philanthropist who, together with his wife, Marion, has helped many organizations and individuals and organizations in the Armenian community over the years. Leon provided inspiration for all those younger than him, and a fun occasion to boot.

Life Adventures

Semonian spoke to the *Mirror-Spectator* about his life and career. The third child of Levon and Veron Semonian (in birth order, Suren, Grace, Leon and Bob), Leon grew up in Watertown, where he graduated high school in 1950. After serving in the US army, he graduated from Suffolk University.

Leon played the trombone in high school and when he went to Fort Dix, N.J., he was assigned to the army band. Leon said that while he did not ask for this assignment, it turned out to be a gift that worked out well for him.

Since this was during the Korean War (1952-54), Leon would go and play for troops getting ready to go to the West Coast and then onward to Korea.

see SEMONIAN, page 8



Leon and Marion Semonian with their son Mark and the latter's Cessna 210 airplane at Hanscom Field Airport in Bedford, MA, c. 2007 (photo courtesy Leon Semonian)

Projects for Peace Names Anoush Baghdassarian 2026 Alumni Award Recipient

MIDDLEBURY, Vt. — Projects for Peace and the Kathryn Wasserman Davis Collaborative in Conflict Transformation at Middlebury College have named Anoush Baghdassarian, JD, a licensed attorney and cofounder of the Rerooted Archive, winner of the 2026 Projects for Peace Alumni Award.

“Projects for Peace alumni award winners are exemplary representatives of the spirit that drives Middlebury’s experiential learning opportunities around the world. We are proud to count Anoush among the growing ecosystem of peacebuilders who have emerged from this program,” said Middlebury College President Ian Baucom.

The annual award provides up to \$50,000 in support of ongoing peacebuilding efforts of past Projects for Peace grant recipients who demonstrate innovation and persistence in working for peace and transforming conflict. Baghdassarian will use the award to advance her ongoing work with Rerooted, a community-centered digital archive and advocacy organization that preserves Armenian stories, strengthens identity, and supports justice efforts for Armenian communities facing displacement, violence, and erasure.

Baghdassarian received a 2017 Projects for Peace grant as an undergraduate at Claremont McKenna College for a project cofounded with Ani Schug, then an undergraduate at Pomona College, focused on documenting the stories of Syrian-Armenians who had resettled in Armenia during the Syrian conflict. Their project, “Restorative Memory: Eternalizing and Empowering Narratives of Syrian-Armenian Refugees,” sought to preserve whole histories: family memories of the Armenian Genocide, community life in Syria, experiences of war and displacement, and the work of rebuilding in Armenia. “Ani and I are over the moon,” Baghdassarian says. “Thank you all so much for this incredible honor and opportunity. We are so grateful!”

What began as a summer project has since grown into Rerooted, an organization founded on the idea that no matter how many times Armenians have been rerouted by conflict, they have continued to reroot in strong, thriving communities. Today, Rerooted has grown to include more than 25 communities, collected more than 400 testimonies, and trained more than 90 team members in its work of preserving memory and using it for action. For Baghdassarian this announcement is only the start of how the award will raise awareness of Rerooted. “We can’t thank you enough for believing in this project and we are so excited to stay closely involved with you all and for all the events celebrating this important work.”

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Leon Semonian Inspires as He Celebrates His 95th Birthday

SEMONIAN, from page 7

Every week, the band did a show in Philadelphia. It also performed on the Kate Smith Show in New York. While playing the trombone was a hobby, for some years it was an important sideline in Leon's life. He periodically played with Louis King's Orchestra from his senior year in high school, and also played later with four or five dance bands locally, including Ken Reeves and George Graham, until graduating college in 1958.

Leon majored in business in college and after he graduated, he was accepted to work at Hornblower and Weeks as a trainee. He said, "For some reason, I had stocks and bonds on my mind. Somewhere in the mid-1950's after high school, I said, gee, I would like to get into that business." Hornblower and Weeks was absorbed by another firm, and in this period there was a lot of consolidation and mergers so that the name of the firm where he worked changed often. Most of the firms in Boston were considered Yankee firms, and it was unusual for non-WASPs to be in the front office. Consequently, the area where Leon, an Armenian, was working with three Jews and an Italian, was nicknamed the Gaza Strip.

Semonian said that the five of them got along very well and had a good time together. Eventually, Leon's firm turned into Morgan Stanley, and after over three decades, Leon retired from there as a senior vice president in November 2021.



Marion and Leon Semonian, seated, with, from left to right, grandsons Wesley, Wilson and Austin, and their parents Wendy and Bill Eppich (photo courtesy Semonian family)

When Semonian was 35 years old, he married his wife, Marion, who is ten years younger than him. Leon related how he parlayed a ride he offered her back home into a dinner and then a show and then a club. Within a year, they got married.

Unfortunately, he related, Marion was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, which progressively got worse. Though she has been in a wheelchair for a long time, and only has use of her left hand, the couple stays very active, going out to events and dinners. At home they have a team of helpers. They even managed to travel abroad in 2005. In particular, Leon said, "I was so happy that she was able to go and see Armenia. It was a great trip and she really enjoyed it." Their daughter accompanied them and their son met them in Munich, Germany.

Aside from his own brokerage business, in which he would buy and sell stocks, futures and bonds, and offer recommendations to clients, Leon ended up in the publishing field due to his son Mark. After Mark graduated college, he proposed setting up a magazine which became the very successful Improper Bostonian magazine.

Leon owned 80 percent, while his brother owned the rest of the shares. Mark ran the publication for a decade before handing it off to his sister, Wendy, who published the Improper for another 16 years.

Leon said, "I respected what they were doing and tried not to dictate anything."

The Armenian Community

Leon spoke both English and Armenian as a child, and related that when he was very young, his father was a deacon at St. James Armenian Church in Watertown, and so he would go with him to church every Sunday and sang in the choir. He was also a member of the Armenian Church Youth Organization Juniors.

He continued his community involvement as he grew older, and supported many organizations. He said, "I feel very proud to be an Armenian. We as Armenians must do our best to help each other, especially the organizations. I went out of my way to make sure I helped."

He was deeply affected by the 1988 earthquake in Armenia and supported it through the Fund for Armenian Relief of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church. He also supported Armenia and Artsakh through the Armenia Fund and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research during the Artsakh war in the 1990s.

He has helped many other Armenian organizations, including the Armenian Heritage Park, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (including recently its Global Leadership Program), the Armenian Assembly of America, the Armenian EyeCare Project, the Armenian National Committee of America, the Ararat Association of Rhode Island, the Armenian Mirror-Spectator, and many of the local churches in the Watertown and greater Boston area. He is active in the Knights of Vartan and is also a member of the Council of Armenian Executives.

He and Marion created the Leslie Semonian Memorial Fund to honor their eldest daughter, who passed away in 1999, and through it created the Leslie Semonian Computer Center at St. James Armenian Church. The plaque, dated December 10, 2000, has a photograph of Leslie and an apt description of her as someone "who was truly a participant in life, and not an observer." Every year the Semonians continue to contribute further to this fund.

Fr. Arakel Aljalian, who has been pastor of St. James since 1999, declared, "St. James is very grateful and thankful for the generosity of the Semonian family in establishing this endowment fund and continuing to support it over the years. It has allowed the St. James office to carry out its mission with modern technology and equipment."

Leon and his family continue also to support another project in Leslie's memory, the Leslie's Links Ewing Sarcoma Fund at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute. This fund, Leon said, now has close to two million dollars.

In addition to his own Leon and Marion Semonian Charitable Trust, Leon also put together and continues to manage the Robert A. Semonian Charitable Trust in honor of his brother, who passed away in 2016. The latter trust contributed to the Armenian Tree Project, which in turn named a park in Armenia Semonian Park. Leon said that it is in a good position to continue to make good donations to various Armenian causes as well as non-Armenian ones.

He noted, "I enjoy giving. That is one of the pleasures I get out of life."

Speakers

At the party, Leon's daughter, Wendy Semonian Eppich, deftly served as the master



Leon Semonian, front row left of director on WFIL TV Philadelphia with the 173rd Army Band of Fort Dix, NJ, 1953 (photo courtesy Leon Semonian)

of ceremonies, and also helped behind the scenes in some of the arrangements. Aside from the food, music and dancing, there were several speakers.

Leon's old friend and work colleague, John D. Spooner, declared in a humorous vein that he had worked with Leon for almost 50 years, and as he had delivered the same speech at each of Leon's many birthday parties, he would just use his old notes.

Spoooner, aside from being an investment adviser, is the author of over 10 fiction and non-fiction books and has appeared on many television, radio and internet programs, including Wall Street Week, CNBC, Fox News, NPR and Bloomberg National Radio.

He said that he has written about Leon as a distinct character in the Boston financial world for many years and calls him Leo the Lion. He featured Leon in a Boston Magazine article with that title. He said that he asked one of the firm's managers after he worked with Leon for a long time what he thought Leon had done better than anybody else. Spooner said that the manager declared, "He made more schmucks into millionaires than anybody else."

He declared that in certain ways, Leon was always a macho man, so you didn't necessarily know if he had a tender side, yet Leon was the best husband Spooner had ever seen in terms of his love. There is

continued on next page

BAIKAR WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

SAVE *the* DATE

10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2026

ST LEON CHURCH HALL
FAIRLAWN, NEW JERSEY

Details to follow!

THANK YOU FOR 10 YEARS OF
SUPPORT, TRUST, AND COMMUNITY.

COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page
nobody like him, he said, when it comes to his love for his family.
Another old friend, Paul Bogosian, then took the microphone and exclaimed that Leon is so Armenian. Bogosian said he has known Leon for several decades, initially

es, there is only joy that you can see in his face and you know you have made him happy by asking about them. Though he prematurely lost his eldest daughter, Leslie, to cancer, Koutoujian said that he was not embittered. Instead, it just made Leon and his family stronger.



