THE ARMENIAN
MIRROR-SPECTATOR
SINCE 1932

Volume LXXXXIV, No. 4, Issue 4942 | AUGUST 8, 2026 | $2.00

Police Arrest Six Jewish Extremists After Attack on St. James Monastery In Jerusalem

JERUSALEM (Times of Israel/WAFA) — Six religious Jews — five minors and one adult — were arrested on Sunday, August 2, after banging and spitting on the entrance to the St. James Monastery in the Old City of Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter, police said.

The six also threw stones at the wall of the compound, which is the headquarters of the Armenian Church in the region and the home of its top local cleric.

According to an Armenian journalist, the suspects saw an Armenian woman filming them, and yelled at her, "Get back inside, you daughter of a whore!"

Video of the incident showed one suspect hurling stones, reportedly at the woman filming them.

"Upon receiving the report, officers from the David Precinct were dispatched to the scene and launched extensive searches, assisted by Mabat 2000 observation center officers," the Israel Police said in a statement.

see ATTACK, page 5

Armenian Catholicos Karekin II To Stand Trial in Historic First

By Yousef Bardouka

In a first in Armenia's modern history, Catholicos Karekin II, the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, will go to court to face criminal charges. The case concerns the dismissal of Bishop Gevorg Saroyan, with the authorities accusing Karekin II and other church officials of refusing to reinstate Saroyan.

According to the independent media outlet CivilNet, five other senior church officials are to stand trial alongside Karekin II on charges of deliberately "obstructing the enforcement of a lawful court decision" through "abuse of power."

Those include Archbishop Nathan Hovhannisyan, Archbishop Haykazun Najaryan, Bishop Vahan Hovhannesyan, Bishop Edgar Hakobyan, and Bishop Artur Hakobyan. According to CivilNet, Karekin II and the bishops have also been placed under a travel ban.

Saroyan was among a number of Church figures to have expressed support for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in his conflict with the Church and Karekin II.

He had publicly supported Pashinyan's Church reform agenda, and was dismissed in January.

On his dismissal, the Church cited Saroyan's "abuse of office, failure to fulfil the duties incumbent upon the Primate, as well as instances of coercion and pressure exercised against the clergy of the diocese." In response, Saroyan dismissed the Church's claims, and instead accused Karekin II of possessing compromising material on all members of the clergy.

A court in Armenia ordered the Church to reinstate Saroyan the same month he was dismissed.

The authorities barred Karekin II from leaving the country in February, but struck down the travel ban two months later in April.

Relations between the Church and Pashinyan's government have been tense since May 2025, after Pashinyan criticized Church leadership for failing to properly maintain churches across the country. As accusations against the Church, and specifically against Karekin II, continued to grow, Pashinyan gradually made clear that he was seeking to oust the Catholicos.

(This story originally appeared on the news website www.oc-media.org on July 30.)

Opposition Lawmakers Meet Catholicos after Parliament Snub

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Opposition lawmakers made a point of visiting Catholicos Karekin and receiving his blessings late on Sunday, August 2, after he was effectively barred from addressing the inaugural session of Armenia's new parliament contrary to an established tradition.

The parliament's statutes entitle the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church to deliver such an address along with the president of the republic. Karekin did not exercise that right due to a lack of formal invitation from the pro-government majority in the National Assembly. The snub reflected Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's yearlong campaign to depose him, denounced by the Armenian opposition as illegal.

Lawmakers representing the opposition Strong Armenia and Hayastan alliances decried Karekin's absence when the parliament elected on June 7 began its opening session on Sunday morning.

"Where is the Catholicos?" shouted some of them, prompting stern warnings from a pro-government colleague chairing the session.

The entire parliamentary groups of both alliances visited Karekin at his Echmiadzin headquarters late in the evening to show solidarity with him.

"In the context of this government's anti-national campaign, when for the first time in the history of our state, His Holiness' message, prayer, and wishes were not heard at the inaugural session of the National Assembly, we were obliged to correct what happened," Hayastan's parliamentary leader, Anna Grigorian, said at the meeting.

Catholicos Karekin II meets with opposition members of Armenia's new parliament, Echmiadzin, August 2, 2026.

see OPPOSITION, page 2

Liparit Avetisyan in his Metropolitan Opera debut as Alfredo in Giuseppi Verdi's opera "La Traviata," with Rosa Feola as the courtesan Violetta (photo courtesy Liparit Avetisyan)

Tenor Liparit Avetisyan Stands Atop the Opera World

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Operatic tenor Liparit Avetisyan has become an internationally renowned singer who has appeared on many of the most famous stages in the West. He performed this May and June at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, where he made his debut as Alfredo Germont in Giuseppi Verdi's "La Traviata." Reviewer Rick Perdian of the New York Classical Review wrote: "Avetisyan exploited his handsome looks, youthful vigor, and shining lyric tenor for all their worth to craft a fascinating Alfredo."