Marion and Leon Semonian at the party (photo courtesy Semonian family)

through Leon’s brother Bob. Bogosian exclaimed, “He has an extraordinary, generous spirit.”
Paul and Leon traveled together to Los Angeles this past February where the latter was honored by the Knights of Vartan. Bogosian declared that Leon is a proud Knight and has been very much involved all his life in defending the heritage and culture of the Armenians. He does this with his checkbook, Bogosian said, with his spirit of always contributing, always showing up when anybody calls him from any Armenian group.
Paul read a poem he composed and dedicated to Leon.
Sheriff of Middlesex County Peter Koutoujian spoke next. He declared that those attending were not present that day only because it was a 95th birthday, but rather, he said, “We’re here because it is Leon Semonian, a man who we love so deeply who is still so active today. There is still not an event that I go to now at which I don’t see Leon.”
He added that it is remarkable how so many decades of marriage did not diminish but actually strengthened Leon’s love for his wife Marion, despite the difficulties they had to overcome. Moreover, said Koutoujian, when you ask Leon about his children and he speaks about their success-



Grandson Austin Eppich speaks from the heart (photo Aram Arkun)

“Leon,” he continued, “filled his life with compassion and love and support for his family, for his grandsons, and for his community. He invested in our community like no one else, and he was successful in his investments.”
Usually at a 95th birthday, there are not that many people left to celebrate who are close to a person, but with someone like Leon who has been to events every year for decades, his reach, Koutoujian pointed out, was much deeper than just one generation.
Koutoujian presented Leon with a citation from his office recognizing his birthday and lifelong commitment to the Armenian community and his family.
Leon’s grandson, Austin Eppich, 13, spoke last, succinctly declaring, “I love you, Grandpa.”
Wendy Eppich admitted that when one’s father turns 95, one is in a state of extreme appreciation “times ten,” because it is a great gift to be able to have such a moment.
Eppich recalled that despite the heartaches her father has faced, he is a celebrator of life. “So,” she concluded, “to me, he’s pretty incredible.”
The evening continued with Leon dancing with the belly dancer for quite some time. The Armenian band continued to play after this, creating a festive atmosphere for guests of all ages. Leon later said that he plans to have his next birthday party when he turns 100.



Sheriff Peter Koutoujian prepares to give Leon Semonian a certificate of recognition (photo Aram Arkun)



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

Nancy Agabian donated \$50 to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* in memory of her parents, who were longtime subscribers.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Knights and Daughters of Vartan Advance Their Mission at 108th Grand Convocation

CONVOCAION, from page 1

The Ardashad Tahlij (Lodge) and Shooshanig Otyag (Chapter) of Philadelphia hosted the Grand Convocation. Their leadership, together with dedicated members and volunteers, organized the week-long event with exceptional care and professionalism. From the moment attendees arrived, the committee ensured every guest felt welcomed and that every meeting, activity and event was thoughtfully curated and seamlessly executed. Many thanks to the entire planning committee, especially Co-Chairs Past Commander Raffi Berberian and Past Matron Araxi Bozadjian.

During the convocation, both Knights and Daughters Grand Councils were re-elected.

The 2026-27 Grand Council of the Knights of Vartan consists of: Grand Commander, Robert Avakian; Grand Lieutenant Commander, Gregory Norsigian; Grand Chaplain, Der Stephan Baljian; Grand Recorder, Aram Arkun; Grand Treasurer, Arman Manoukian; Grand Master of Ceremonies, Antranig Mardiros and Grand Sentinel, Haig Gulian.

Grand Commander Robert Avakian stated that “Each Grand Convocation reminds us that the strength of the Knights of Vartan lies in our shared commitment to service, fellowship and the preservation of our Armenian heritage. As we look to the future, we remain united in our mission to strengthen our communities and support Armenia and Armenians wherever they may be.”

The 2026-27 Grand Council of the Daughters of Vartan consists of: Grand Chairwoman, Lily Sarkissian; Grand Associate Chairwoman, Tanya Bukucuyan; Grand Chaplain, Nancy Tutunjian Burdman; Grand Secretary, Lucy Ohanian Murad; Grand Treasurer, Hilda Beatrice Adil; Grand Mistress of Ceremonies, Christine Akyemeniciyan and Grand Sentinel, Emma Artun.

“Every Convocation is a reminder that we are more than an organization—we are a family united by our Armenian heritage and our commitment to serving others. The enthusiasm and dedication shown this week gives us great confidence in the future,” said Grand Matron Lily Sarkissian.

Activities and Presentations

This year’s Grand Convocation held special significance as the United States is commemorating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, which took place in Philadelphia and the city also holds a special place in

the history of the Knights of Vartan, since it was founded there in 1916. In recognition of this shared heritage, delegates had the opportunity to visit some of Philadelphia’s most iconic historic landmarks before the formal meetings began. A guided city tour included visits to Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, along with time to explore the Young Meher sculpture by renowned Armenian-American artist Khoren Der Harootian. Surrounded by stone boulders brought from every region of Armenia and Artsakh, the memorial stands as a symbol of the Armenian nation’s enduring resilience, unity and spirit.



Knights and Daughters of Vartan Gala at the Grand Convocation (photo Alec Balian)

The Knights and Daughters held two full days of business meetings, training and workshops.

Liaison and Director of the Knights of Vartan Charities, Inc. Branch in Armenia, Gohar Palyan, presented an update on the organization’s ongoing humanitarian and development initiatives in Armenia. Highlights included full-year scholarships for 12 students at several universities; two school and one home renovation projects; and the continued success of the Economic Sustainability Program (ESP) — one of the organization’s flagship initiatives, which supported 91 small business projects.

The ESP supports displaced Artsakh and local Armenian families by helping them establish or rebuild businesses through grants for essential equipment, tools and other start-up needs. One inspiring success story is that of Kristine Hakobyan, a hairstylist who owned a beauty salon in Artsakh before being forcibly displaced with her family in 2023. After relocating to Armenia, she applied for assistance through

the Knights of Vartan and received an ESP grant to rebuild her livelihood from the ground up. Investing more than 60 percent of the total project cost herself, Kristine rented a commercial space, registered her business, purchased the necessary equipment and created employment for five people. Today, her salon is a thriving business, providing financial stability for her family while contributing to her local community.

Since its inception, \$213,885 has been funded for 13 different business types: bakeries, beauty salons, machinery, tailors, small shops, husbandry, agricultural projects and more. These projects together cov-

er 7 regions of Armenia.

All of the recipients of these grants continue to live in Armenia after a year of receiving the grant, indicating the positive psychological impact of the ESP in addition to its financial or business aspect. These families from Artsakh were able to stay occupied and employed, which helped them temporarily escape the harsh reality of losing Artsakh and the trauma of war.

Reports were presented on several projects which were implemented during the last fiscal year, including scholarships in both the US and Armenia, the renovation of schools and kindergartens and the support of research on Armenia and Armenians.

The Knights of Vartan organized a workshop moderated by Avak Sentinel Haig Gulian. He clearly and concisely presented the results of a national survey of the membership. This was followed by a second spirited workshop moderated by NS Jake Bournazian and Past Grand Commander Dr. Gary Zamanigian on Membership Development and Recruitment.

The Daughters of Vartan organized two workshops, the first with Dr. Taline Andonian, discussing the effect of generational trauma and the second, a Professional Women’s panel featuring Dr. Markrete Krikorian, Araz Majnoonian and Ani Jilozian, moderated by Past Grant Matron Lisa Kradjian.

Honorees

Each year, the Knights and Daughters of Vartan pay tribute to one man and one woman whose extraordinary dedication, leadership and generosity have strengthened and enriched the Armenian community.

The Knights 2026 “Man of the Year” award was presented to Harry S. Cherken Jr, a retired attorney, civic leader and dedicated advocate for the Armenian community. He was formerly Managing Partner at Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath and he has been widely recognized as one of Pennsylvania’s leading real estate lawyers. Cherken has served on the boards of major corporations and numerous educational and charitable institutions. A founding governor and former chair of the Armenian Bar Association, he is currently President of the Howard Karagheusian Commemorative Corporation and he is Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia for the Greater Philadelphia Area. He also provided pro bono legal services to secure Armenia’s Embassy in Washington, D.C. and its UN Mission in New York, for which he received a presidential citation from Armenia. His longstanding commitment to Armenian heritage includes helping establish the Armenian Heritage Walk in Philadelphia. He delivered a masterfully crafted speech with warmth and authority that commanded the room.



Knight of the Year Nishan Atiniazian with Grand Commander Robert Avakian (photo Gary Altoonian)

The 2026 “Woman of the Year” award was presented to Vicki Shoghag Hovanesian. She is a distinguished Armenian-American philanthropist, cultural leader and humanitarian whose decades of service have left a lasting impact on the Armenian community worldwide. A champion of culture, education and humanitarian causes, she has led major fundraising efforts for disaster relief, educational institutions, medical programs and cultural initiatives, including helping establish Chicago’s AGBU Cultural Center, securing the future of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, advancing continuing medical education in Armenia and playing a pivotal role in bringing the landmark Armenia exhibition to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. A passionate advocate for Armenian art and heritage, she currently serves as Cultural Advisor to the Embassy of the Republic

continued on next page



Attendees danced and enjoyed themselves.



COMMUNITY NEWS



Group photo of the Daughters of Vartan

from previous page
of Armenia in the United States and Armenia’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations. Her extraordinary leadership has been recognized with the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, medals from the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians and multiple U.S. Congressional commendations. Without question, Vicki Shoghag Hovanessian is the embodiment of unwavering dedication and compassion; her impact, leadership and generosity set a standard that inspires everyone.