The 36-year-old has traveled a long path from his native Yerevan to reach this current state of success. His family left Armenia in 1994 for the city of Theodosia in the Crimea, then under the control of Ukraine. He recalled that in his family, music — that is, the art of song — had always resounded. There were no musicians in his family but his father, he said, had a superb voice and would be asked "to beautify each evening with his voice."

see OPERA, page 16

PHILADELPHIA

Nishan Atinizian, pictured with his wife Margrit, received the Mamigonian Knight of the Year Award at the Grand Banquet of the Knights and Daughters of Vartan in Philadelphia on August 1, while Harry S. Cherken, Jr., at right, was given the Man of the Year Award by newly-reelected Knights Grand Commander Robert Avakian. See more on the event in a forthcoming issue.

BAKU

Armenian Wrestlers Shine In Baku World Championships

Page 6

NEWS *from* ARMENIA

Armenian, Ukrainian Parliament Leaders Speak

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Speaker of the National Assembly of Armenia Ruben Rubinyan held a phone conversation with Chairman of Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada Ruslan Stefanchuk on August 4.

Stefanchuk congratulated Rubinyan on his election as Speaker of Parliament.

The two speakers discussed the agenda for cooperation between Armenia's National Assembly and Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada, emphasizing the importance of further strengthening ties.

YSU to Reportedly End Contract with Former Law Faculty Dean

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Yerevan State University (YSU) will terminate the employment contract of Gagik Ghazinyan, a former dean of the university's Faculty of Law and former member of Armenia's Justice Council, effective Sept. 1, the Zhoghovurd newspaper reported on Saturday, August 1, citing unnamed sources.

According to the report, Ghazinyan was told on July 7 that the university would not renew his contract.

His sons, Artur Ghazinyan and Davit Ghazinyan, are affiliated with opposition political forces.

Artur Ghazinyan was elected to parliament in the previous parliamentary elections as a member of the Hayastan alliance. Davit Ghazinyan is a senior member of the Strong Armenia party and was also elected to parliament on June 7.

The report did not provide an official explanation from YSU for the decision not to extend Ghazinyan's contract.

Ancient Settlement Discovered at Site of Academic City

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — A significant archaeological discovery has been made in Silikyan district, at the site where Academic City will be built.

Excavations led by archaeologist Hakob Simonyan this week revealed an architectural complex consisting of around 34 stone-built rooms, along with tools indicating advanced stone-working practices. Researchers believe this may be the oldest known settlement in the area, with origins dating back thousands of years.

The discovery was presented during the official summary of Armenia's 2025 archaeological season on March 24, 2026.

The discovery adds a new historical dimension to the project.

The future educational and scientific hub is being developed on a site where traces of early human habitation have been preserved, creating a unique link between Armenia's ancient heritage and its vision for the future.

Armenia Govt. Charges Russian Blogger over Offensive Language about Armenians, Vardavar Water Festival

By Nate Ostiller

Russian blogger Nadezhda Pirozhkova in a photo posted on social media in July 2026

Russian blogger Nadezhda Pirozhkova has been charged with hate speech after she published a video complaining about how she was splashed unwillingly during Armenia's Vardavar water festival while calling the festival itself "aggressive" and referring to Armenians as being "rat-like." The charges were reported by the Russian-language Polish media outlet Vot Tak on Wednesday, July 29, citing comments from Armenia's Investigative Committee.

Vardavar is a national holiday in Armenia connected to the country's Apostolic Church. The key manner of celebrating the holiday is by splashing others with water in the street — including total strangers.

Pirozhkova, who apparently has lived in Armenia since 2025, had published a video on social media taken during the festival earlier in July, which contained clips of her complaining about being splashed even as she tells passersby she does not want to be involved in the holiday.

She also described the holiday as "direct aggression towards visitors" along with the above-mentioned offensive language.

The video quickly racked up thousands of views, and Pirozhkova ultimately made a public apology for the remarks.

"I understand that many took it as disrespect for the Armenian people. And I truly regret it. I did not and do not have such an intention," Pirozhkova wrote.

"I recorded an emotional video about a specific situation and spoke from my feelings at the time. I felt vulnerable at the time and wanted to protect myself," she wrote, adding, "I also didn't check the sound when I posted the story. Otherwise, it wouldn't have ended up online," likely referring to the outrage over the "rat-like" comments.

The apology apparently did not mollify the public, which reported the comments to the Interior Ministry, the Investigative Committee told Vot Tak.

Pirozhkova has been placed under house arrest pending the results of the investigation, and if convicted, faces from one to four years in prison.

(This story originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on July 29.)