In 2023, the Knights of Vartan Grand Council introduced a new honor to recognize extraordinary service, the “St. Vartan Mamigonian Knight of the Year.” This year the Knights of Vartan was proud to honor Nishan Atinizian. For more than 50 years, Nishan Atinizian has exemplified leadership, philanthropy and service to the Armenian community. A successful businessman, he played a pioneering role in Armenia’s economic development by leading the acquisition of the Armenia Marriott Hotel — one of the country’s first major foreign investments after independence — and founding Armenia’s first private residential mortgage finance company. Together with

his wife, Margrit, he has supported numerous humanitarian, educational and religious initiatives, including the Nishan and Margrit Atinizian Senior Center in Gyumri. A devoted supporter of the Armenian Church and many Armenian organizations, his lifelong contributions have earned him Armenia’s Anania Shiragatsi Medal, the Armenian Church’s St. Gregory the Illuminator Medal, the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, the St. Vartan Award and numerous other civic and humanitarian recognitions.

The following Knights were honored for their dedication to the organization for the Year 2026. The 110th Anniversary Lifetime Achievement Award was given to four Past Grand Commanders; Steven Adams, Steven Kradjian, Dr. Gary Zamanigian and Bob Barsam. Economic Sustainability Committee members Nshan Kesecker, Dr. Gary Assarian and Howard Atesian were honored for their dedicated efforts throughout the past year. Special Recognition Awards were given to Michael Demirchian, Ken Nahigian, Der Stephan Baljian, John Paklaian, Dro Bush and Haig Gulian.

Several Tahlijes received recognition for their dedication and activities to advance the mission of the Knights of Vartan: Ar-

daz, Ghevont and Sevan Lodges of Los Angeles, Nareg-Sharvarshan Lodge of Detroit and Ardashad Lodge of Philadelphia.

The Knights and Daughters of Vartan are committed to continue many projects in Armenia and USA and to develop new programs. They include but are not limited to the Economic Sustainability Program (ESP), the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia NGO – building homes for low-income families, scholarships from the Tabibian Family Fund of the Knights of Vartan at Yerevan State University, American University of Armenia, and the National Polytechnic University of Armenia, scholarships for USA students and other charitable initiatives in Armenia and the Diaspora.

The Knights of Vartan Inc. is a fraternal leadership and service organization of Armenian men dedicated to safeguarding and perpetuating the Armenian heritage and cultural traditions. Its membership represents the spectrum of the leadership of the Armenian community. It was founded in 1916 in Philadelphia and is based in the United States with 22 local chapters which support Armenian causes around the world.



Grand Matron Lily Sarkissian with Woman of the Year Vicki Shoghag Hovanessian (photo Gary Altoonian)

The Daughters of Vartan is an Armenian Sisterhood associated with the Knights of Vartan. It was organized in 1933 in Philadelphia. The Daughters of Vartan is an organization of women whose members are committed to the intellectual, personal and leadership development of Armenian women and families around the world, while also promoting Armenian heritage and Christian values through its 18 chapters across the US.

For more information about the Knights and Daughters of Vartan, visit <http://kofv.org>.

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OBITUARY

Marguerite ‘Peggy’ (Bargamian) Sarkisian

Dedicated Educator, Committed to Armenian Community

WALTHAM, Mass. — Marguerite “Peggy” (Bargamian) Sarkisian passed away on August 6, 2026.

Peggy was the wife of the late Levon “Leo” Sarkisian and the devoted and loving mother of Christopher Sarkisian and David Sarkisian and his wife, Jennifer. She was the sister of Lucy Sisoian and aunt of Paul Sisoian. Peggy is also survived by many cousins and extended family members.

Peggy grew up in North Providence, RI, and attended Rhode Island College. She later attended Harvard University, where she earned her master’s degree in education with a focus on guidance. She dedicated

her professional life to education, working as a schoolteacher and guidance counselor in Rhode Island, Indiana and Massachusetts. Her 15 years with the Waltham Public Schools were an especially meaningful part of her career. Peggy deeply valued the people she worked alongside and the friendships and lasting relationships she formed with her colleagues over the years. For 60 years, she made Waltham her home and became a treasured part of the community.

Throughout her life, Peggy remained deeply connected to her Armenian heritage and community. She was a lifelong member of the Armenian Youth Federation



with a good book. She will be remembered most for the warmth she shared, her generosity toward others, and the love and devotion she gave to her family.

Funeral services was held at Saint Stephen’s Armenian Church, Watertown, on Thursday, August 13.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to Saint Stephen’s Armenian Church in Peggy’s memory.

Interment followed at Newton Cemetery, Newton.

Shirley Onanian

Dedicated to Church

WATERTOWN — Shirley Onanian, a longtime resident of Watertown, passed away peacefully on July 29, 2026, at the age of 96.

She was born in Cambridge on May 9, 1930, to the late Arakel and Sarah (Najarian) Onanian.

Shirley was a devoted lifelong parishioner at St. James Armenian Church in

Watertown, where she served her church community for most of her life. She was deeply involved in the life of the parish, attending services regularly, volunteering at weekly bingo, serving as an active member of the Women’s Guild and in recent years, volunteering in the church office.

In 2015, Shirley fulfilled a lifelong dream when she joined the church pil-



grimage to Armenia, an experience she treasured and often spoke of as one of the highlights of her life. Her love of her Armenian heritage, and dedication to her church were constant sources of joy and purpose.

When Shirley was younger, she loved to travel. She and her sister, Helen, enjoyed exploring the United States and traveling abroad. She was part of the Watertown Savings Bank Club 50 and would frequently take advantage of trips and events that were offered. She also had a lifelong love of the arts and enjoyed attending theater performances, reading and watching Jeopardy!

Shirley was the sister to her late siblings Helen Onanian, George Onanian and Berch Onanian. She is survived by her sister-in-law Jane Onanian.

She was the aunt of David Onanian and his wife Christine; Sarah Keith and her husband Russell; Amy Ilfrey and her husband Campbell; Scott Onanian and his wife Kelly; and the late Doug and Dana Onanian. Shirley was also a great-aunt to Emma, Sophia, Sam, Ella and the late Nora.

In addition to her family, Shirley leaves behind her beloved church community, extended family, and many dear friends.

Funeral Services were held at St. James Armenian Church, Watertown on Thursday, August 6. Interment followed at Ridgelawn Cemetery in Watertown.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made in her memory to St. James Armenian Church.

(AYF) and the Armenian Relief Society (ARS), organizations that held a special place in her life and reflected her enduring commitment to her Armenian heritage and community. It was through her involvement in the AYF that Peggy met Leo, beginning a life together centered on family, Armenian heritage, and community.

Peggy’s greatest joy was her family. She treasured time spent together, especially sharing dinners and conversation around the table. Her generous and welcoming nature made family and friends always feel at home in her company. When enjoying quieter moments, Peggy could often be found

Sponsor a Teacher Program

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



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Tekeyan Cultural Association
Metro Los Angeles Chapter



FAMILY FUN DAY

Angels vs Phillies

Saturday, August 29, 2026, 6:30 PM
Angel Stadium of Anaheim

Fireworks after the game
\$33 per ticket

Purchasing deadline: Sunday, August 23, 2026
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Arts & Culture

Veteran Film Composer, Orchestrator Jeff Atmajian to Be Inducted in Fresno Valley Music Hall Of Fame

By Christine Vartanian Datian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

FRESNO — Jeff Atmajian, an accomplished composer, arranger, orchestrator and conductor will be inducted into Fresno's Valley Music Hall of Fame on September 16. The class of new inductees was recently announced. The official installation ceremony will be held at Roger Rocca's Dinner Theater on the corner of Olive Avenue and Wishon Avenue in the Tower District in Fresno.

Atmajian was born in Fresno in 1960 to Ron and Donna Atmajian. He began private classical piano lessons at the age of 8, and at age of 15 he began additional private study of traditional jazz piano then later added studies in progressive (modern) jazz



Jeff Atmajian

piano (3 teachers simultaneously). At the age of 14, he began composing when he gained an interest in popular music. In addition to studies in mathematics and computers, Jeff received a composition degree at California State University, Fresno (CSUF) in 1984. It was at this point that his love for symphonic and chamber music began to flourish, and he played piano for vocal groups and ballet classes, local theatre productions and the University Jazz Band. He was also highly involved in the music department at Northwest Church during these years.

Atmajian has expressed great appreciation for Central Valley, where his mother, sister Carrie, her husband and two nephews currently reside. He said, "I'm grateful for this wonderful city which I still consider home because I come back so often to see family and friends here. It's a true honor to be celebrated by the very city that gave me the foundation which has led to my success."

Atmajian studied mechanical engineering at CSUF. In 1984, he moved to Los Angeles after being accepted into the special studies for film music program at USC. After graduating

see ATMAJIAN, page 16



Lusine Sargsyan with the Bible of Avag, Venice, San Lazzaro, 2012

Mesrob, Matenadaran And the Digital Revolution

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In 405, Mesrob Mashtots invented the Armenian alphabet and thereby unleashed a literary, cultural revolution; by giving the Armenian people a written language, he made possible a translation of the Bible, and with it, not only the basis for worship with a liturgy in the mother tongue, but the means to develop a literary culture.

Scholars at the Mesrop Mashtots Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) have launched an ambitious new project that might be seen as honoring the legacy of its namesake, by applying digital technologies to the study of illuminated manuscripts: The Armenian Manuscript Illumination (AMI) Project.

Lusine Sargsyan, senior researcher in the Medieval Art Studies Department at the Matenadaran and the initiator of the project, spoke in July about its origins and aims. A graduate of Yerevan State University in Armenian Art History and Theory, Sargsyan has focused her research on Armenian manuscript art, and dedicated her 2023 doctoral dissertation (supervised by Prof. Levon Chookaszian) to the work of 14th-century Armenian miniaturist Awag. While conducting graduate research in Paris, with support from the Sirarpie Der Nersessian Foundation, she acquired skills in interdisciplinary methodology, studying Awag not only as a miniaturist, but as a scribe, calligrapher, manuscript binder, musician proficient in medieval Armenian musical notation (khaz), and an important church figure of his time.

In parallel she launched a project dedicated to identifying, studying and cataloguing Armenian manuscripts preserved in Romania and, under the guidance of the late Gevorg Ter-Vardanyan, chief conservator of Armenian manuscripts at the Matenadaran, conducted systematic research in Romanian collections which led to scholarly publications. She acquired experience in the use of digital technologies for manuscript studies in 2017 as a Visiting Scholar at the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library in St. John's University, Minnesota, home to one of the world's largest collections of digitized manuscripts, including Armenian manuscripts from Iraq and Syria.

In 2018, Prof. Karen Matevosyan, then deputy director of the Matenadaran, invited Sargsyan to join the institute. She also teaches art history, Medieval Eastern Christian Art, and Armenian-Byzantine artistic relations at Yerevan State University.

AMS: Tell me more about illuminated manuscripts and why they are so important.

Sargsyan: Armenian manuscript illumination plays an important role in the history of Armenian art. With a tradition spanning more than a thousand years, it also occupies a significant place within the broader history of medieval

see MATENADARAN, page 14

Award-winning Novel *Boy With Wings* by Mark Mustian Earns Literary Honors

International bestselling author Mark Mustian is earning widespread recognition for his latest novel, *Boy With Wings*, published by Köehler Books. Since its release, the book has received numerous prestigious awards and honors, establishing it as one of the most celebrated independent novels of the year.

Leading the list of accolades, *Boy With Wings* received the Grand Prize for Fiction at the Next Generation Indie Book Awards. The novel also earned the Bronze Prize in Historical Fiction from the Independent Publishers Book Awards (IPPY Awards). In addition, the book's striking design won the Cover Art – DaVinci Eye Award from the Eric Hoffer Book Award program.

The novel has also been recognized as a finalist in several major competitions, including the American Writing Awards (Hawthorne Prize), the National Indie Excellence Awards (Literary Fiction), the Readers' Favorite Book Awards (Historical Fiction), and the International Book Awards (Cross-Genre Fiction). It was also shortlisted for the Shelley Award for Paranormal Fiction from the Chanticleer International Book Awards.

Set in the United States during the 1930s, *Boy With Wings* explores what it means to be different through the



life of Johnny, a boy born with wings. After surviving a traumatic birth and childhood in a turpentine labor camp, Johnny finds himself traveling through the South as part of a sideshow, encountering an unforgettable cast of characters while searching for the truth about his origins and identity.

Early praise for the novel has come from acclaimed authors, including Jeff VanderMeer, who calls it "Highly Recommended," and Chris Bohjalian, who commends Mustian's imaginative storytelling and richly layered narrative, calling the book "a brilliant fever dream of a novel."

With its blend of historical fiction, magical realism, and powerful themes of identity and belonging, *Boy With Wings* continues to captivate readers and critics alike.

Mustian is an author, attorney and former elected official, as well as the founder of the Word of South Festival of Literature and Music in Tallahassee, Fla. A graduate of the University of Florida, he earned both his B.S. in Finance and Juris Doctor there. Mustian has served on the National Policy Council for AARP and the Board of Directors of the Florida League of Cities. He lives in Florida and Michigan. For more information about him, visit www.markmustian.com.

Mesrob, Matenadaran and the Digital Revolution

MATENADARAN, from page 13
Christian art. The earliest surviving examples of Armenian manuscript illumination are four illuminated pages painted on two parchment bifolia, dating to the 6th or 7th century. These leaves were later bound at the end of the so-called Etchmiadzin Gospel, a manuscript copied in 989 at Bgheno Noravank in the Syunik Province of Armenia. Their significance for the study of Christian art is comparable to that of the 6th-century Rabbula Gospels (Syriac) and the Rossano Gospels (Greek), which are internationally recognized as among the earliest surviving masterpieces of Christian manuscript illumination.

Over the centuries, Armenian manuscript illumination developed into a rich, multifaceted artistic tradition, giving rise to distinct regional schools, individual artistic styles, and local workshops. In many periods, it evolved in parallel with the manuscript traditions of the Eastern Christian world, Byzantium and Medieval and Early modern Latin Europe, but still preserved its unique iconographic and stylistic characteristics. Richly illuminated manuscripts were produced especially in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, as well as in Armenian communities in Crimea and, in later centuries, in New Julfa and Constantinople. At the same time, the historic Armenian schools of Vaspurakan, Syunik, and Artsakh preserved regional artistic traditions, reflecting local cultural, religious, and aesthetic developments. Regardless of where, when, or within which artistic tradition Armenian manuscript art developed, it is without a doubt an integral part of the history of world art. Though it has distinctive characteristics that make it uniquely Armenian, it also shares many artistic, iconographic, and cultural features with the broader traditions of medieval Christian manuscript illumination.

AMS: How did the Armenian Manuscript Illumination Project come into being?

Sargsyan: It was the result of a learning

process. First let me say that in scholarly literature there do exist episodic studies on illumination programs of Armenian manuscripts. By “program” we mean the criteria followed in planning all the illustrations for one manuscript; this includes the selection of images, their placement or layout on the pages, the relationship between images and letters, etc. I encountered a problem related to this while studying an illuminated Hymnal from the Academy Library of Romania in Bucharest in 2013. The main colophon of this Gospel was missing, so I was faced with the task of identifying the location and

an Old Testament from the Mekhitarist Library in Venice, and a New Testament from the Bible of King Oshin. I studied the illumination programs of these manuscripts through a table showing both text and illumination in comparison with other Bibles.

As a result, I realized there was a need to develop a systematic study of the complete illumination program of Armenian manuscripts, with their diverse iconography or differing imagery, and to do so by utilizing the tools provided by digital technologies. Whereas existing publications with tables of such illumination programs contain only

opment of the illumination program of the Armenian Gospels.

AMS: How would I begin to study a particular manuscript?

Sargsyan: First, you would look at the data available on that manuscript: a brief physical description of each Gospel is given, as well as colophon extracts that provide information about the creation of the manuscript. A brief commentary on the illumination program and artistic features of each manuscript is also provided. To enter these data, the project team used available literature (catalogues of manuscripts, monographs, articles), internet resources (if any), and in some cases archival documents. Sources are listed in the bibliography.

AMS: That is the concept governing the website; how do I as a visitor/user proceed step by step?

Sargsyan: You would choose between two main search areas: Advanced search (separately for “Table”, “Manuscript” and “Miniature”) and Quick search (entering a word or an inventory number, e.g. Jerusalem, 2568). The Advanced search for “Table” functions by browsing manuscript title and text/Gospel reading (e.g. Gospel, Matthew 1:10, 1st chapter, verse 10), for “Manuscript” by browsing: library, inventory number, century or year, place, scribe, script, miniaturist, patron, owner (e.g. Venice, Mekhitarist Congregation Library 1917, 14th, Syunik, Sargis, Toros Taronatsi, bolorgir, vardapet Davit, Esayi Nchetsi), and for “Miniature” by browsing the title of the miniature, manuscript, folio, type and text/Gospel reading (e.g. Annunciation to Mary, Vienna, Mekhitarist Congregation Library 242, 121r, ornamental heading, Luke 1:24).

This kind of general description (with some similarities or differences) of each manuscript and its miniatures is often present on the websites of digitized manuscripts.

AMS: Then what distinguishes the AMI from preexisting digital study tools in this area of research?

Sargsyan: The special feature of the AMI Project is the comparison of illustrated pages from different manuscripts corresponding to the text, with the use of search tools: Gospel verses, Bible verses, Hymnal Canons, Lectionary readings, etc. By comparison, take, for example, the Princeton University Index of Medieval Art (<https://theindex.princeton.edu/>), which represents the largest archive of medieval art in the world, including illuminated manuscripts. The browsing list consists of 15 multifunctional tools, but without the correspondence of text and image as in the AMI Project (Gospel reading and miniature) with its comparative table.

AMS: Why are comparative manuscripts important?

Sargsyan: There are many project websites that display Armenian digitized manuscripts from various collections: these are scanned copies of manuscripts, or digitized catalogues usually with limited information on each manuscript or its miniatures. But they do not provide answers to any specific issue in manuscript art study.

The comparative analysis we provide through the AMI, on the contrary, raises a number of research questions. For example, what similarities and differences can be observed among 14th-century Armenian Gospel illumination produced in Cilicia, Vaspurakan, and Syunik? How did regional artistic traditions influence the selection and arrangement of illuminated cycles? It enables scholars to trace the development of illumination programs of Armenian manuscripts across centuries, and to examine the contribution of individual artistic schools and masters. It also enables users to explore

continued on next page



Lusine Sargsyan with the Gospel of Prince Vasak, Jerusalem, 2019

date of the manuscript myself. I examined the binding of the manuscript, its paleography, the iconography and style of the miniatures, and then compared the manuscript's illumination program with 61 other Hymnals. That led me to an approximate answer to my question. Later I studied the illumination program of the manuscripts of Awag for my PhD thesis: an Armenian Manusmunk (Songbook) from the Berlin State Library,

figurative miniatures, the tables I have suggested display the entire illumination program, including not only figurative miniatures, but also the canon tables, title pages, ornamental headings, marginal ornaments, and ornamental letters. So, that was the genesis of the AMI Project; and it presents a complete illumination program of Armenian manuscripts (text and miniature) with varied content – and moving it from printed to digital format. Due to their physical size, printed pages impose limits on the researcher, whereas the digital realm has unlimited possibilities for including countless manuscripts, each with different content.