Opposition Lawmakers Meet Catholicos Snubbed By Parliament Majority

OPPOSITION, from page 1

According to a statement released by the church's Mother See, Karekin "conveyed his greetings and blessings to the deputies" and regretted the fact that he was unable to address them and the other lawmakers on the parliament floor "for known reasons." He also deplored the "concerning situation" in Armenia and "illegal, unconstitutional steps taken against the Armenian Church."

"Such unacceptable phenomena undermine the foundations of national unity, Diaspora-Armenia relations, disrupt the atmosphere of mutual respect and trust in society, the strengthening of democracy and legality, and the supremacy of justice and truth," the statement quoted him as saying.

Karekin as well as six archbishops and bishops will go on trial on Friday, August 7 (after the Mirror-Spectator goes to press) on charges rejected by them, opposition leaders and other critics of Pashinyan as politically motivated. The charges stem from his January 27 decision to defrock a pro-government bishop involved in Pashinyan's controversial campaign. Lawyers representing the Mother See maintain that Armenian courts law-enforcement agencies have no jurisdiction over internal church affairs.

Karekin is the first Catholicos prosecuted in Armenia's post-Soviet history. Even Soviet authorities never formally prosecuted his predecessors.

Pashinyan began pressuring Karekin to resign in June 2025 shortly after the Catholicos accused Azerbaijan of committing ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh and illegally occupying Armenian border areas during an international conference in Switzerland. Three Armenian archbishops and one bishop were arrested in the following months on different charges strongly denied by them. They were all moved to house arrest this year.

Zakaryan Warns Armenia Risks Getting Caught in Middle of Rivals' Geopolitical Struggle

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia risks becoming trapped in a widening geopolitical struggle among major regional and global powers because of the government's foreign policy choices, former Deputy Defense Minister and Republican Party of Armenia Deputy Chairman Artak Zakaryan warned on August 1.

In a social media post, Zakaryan said Armenia's current trajectory has left the country increasingly vulnerable to competing interests involving Russia, the United States, Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan. He argued that the government's policies have reduced Armenia's ability to maintain strategic independence and protect its national interests.

"We can now say that we are in that trap," Zakaryan wrote, warning that Armenia's key challenge is not simply choosing between closer ties with the West and preserving relations with Russia, but maintaining sufficient strategic autonomy and control over its territory and transit routes.

He said regional developments could further complicate Armenia's position, particularly if Russia retains its influence in Ukraine, Western influence declines in Georgia, and the United States fails to pressure Iran into changing its regional posture.

According to Zakaryan, Tehran would strongly oppose any arrangements that expand Western or pan-Turkic influence near its borders, while Moscow and Ankara would also seek to prevent the South Caucasus from becoming a strategic foothold for Western powers.

Zakaryan said Azerbaijan and Georgia have pursued more balanced foreign policies that allow them to preserve their influence under different geopolitical scenarios, while Armenia faces the risk of becoming a passive player in decisions affecting the region.

"The key issue for Armenia is whether we can preserve enough strategic independence and control over our territory and transit routes to remain a meaningful actor in the South Caucasus without becoming a casualty of competition between major powers," he wrote.

Zakaryan criticized Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government, accusing it of prioritizing foreign interests over Armenia's long-term security. He claimed that the ruling Civil Contract party had benefited from Western support and would continue policies that could expose Armenia to new risks.

He also drew parallels with Armenia's history in the early 20th century, when the country found itself caught between competing regional powers and suffered significant consequences.

Zakaryan called for a more pragmatic foreign policy, urging Armenians not to blindly support confrontation with Russia, place unconditional trust in Western initiatives, or underestimate the strategic interests of Turkey and Azerbaijan.

"Instead, we need to regain our sense of responsibility and seriously focus on solving the country's problems," he added.

ARMENIA

Deep Breathing:

Asthma Clinic Buried 250 Meters Into an Armenian Salt Mine

By Pjotr Sauer

YEREVAN *(Guardian)* — For most people, spending hours deep underground in darkness would seem an odd prescription for better health.

Yet every morning, a handful of Armenians descend 250 meters beneath the earth into an active salt mine where they spend six hours in cavernous chambers carved from rock salt, hoping the air below ground will help them breathe more easily.

"I tried every possible treatment, and this is the only thing that worked," said Mikayel Torosian, an asthma sufferer visiting the clinic. "I thought it was complete rubbish before I tried it, but I am a true believer now. It saved me."

Since its opening in 1987, patients have travelled to the Soviet-era mine for an alternative treatment known as speleotherapy based on the belief that the mine's salt-saturated, allergen-free air can alleviate respiratory diseases.

But the clinic, one of the world's few hospitals in a deep salt mine, now hangs in the balance after Armenia withdrew state funding, raising broader questions about the state's role in supporting alternative medicine.