AMS: How could a scholar or layperson see how the Project works?

Sargsyan: You would visit the AMI website! We have produced the first-ever digitally illustrated website of Medieval and Early Modern Armenian manuscript illumination systems or programs through a comparative table representing the text with its miniature(s). This work was made possible by the Institutional hosting of the Matenadaran and a research grant provided in 2021-2022 by the Armenian National Science and Education Fund (ANSEF) based in New York. The AMI Project contains in its database a selection of illuminated manuscripts from the four largest collections of Armenian manuscripts in the world: The Matenadaran Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan, The St. Theodoros Library and Treasury at St. James Armenian Cathedral in Jerusalem, the Mekhitarist Libraries in Venice and Vienna.

With this, our first initiative, the Project has presented nine illuminated Gospel manuscripts stretching over a long chronological span, from the 9th to the 17th centuries. It also features a map illustrating the geographical development of Armenian manuscript illumination, covering historical Armenia, the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, and Armenian communities throughout the diaspora. The choice of the manuscripts was based on the specific role that each of them has played in the establishment and devel-

TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION BOSTON CHAPTER PRESENTS

Arshile GORKY

Between the
Figural and
Abstract

an illustrated talk by

Kim Servat
Theriault,

author of *Rethinking
Arshile Gorky*

Arshile GORKY

Between the
Figural and
Abstract

an illustrated talk by

Kim Servat
Theriault,

author of *Rethinking
Arshile Gorky*

Thursday
September 17

7 p.m. sharp

Baikar Building, 755 Mt. Auburn St.,
Watertown.
Free admission. For more info, email
teadirector@aol.com.



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Isabel Lion's Deluxe Raisin Pie

FRESNO - Isabel Lion of Fresno passed away on February 22, 2018. She was born on March 3, 1926, in Visalia, California, Isabel was the fourth and last child of Aram and Satenig Rose Keklikian. Her two sisters are the late Roxie Dashjian, and Madeline Moradian. Her only brother, Harry, died before the age of three.

On the family farm, near Goshen, Isabel acquired a strong work ethic in her young childhood and teenage years. While attending Visalia schools, she enjoyed learning, especially the spelling of words. She graduated from Visalia Union High School, which is now Redwood High School. In 1946, Isabel married Herbert Lion, a Fresno citizen who had recently returned from the war in Europe, where he had served in the Battle of the Bulge. A loving daughter-in-law, she embraced Herbert's parents, Al and Queenie, now deceased.

Isabel's faith journey encompassed experiences in both the Orthodox and Evangelical Christian movements. Members of the Apostolic Church, her parents, Aram and Rose, were early members of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church of Yettem. Isabel continued to foster her ties with the church in Yettem, while her husband Herbert served as a Sunday school teacher in Fresno's First Armenian Presbyterian Church. In the last decades of Isabel's life, she also enjoyed listening to the sermons of G.L. Johnson of Fresno's People Church.

Isabel was a wonderful cook, a gift for which she won four first place prizes at the Fresno District Fair. Published articles regarding Isabel's cooking were printed

in periodicals such as Sunset.

She was also an active member of Raisin Wives, in which her charitable activities included gift sales and recipe contributions. She executed gift sales with strict organization and a competitive streak. This competitive streak was also present in her competition with herself to make herself a better person. She was a member of the Fresno Women's Choral Group, Toastmistress, and other life enriching activities. She was deeply involved in the education of her grandchildren at Fresno Pacific University. Living on the same block as the University, she befriended students who were not her relatives, enjoying her young friends' invitations to commencement ceremonies. It was her way to quietly expand her circle of friends.

When Isabel's sister, Roxie, passed away, she stepped in as a mother figure for her nieces, Linda Dashjian and Jeannette Dashjian.

Isabel's hobbies demonstrate a love for beauty. She enjoyed growing flowers, especially gladiolas, which she would place at the gravesites of loved ones. She was a patron of the musical arts, especially as performed by the Tulare County Philharmonic. After learning to play the piano, without fanfare or bravado, she shared her gift at a local nursing home. Her family learned about such things only in passing. She was also a fan of the cinematic arts, rarely missing an airing of the Academy Awards each year.

Isabel is survived by her two sons: Larry and John Lion. Larry owns Lion Automotive, and teaches automotive classes at Fresno City College. John owns Lion Electronic Laboratories, and is an electronics engineer. Larry and wife Patti have two daughters: Sara Lynn, and Jennifer. Sara Lynn is a licensed marriage and family therapist, married to Greg Kassabian, with whom she has a daughter Talia. Jennifer is a homemaker, married to Gary Antone. They have two sons: Solomon and Samson. John and wife Manuela have a daughter and a son: Rose and Alex. Rose is a licensed marriage and family therapist, married to Jesse Gamino. They have three sons: Noah, Isaac, and Elias. Alex is a doctor, specializing in Pediatric Neuro-Oncology. His wife Janna and he have three children: Samuel, Jordan, and Kynslee.

This is one of Isabel's prized raisin recipes that she made for special events and family celebrations for many years.

Recipe and photo are courtesy of Patti Lion of Fresno, Isabel Lions' daughter-in-law.

INGREDIENTS:

In a bowl, combine:
2 tablespoons cornstarch
1/3 teaspoon cloves
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup sugar

In a medium saucepan, combine:

2 cups rinsed raisins
2 cups water
2 tablespoons vinegar
2 tablespoons butter

PREPARATION:

Preheat the oven to 450°F.

Add the dry ingredients to the saucepan. Stir and bring to a boil. Boil for 2 minutes, stirring. Pour this mixture into a 9-inch pie shell. Place lattice or double crust (with slits cut in to vent) on top. Bake at 450°F for 25-30 minutes. Remove the pie from oven and allow to cool before serving with fresh whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

For Isabel's obituary, please see: <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/fresno/name/isabel-lion-obituary?id=9892481>

from precious page

a wide range of detailed research questions, such as the recurrence of specific marginal ornaments accompanying the same verse or reading across different illuminated Gospel manuscripts.

AMS: How has the AMI Project been received?

Sargsyan: Following the launch, I received very positive feedback from my colleagues — including international scholars — and students, who use the website data in their research. The Project was also presented at the First International Armenology Congress in a paper entitled "From Tradition to Innovation: New Approaches in Armenian Manuscript Studies," held at the Matenadaran, July 19-22, 2024. The presentation generated considerable interest and received strong encouragement from specialists in the field, who recognized the Project's scholarly value and potential. Subsequently, several distinguished scholars expressed their support for the initiative; among them, Dr. Christina Maranci, Mash-tots Professor of Armenian Studies at Harvard University, and Dr. Ioanna Rapti of the École Pratique des Hautes Études joined the

Scientific Council of the AMI Project. Their participation brings additional expertise and further strengthens the Project's international research network.

AMS: Where does the AMI stand today? What are your plans for the future?

Sargsyan: I am pleased to announce that this year the Project has been awarded a grant from the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) and the Collaborative Heritage Management grant by the American Research Institute of the South Caucasus (ARISC). These grants will enable us to expand our database with new illuminated manuscripts from the collections of the Matenadaran and the Mekhitarist Libraries of Venice and Vienna. The funding will also support the development of the website's search tools, maintenance, and IT services.

Thanks to the generous cooperation of the conservators at all three repositories, the database will be enriched with more than ten times more illustrated manuscript pages than are currently displayed on the website. In this regard, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Directorate of the Matenadaran, especially Director Dr. Ara

Khzmalyan and Deputy Director Dr. Vahe Torosyan, Head of the Medieval Art Studies Department Dr. Nazenie Garibian, as well as to Father Vahan Vardapet Ohanean of the Mekhitarist Congregation of Venice, for their invaluable support and collaboration. The AMI team's research trip to the Mekhitarist Library in Vienna is coming up very soon, in the second half of August.

And, the Project's team has continued to grow. Art historians Lusine Barseghyan and Siranush Beglaryan from the Matenadaran, together with Dr. Erin Piñon of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence — Max Planck Institute, have also joined.

I see the future of the AMI Project not only in enriching its database with new manuscripts (by expanding collaboration with other repositories of Armenian manuscripts around the world) and developing advanced search tools (including AI-based methods), but also in addressing a specific scholarly challenge in the study of Armenian manuscript art — the very challenge for which this digital database was conceived.

In the long term, this work will contribute to generating a series of scholarly volumes dedicated to Armenian manuscript

illumination programs. I envision this series organized according to manuscript content — such as Gospels, Bibles, Hymnals (Sharaknots), Ritual Books, Psalters, Lectionaries (Chashots), and other categories. Each volume (for example, The Illumination Program of Armenian Hymnals) would present the manuscripts in chronological order, reflecting the historical formation and development of their illumination programs over time.

To summarize, the AMI Project is not merely the creation of a digital database. Rather, it poses new research questions, proposes original approaches to answering them through digital scholarship, and ultimately lays the foundation for a comprehensive printed series on the illumination programs of Armenian manuscripts. As Principal Investigator of the AMI Project, I believe that the realization of this ambitious vision requires collaborative, interdisciplinary teamwork involving specialists from both Armenia (first and foremost from the Matenadaran) and the international scholarly community.

(To learn more about this project, visit <https://armenoids.com/>)



ARTS & CULTURE

Film Composer, Orchestrater Jeff Atmajian to Be Inducted in Fresno Valley Music Hall Of Fame

ATMAJIAN, from page 13
he supported himself by working as a music copyist, arranging, playing for dance classes and two churches in Orange County.

In 1986, he met English orchestrator Christopher Palmer at a film scoring session in Los Angeles, and that began the start of what would be a dual life of living and working in Los Angeles and London.

Jeff has worked on over 200 films as orchestrator and often conducts as well. As an orchestrator, Jeff worked on nearly all of the films of directors Rob Reiner and M. Night Shyamalan. He has been involved with many other projects through which he has worked for Elmer Bernstein, Andre Previn, Sir Neville Marriner, Sir Christopher Plummer, Jose Carreras, Lord Richard Attenborough, Al Pacino, Nora Ephron, Geena Davis, Barbra Streisand and other noted names in the classical and film world.

He has worked with all the London orchestras on classical, popular and film recordings, as well as doing film recording with the excellent studio orchestras in Los Angeles and New York. He recently arranged and orchestrated As Time Goes



By on Josh Groban’s most recent album, which was released in April 2026.

Jeff works primarily at the piano for compositional and arranging ideas. He works with Finale for all of his notation.

He is a highly sought after arranger and orchestrator for films. His steady clientele are well-known and highly successful composers such as James Newton Howard, Marc Shaiman, Rachel Portman and Gabri-

el Yared.

In 2005, he composed, music directed and produced all the music for the large-scale production Creation, which features a 76-piece orchestra, ethnic world music and songs for Soloists or choir. Over the years he has also composed large- and small-scale library music for Megatrax and KPM.

Atmajian scored the 90-minute 2006 documentary by scholar and filmmaker Dr. Carla Garapedian about the 1915 Armenian Genocide called “Screamers,” won several awards.

In 2024, he created new orchestrations for the songs for the two-part film adaption of “Wicked.”

Jeff divides his life between his homes in Venice Beach and London.

Tickets for the Fresno Valley Music Hall of Fame induction event honoring Atmajian at Roger Rocka’s Dinner Theater are \$100 per person. This price includes both the dinner and the show.

For tickets, contact: info@gcplayers.com

For more information: <https://jeffatmajian.com/>

Tekeyan Cultural Association Greater New York
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4PM

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Tickets: \$75, \$50, \$40

Books

Philliou's and Kolovos's *Naming Non-Muslims: A Guide to Reading Greek, Armenian and Jewish Male Names in Ottoman Sources* Published

Athens-Asini Publications recently announced the publication of Christine Philliou's and Elias Kolovos's *Naming Non-Muslims: A Guide to Reading Greek, Armenian and Jewish Male Names in Ottoman Sources*.

This important book is a reference work intended as a resource for researchers working with Ottoman sources on non-Muslim communities — Armenians, Greeks, Slavs and Jews. The main body consists of separate lists of Greek (primarily Greek Orthodox, including some Slavic names), Armenian and Jewish/Hebrew names. For each entry, the Ottoman spelling is followed by a transliteration into Latin characters, the standard form of the name in its source language (Greek, Slavic, Armenian, or Hebrew), commentary on the name's meaning and variants and relevant bibliographical references.

The impetus for the book was the widespread misspelling, misreading and consequent misidentification of non-Muslim names in Ottoman sources by researchers unfamiliar with the languages from which those names originated. The authors maintain that accurately identifying and spelling the names of non-Muslims is a key prerequisite for understanding who they were as unique individuals rather than reducing them to nameless members of religious or ethnic communities. The lists are preceded by an introduction by Philliou and a preface by Kolovos, which discuss the value of Ottoman population registers for the study of Armenians, Greeks and Jews in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and emphasize the importance of reading their names accurately.

According to Philliou and Kolovos, one of the greatest obstacles to researching and writing the history of Armenians and other non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire is the difficulty of deciphering their names in Ottoman Turkish, which was itself written in Arabic script. The spelling of non-Arabic names was often improvised within a writing system not designed to represent them. As a result, unless a researcher already has some idea of what a particular name might be, it can be extremely difficult — and sometimes impossible — to identify it correctly. Most Turkish scholars today do not know Armenian, let alone Greek or Hebrew, while non-Turkish scholars may know one of these languages in addition to Turkish, but very few researchers possess expertise in all of them.

"We used a particular population register from 1821 to compile our list of names, focusing on the Bazaar of Istanbul's Old City, where we found thousands of Armenians, who had by far the largest presence among the three non-Muslim groups," the authors explain. "This alone provides grounds for further fascinating research on Armenians in the Ottoman capital as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century."

The book includes an extensive list of the historical names of Armenian, Greek and Jewish individuals who lived quite literally alongside one another in the khans of Ottoman Istanbul and in Galata, Ye-

niköy, Emirgan and Boyacıköy — all areas surveyed in the unique 1821 register studied by the authors. These individuals brought with them naming practices from across the provinces of the Ottoman Empire while simultaneously interacting with and influencing one another through everyday life, including, potentially, in their naming practices. In this sense, the names recorded in the register provide not only a practical tool for identifying individuals in Ottoman sources but also an important point of departure for investigating migration, community formation, cultural interaction and everyday life in nineteenth-century Istanbul.

Review:

"Our names define us. When we meet someone, we introduce ourselves with our names first. They constitute the center of our individual identities. They also help us navigate our relationships with people around us, turning random people into individuals. Naming Non-Muslims, therefore, is not simply A Guide to Reading Greek, Armenian and Jewish Male Names in Ottoman Sources as its subtitle describes it. It invites scholars (like myself), who do not read Armenian, Greek, or Hebrew and mainly work with Ottoman Turkish, to acknowledge Armenian, Greek and Jewish Ottomans,

whose names are recorded in Ottoman archival documents in Arabic letters, as unique individuals with unique lives who actually write their names in different alphabets and speak different languages that shape the ways in which they understand themselves and the world around them. Naming Non-Muslims, thus, transforms "non-Muslims," who have mostly been defined negatively by their not-belonging to the Muslim community in Ottoman historiography, into people. By recording the shared names between Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Muslim Ottomans, Naming Non-Muslims also invites us to consider more seriously the ties that bound these confessional communities together in Ottoman society." Baki Tezcan, University of California, Davis

Christine Philliou is a professor in the Department of History and Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at UC Berkeley, specializing in the connected histories of the Balkans and Middle East since the 17th century, focusing particularly on the emergence of the Greek and Turkish nation-states out of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries. Her books include *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (UC Press, 2010) and *Turkey: A Past Against History* (UC Press, 2021). She also directs a collaborative digital/public humanities project on Greek Orthodox communities in the larger context of late Ottoman Istanbul/Constantinople (1821-1923): <http://istanpolis.org/>. Her forthcoming book, *An Ottoman Pompeii: The Greek Revolution and the Limits of Conviviality in 1821 Istanbul* (Koç University Press 2026) is the first fruit of that collaboration.

Elias Kolovos is research director with

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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 17 — Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter presents "Arshile Gorky: Between the Figural and Abstract," an illustrated talk by Kim Servart Theriault. Thurs., 7 p.m., Baika Building, 755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown. For more info, email tcadirector@aol.com.

SEPTEMBER 19 — Join the 15th Annual New England Walk for Life sponsored by the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry New England Chapter. Saturday. Registration 10.30 a.m., start 11.30 a.m. from St. James Charles Mosesian Cultural and Youth Center, 564 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, to Faire on the Square, Saltonstall Park, Watertown. Registration Fee, \$30; \$15 for students and children. Proceeds benefit ABMDR. For info and to register, visit www.abmdr.am/ne.walk or call 617-331-0426.

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

OCTOBER 25 — "Voices Across Time: Armenian Piano Music: A Homage to Robert Mirak," Piano Recital and CD Launch by Alessandra Pompili. Works by Stephen Minas, Alan Hovhanness, Emanuel Melik-Aslanian, Loris Tjeknavorian, Komitas, George Gurdjieff, Diane Goolkasian Rahbee, Aram Khachaturian, and Koharik Gazarossian. Armenian Cultural Foundation, Arlington, Sunday at 5 p.m. Free and Open to the Public - Reception to follow.

NOVEMBER 13 — Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) Boston's Child Care Committee presents an evening in support of the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan. The event will feature Manet-Miriam, star of "La Voix" (The Voice) Canada, with special guest Melanya Geghamyan, founding principal of the Avedisian School. 6 p.m. Dinner and live auction. Wellesley Country Club, Wellesley Hills. For more info and reservations visit: <https://amaa.org/hyeminds2026/>

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.

a specialization in Ottoman History at the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation, in Athens, Greece. He is the elected Secretary of the Board of the International Association for Ottoman Social and Economic History. In the past, he served as Professor of Ottoman History at the Department of History and Archaeology, Faculty of Letters, University of Crete, serving also as the Director of the M.A. in Ottoman History Program of the same Department. He has written, edited and coedited 20 books

and over 80 papers in Greek and international publications and journals. His research interests include Mediterranean economic history, the history of insular (island) worlds, the history of frontiers, rural and environmental history, as well as spatial history and legacies of the Ottoman Empire.

Copies of *Naming Non-Muslims: A Guide to Reading Greek, Armenian and Jewish Male Names in Ottoman Sources* can be purchased through Asini's website or by emailing asini@asini.org.



THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
— SINCE 1932 —



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COMMENTARY

One Year After the Washington Accords

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In recent days, the central topics of discussion in Armenia's political sphere have been the agreements reached between Armenia and Azerbaijan with US mediation, the first anniversary of those agreements, and the phone conversation between the prime minister of Armenia and the presidents of the United States and Azerbaijan.

In fact, the Trump administration has achieved in the South Caucasus something that no previous US administration has managed to accomplish since 1991. This concerns the idea of connecting Central Asia to Europe through the South Caucasus and the Middle Corridor, as well as the prospect of integrating Armenia into global supply chains. The initiative has strategic significance for Washington because it creates uninterrupted transportation and communication routes that bypass Russia, China, and Iran. The concept itself is not new, but it has never before reached this stage of implementation.

It is clear that timing is a critical factor here, and the project must be implemented as quickly as possible. This is precisely why the role of Washington bureaucracy has been significantly reduced in this process. Every effort is being made to ensure that the project is launched as rapidly as possible and that no additional obstacles emerge within Washington's administrative system that could affect the implementation timeline.

This applies both to the State Department, where decision-making processes can often be slow, and to the National Security Council, where decisions and policy scenarios may also take considerable time to develop. At the moment, these obstacles effectively do not exist. Both competing institutions are headed by Rubio, and, at least in the case of this project, decisions appear to be made rather quickly.

It is also important to address the appointment of Konstantin Sokolov, which generated a wide range of interpretations. His appointment should be viewed within the same strategic framework. Sokolov is quite familiar with Armenia's business environment, including both its strengths and its weaknesses. More importantly, his appointment also fits the broader logic of reducing bureaucracy. He has direct connections with key figures in the Trump administration and, in the implementation of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) and the broader project, he will benefit from the administration's immediate and unconditional support.

At present, the main factors complicating the TRIPP project

are the railway issue and the tense US-Iran relationship. TRIPP is the American strategic project located closest to Iran's border, with all the implications that entails. This may create certain concerns on the American side, particularly during the current period of heightened tensions, and could slow the implementation of the project.

At the same time, it is necessary to understand what may happen if TRIPP is not built, for a variety of reasons that may depend on the realities of our region, a US-Iran war, the domestic political situation in the United States, and other issues. What will happen to Armenia if the TRIPP project is not implemented?

Azerbaijan has declared repeatedly that, regardless of everything, it wants to have its own connection with Nakhichevan, and Armenia should provide it with a corridor to establish that connection, since the American initiative would otherwise not be possible to implement.

The second possible scenario is that Russia may try to become a mediator in this process, relying on the November 9, 2020 trilateral statement, according to which Russia undertook to ensure the connection between Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan through Armenian territory and to ensure its security.

Of course, other mediators may also emerge — countries that can exert influence over both Azerbaijan and Armenia. For example, Turkey or China may seek to act as mediators and implement the project themselves if, for whatever reason, the United States is unable to implement this project in the short term.

Overall, it appears that Washington is eager to move forward with the project as quickly as possible and within the shortest feasible timeframe. The rationale is clear: the Trump administration wants to see the project implemented while both Iran and Russia remain pre-occupied with their own challenges, and while Donald Trump is still president of the United States. For this reason, Washington will most likely double down on its efforts and devote even greater resources to advancing the project. It is likely that, in the coming period, clear signs of increased American activity will emerge, accompanied by a more concerted effort to bring the project to fruition.

(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.)



LETTERS

Generational Change at Knights of Vartan

To the Editor:

The Knights of Vartan have entered a transformational stage with vigorous new programs and goals catered to young professional Armenian men who possess a haygagan sird – Armenian heart. Last year almost all 10 of the new brothers at the local Watertown, MA, Ararat Lodge were under 30 years of age. And the leadership team has brothers in their 30's and 40's. The forward-thinking push has been supported nationally, shepherded by the leadership team, as the entire country has recognized that the succession plan is organically rising.

The Knights occupy the distinctive fraternal order space of diaspora Armenian men. As unified 'brothers' of charity and spirituality they are at the core of ethnic community-building activities which also support Armenian national 'good works'. These programs include grant making for Artsakh refugees developing home businesses in their resettlement residences.

The Knights have renovated a number of schools in Armenia and sent in over \$500,000 of medical supplies and foodstuffs to Artsakh refugees. At our Times Square Commemoration on April 24, a letter of support from New York's Mayor Zohran Mamdani was read to great applause to the crowd of 700.

Most importantly, the Knights have become infused with youthful brothers who are seeking the answers to valid questions of how best to 'grow and safeguard our community' – including by providing more support for scholarships in Armenia and the US.

Spearheading this focused approach is the new Avak Sbarabed (Grand Commander) Bob Avakian, who was unanimously re-elected to a second term of service. He reported that the Knights have set up a new committee to fundraise from external sources and expand the national membership with like-minded men who care about the future of Armenia and its academic agenda. On the local level, the Knights are focused on building community with family events like their Graduates Night event – celebrated, as another Watertown example, with families at St. James Church, and the forthcoming Cigar Night on September 17 at the Armenian Cultural and Educational Center in the same town.

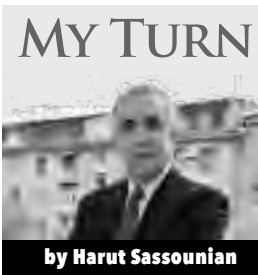
Avakian further pointed to the internal assessment that the Knights developed to analyze their new goals and objectives in continuing their global and local involvement with 22 Lodges across the US – 1,000 dedicated men doing 'good works' for the last 110 years. He related that the Knights are preparing to proactively meet the challenges ahead and will fortify their mission to preserve, protect and pray for our culture and our homeland population with renewed zeal and clarity of purpose.

The Knights in Watertown look forward to hosting Armenian men at their monthly dinners at St. James Armenian Church. I, Avak Sbarabed Bob Avakian, and Grand District Representative Greg Vartanian are looking forward to sharing additional information to clarify the new mission of the brotherhood.

Arman Manoukian
Grand Treasurer of the Grand Council of the Knights of Vartan



COMMENTARY



Erdogan’s Denial of Genocide Attracts More Attention to Turkish Mass Crimes

Despite their diplomatic cunning, one thing Turkish leaders have never learned is to keep their mouths shut when accused of genocide. They fail to realize that every time they deny committing mass crimes, they inadvertently draw more attention to their long criminal history.

Turkey’s Pres. Recep Tayyip Erdogan made a major blunder during a speech he delivered on June 30, denying the long history of Turkish crimes. He falsely claimed: “Our history contains no genocide, no massacres, no oppression, and no colonialism. Throughout our thousands of years of glorious history, there has been only justice and compassion.” The video of his remarks was viewed by almost 100,000 times on X.

To begin with, by referring to “thousands of years of glorious [Turkish] history,” Erdogan made two errors: a) Turkey and its predecessor the Ottoman Empire have not existed for thousands of years; and b) Their history has been far from “glorious.” On the contrary, it has been shameful and criminal.

Let us now turn to the most outrageous lie in Erdogan’s remarks: “Our history contains no genocide, no massacres, no oppression, and no colonialism.” In fact, the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey have repeatedly committed every one of these massive crimes.

The Hellenic Canadian Research Institute has published an extensive list of crimes committed by the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey throughout their history. Here is a shortened version of that report:

- The Historical Record of Mass Atrocities: The Late Ottoman Period Massacres and Genocides (1821 to 1923)
- The Constantinople Massacre (1821): Thousands of Greek civilians were slaughtered throughout the Empire. In April, Ottoman authorities executed the spiritual leader of Orthodox Christianity, Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory V, by hanging him from the gates of the Patriarchate.
- The Chios Massacre (1822): Ottoman troops systematically killed, enslaved, or exiled approximately four-fifths of the Greek population on the island of Chios. Up to 100,000 Greeks were slaughtered or forced into slave markets in North Africa and the Middle East.
- The Destruction of Psara (1824): Ottoman forces completely destroyed the rebel Greek island of Psara. In two days, an estimated 18,000 Greeks were killed or taken as slaves.
- The Third Siege of Missolonghi (1825–1826): Following a brutal, year-long starvation blockade by combined Ottoman and Egyptian forces, the city was overrun, resulting in the slaughter of thousands of Greek civilians and the enslavement of up to 4,000 women and children.
- The Damascus Events (1860): Following sectarian unrest in Lebanon, violent mobs and militias targeted the historic Christian quarter of Damascus. While Maronites were targeted in the mountains, the victims in Damascus

- were predominantly Greek Orthodox. Local Ottoman garrison forces actively colluded with the rioters, who torched the historic Greek Orthodox Mariamite Cathedral and slaughtered 3,000-10,000 Christians.
- The Hamidian Massacres (1894–1896): Sultan Abdul Hamid II targeted primarily Ottoman Armenians across Anatolia. Assyrians and, to a lesser degree, Greeks were also targeted. An estimated 300,000 Armenians and 25,000 Assyrians were killed, and hundreds of thousands were displaced or forcibly converted to Islam.
- The Adana Massacre (1909): 20,000-30,000 Armenian civilians were slaughtered in the province of Adana.
- The Massacres of Unarmed Greeks in Eastern Thrace (1912-1913): During the Balkan Wars, 15,690 unarmed Greeks were massacred in Eastern Thrace by Ottoman forces.
- The Greek Genocide (1914-1923): The systematic extermination of the native Greek subjects of the Ottoman Empire resulted in the slaughter of over 1 million Greeks.
- The Great Famine of Mount Lebanon (1915–1918): A weaponized food blockade and crop requisitioning policy overseen by Ottoman military governor Djemal Pasha starved 200,000-300,000 Maronite and other Christians.
- The Assyrian Genocide (1915-1923): The systematic extermination of the native Assyrian subjects of the Ottoman Empire resulted in the slaughter of 300,000-750,000 Assyrians.
- The Armenian Genocide (1915-1923): The systematic extermination of the native Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Empire resulted in the slaughter of 1.5 million Armenians.
- Early Republican-Era State Violence (1930 to 1938)
- The Zilan Massacre (1930): The slaughter of 5,000-47,000 Kurdish civilians in the Zilan Valley during the military suppression of the Ararat rebellion.
- The Dersim Massacre (1937–1938): A massive military campaign used aerial bombardments (including chemical weapons) and widespread executions against the Alevi Kurds of Dersim (renamed Tunceli). It resulted in the deaths of up to 70,000 civilians, including Armenians.
- 20th-Century Sectarian Pogroms
- The Istanbul Pogrom (1955): State-organized mob attacks targeting Istanbul’s remaining Greek, Armenian, and Jewish citizens, causing massive property destruction and triggering the final mass emigration of Greeks from Turkey. It is estimated that during the two-day pogrom, 37 people were killed, over a thousand were injured, and hundreds of women and children were raped. It was widely reported that Greek men were subjected to forced circumcision. Damage was estimated at around \$500 million.
- The Marash Massacre (1978): A week-long killing spree targeting leftists, Kurds, and the Alevi religious minority in Kahramanmaraş, Turkey, December 19-26, 1978. Orchestrated primarily by the neo-fascist Grey Wolves and local right-wing groups with the support of Turkey’s national intelligence service, the violence resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people.
- The Sivas Massacre (1993): A massacre committed by an angry mob of radical Islamists who set fire to the Madimak Hotel in Sivas, Turkey, killing 35 people. The victims were predominantly Alevi intellectuals, writers, and artists who had gathered for a cultural festival.

(Part I)

Israel’s Suspended Armenian Genocide Vote Is Business as Usual

By Stephan Pechdimialdji

When the Israeli cabinet unanimously approved a measure to formally recognize the Armenian Genocide in late June, it seemed, for a moment, that a long-overdue moral threshold had finally been crossed. Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar framed the move as a matter of historical justice and a moral duty by claiming that “It’s never too late to do the right thing.” In many ways, it was a sentiment that resonates deeply for a nation founded in the wake of the Holocaust. Yet, just weeks later, as parliament prepared for its summer recess ahead of national elections, the planned Knesset vote was abruptly suspended and shelved. Officially, the delay was chalked up to a “sensitive diplomatic climate” and regional turbulence. Unofficially, it followed immediate and intense pushback from Azerbaijan, an energy and security partner, and a desire to avoid completely severing communication channels with Turkey. To anyone tracking the history of Israeli-Armenian relations, this sudden retreat was thoroughly predictable. The postponement was not a routine procedural pause but rather a decades-long pattern in which genocide recognition advances when politically convenient and retreats the moment competing diplomatic interests reassert themselves.

A history of leverage, not conviction

For over 30 years, official recognition of the 1915 Ottoman campaign that claimed 1.5 million Armenian lives had been treated by successive Israeli administrations not as an immutable historical truth, but as a strategic bargaining chip. Whenever relations with Ankara soured, whether over military actions in Gaza, naval blockades, or inflammatory rhetoric from Turkish leadership, proposals to recognize the genocide suddenly gained momentum in the Knesset. Recognition was wielded as a diplomatic stick to signal displeasure to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Conversely, whenever regional security priorities shifted, or when Baku expressed “deep disappointment” over the threat to its strategic alliance with Tel Aviv, the bills were quietly buried in committee or removed from the calendar altogether. This transactional approach has drawn criticism from all sides, including from Armenia itself. When the cabinet initially green-lit the measure, Armenian leadership publicly declined to celebrate, noting with skepticism that historical memory was once again being weaponized for immediate geopolitical posturing rather than genuine moral reckoning. Realpolitik vs Moral Consistency The strategic calculus behind Israel’s hesitation is well understood in foreign policy circles. Azerbaijan supplies a significant portion of Israel’s oil imports and serves as a vital strategic partner on Iran’s northern border. Turkey remains a formidable regional power whose airspace, trade routes, and diplomatic channels cannot be easily written off permanently. However, subjecting historical truth to realpolitik creates a profound moral hazard. When state recognition of a mass atrocity hinges on real-time alliance management, it inadvertently validates

the logic of denialism. It sends a message that the facts of 1915 are negotiable and subject to market conditions, military intelligence sharing, and pipeline agreements. More than a century after the events of 1915, the historical consensus surrounding the Armenian Genocide is clear, documented by extensive archival evidence and survivor testimony. Over 30 nations, along with the United States Congress and the executive branch, have formally recognized it. For a state forged from the memory of genocide, treating historical truth as a cyclical bargaining chip erodes the very moral authority it relies upon. Gap between Symbolism and Commitment Recognition of the Armenian Genocide should not be viewed as a political issue or as taking sides in a regional dispute between neighbors. It is fundamentally a human rights issue and a question of historical truth. The systematic murder and deportation of 1.5 million Armenians is a historical fact, and acknowledging it is about honoring the victims and survivors and reaffirming the principle that genocide should never be ignored or denied for political convenience. If anything, the fact that recognition can be delayed or blocked because of diplomatic pressure demonstrates why this is a human rights issue. Human rights and historical truth should not be contingent on the strategic interests of the day or on the preferences of another government. And ultimately, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cannot simply point to political opposition or diplomatic pressure as the reason for inaction. As prime minister, he has the authority to officially and unequivocally recognize the Armenian Genocide himself. If he truly believes recognition is the right thing to do, he does not need to wait for a Knesset vote. The fact that he has chosen not to do so suggests that the political see VOTE, page 20

Projects for Peace Names Anoush Baghdassarian 2026 Alumni Award Recipient

AWARD, from page 7

Rerooted celebrates and explores Armenian identity in communities around the world and advocates for their just and safe futures. Its digital collections of testimonies, photographs, and documents are designed to be accessible to researchers, teachers, artists, community members, and advocates. Through those collections, Baghdassarian and her collaborators create educational resources, interactive maps, legal reports, cultural heritage projects, and tools that show the resilience of Armenian communities while also supporting accountability and recognition.

The organization’s work now spans preservation, education, language, cultural heritage, and justice. Rerooted’s oral history interviews are used in classrooms from middle school to graduate school and address themes including human rights, diaspora, identity, refugee experiences, language preservation, minorities in the Middle East, and displacement. Its hundreds of hours of spoken testimony and time-coded transcripts also support efforts to preserve endangered Armenian dialects, including Western Armenian and

Artsakhtsi Armenian.

Baghdassarian’s work with Rerooted also reflects a deep commitment to justice. The organization listens to the needs of Armenian communities and follows the lead of narrators to explore mechanisms for accountability and recognition. Rerooted has partnered with law school clinics, student groups, the United Nations, and nongovernmental organizations to support report writing, case building, submissions to international legal bodies, and other efforts to ensure that Armenian voices are included in justice processes.

Netta Avineri, executive director of the Kathryn Wasserman Davis Collaborative in Conflict Transformation, says Baghdassarian’s work demonstrates how storytelling, documentation, and community trust can serve as tools for transforming conflict.

“Anoush embodies so many core principles of conflict transformation, deepening relationships with communities for collective awareness-raising around core social issues,” said Avineri. “Her collaborative process bridges disciplines, perspectives, and methods.”



Anoush Baghdassarian

Since her original Project for Peace, Baghdassarian has continued to build on the connection between memory and accountability. She earned her JD from Harvard Law School and her master’s degree in human rights studies from Columbia University, and her professional path has included work connected to international law, human rights, and Armenian justice efforts. Her continued leadership of Re-

rooted, in close partnership with Schug and a broad network of volunteers, interns, legal fellows, language specialists, and community members, has turned a student peace project into a lasting platform for education, preservation, and advocacy.

Baghdassarian joins a growing group of Projects for Peace alumni whose student projects have developed into sustained commitments to peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Previous awardees include April Edwell, MD, the 2025 recipient, whose 2007 Duke University project supporting educational access for young women in Kenya later informed her work integrating trauma-informed care and anti-racist frameworks in healthcare; Bifenfait Hahozi Mugenza, the 2024 recipient, whose 2018 University of Rochester project on peace through entrepreneurship in eastern Congo grew into the Congo Peace Academy and its programs in dialogue, leadership, digital literacy, and youth empowerment; and Joseph Kaifala, the inaugural 2023 recipient, whose 2007 Skidmore College project to construct a library in Sierra Leone became part of a broader career in human rights, education, remembrance, and transitional justice. Together, their work reflects the purpose of the Alumni Award: to recognize past grantees whose early Projects for Peace have continued to expand in scope, deepen in community partnership, and offer new pathways for transforming conflict.

Launched in 2022, the Kathryn Wasserman Davis Collaborative in Conflict Transformation is the centerpiece of a seven-year, \$25 million grant aimed at incorporating conflict transformation skills into every corner of the Middlebury community while building a global network of scholars and practitioners.

Projects for Peace, which is headquartered at Middlebury College’s Center for Community Engagement, is a global program that encourages young adults to develop innovative, community-centered, and scalable responses to the world’s most pressing issues. Since 2007, students have used Projects for Peace grants to build knowledge, improve skills, and establish identities as peacebuilders and change-makers in communities around the world.

Israel’s Suspended Armenian Genocide Vote Is Business As Usual

VOTE, from page 19

and strategic considerations are not merely an obstacle, but rather are part of the reason for his reluctance.

The latest suspension in the Knesset reinforces a sobering reality in that symbolic gestures from executive bodies mean little if leadership lacks the political will to carry them through legislative ratification when pressure mounts.

If recognition only occurs as an act of retaliation against adversaries, it ceases to be an act of justice. True moral leadership requires affirming historical facts precisely when it is inconvenient and not merely when it scores points in a news cycle.

Until the vote is brought to the Knesset floor without qualification or strategic hesitation, the message to the world remains unchanged in that historical truth and justice will remain on hold until the next geopolitical window opens.

(The writer is a communications strategist living in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is a first-generation Armenian American and grandson of survivors of the Armenian Genocide. You can follow him on X at @spechdimaldji. This article originally appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* on August 11.)

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