The journey into the hospital begins with a rattling industrial lift that drops patients deep beneath a residential district on the outskirts of Yerevan. At the bottom, a maze of tunnels stretches through the rock. At first glance, the underground cavern looks more like a cold war bunker than a hospital. Behind curtains, patients nap on narrow beds. Others play billiards, pace around and perform breathing exercises or simply sit in silence, passing the hours in what might be one of the world's most unusual medical facilities.

Doing activities in the salt caverns is thought to help treat bronchial asthma, bronchitis, allergic and chronic sinus diseases, allergies and skin diseases.

"It looks unusual, but after a few days, people begin to enjoy the peace," said Anush Voskanyan, a doctor who has worked at the clinic since 1989, who guided visitors through the vast chambers.

Voskanyan said the idea to start the clinic emerged after doctors noticed that workers in salt mines appeared to suffer unusually low rates of respiratory illnesses despite spending their lives underground.

> "I TRIED EVERY POSSIBLE TREATMENT, AND THIS IS THE ONLY THING THAT WORKED,"
>
> –Mikayel Torosian
> ASTHMA SUFFERER VISITING THE CLINIC.

She said researchers began studying the mines' microclimate, eventually leading to the creation of specialized underground clinics across parts of the Soviet bloc.

Voskanyan attributes the health benefits to a combination of factors: salt-rich air, year-round 19C temperatures and the absence of allergens, pollution, noise and radiation.

"This is the perfect climate to live in. You basically don't age here," she said.

Patients typically spend six hours a day underground over a three-week course of treatment. Doctors say the first week allows the body to adapt to the mine's unique environment before the benefits gradually begin to accumulate.

At its peak, thousands of patients descended into the Avan mine every year, many receiving treatment free of charge through Armenia's healthcare system.

"We used to admit 60 people at one time," Voskanyan said, looking around largely empty chambers. "Today, there are probably five."

The clinic's fortunes changed in 2019 when the Armenian government withdrew state funding, arguing that speleotherapy lacked sufficient scientific evidence to justify public support. Patients who once attended free of charge now have to pay for each treatment session at a cost of about £20.

The decision came as Armenia began reforming its healthcare system and preparing for the introduction of universal health insurance, forcing officials to make difficult decisions about what treatments should be covered by the state.

"We're on the brink of closing down," Voskanyan said. "We're still operating, but just barely, and could close any day."

Voskanyan insists the treatment works, particularly for children suffering from asthma and allergies.

"There have even been cases where asthma attacks stopped completely after just one course of treatment," she said.

While speleotherapy has been practiced for decades across eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, relatively few large-scale studies have been conducted and most clinics have since closed down. Many respiratory specialists view it as a complementary therapy that may ease symptoms but should not replace conventional medical treatment.

For supporters, however, the lack of definitive research does not negate decades of patient testimony. "If it didn't help, I wouldn't be coming back," said Alvart Alihanyan, who has repeatedly returned to the clinic over the course of 10 years from Russia.

For now, each morning, the lift continues its descent beneath Yerevan. Whatever the debate over its medical benefits, the mine offers something increasingly rare above ground: hours of complete silence, no WIFI and a brief escape from the noise of the outside world.

Pashinyan Demands Criminal Proceedings Against Former Official Allied to Opposition

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on July 30 publicly demanded that law-enforcement authorities launch criminal proceedings against a former senior government official who was fired by him before running in Armenia's recent parliamentary elections on an opposition ticket.

Liparit Drmeyan served as the Armenian government's top lawyer representing it in international courts until effectively objecting in August last year to Pashinyan's decision seize Armenia's national electric utility owned by jailed billionaire Samvel Karapetyan.

Karapetyan's Tashir Group challenged the legality of the seizure at the Arbitration Institute of the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce (SCC) in July 2025. Shortly afterwards, the arbitration body ordered the government to refrain from confiscating the Electricity Networks of Armenia (ENA) utility from Tashir, changing ENA's top management or revoking its parent company's operating license pending a verdict in the case. The government and Armenia's Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC) ignored the injunction despite a letter from Drmeyan warning that the authorities in Yerevan have to comply with it.

Liparit Drmeyan

"I am the government ... no one can have a position that contradicts my position," Pashinyan said at the time, commenting on that letter.

The government announced Drmeyan's dismissal the next morning. The latter participated in the June 7 elections as a top candidate of the opposition Wings of Unity party led by former human rights ombudsman Arman Tatoyan. Like other opposition contenders, the party accused the authorities of rigging the vote officially won by Pashinyan's Civil Contract party.

Drmeyan personally alleged serious fraud at a June 16 news conference in Yerevan. He afterwards decried the Constitutional Court's decision to uphold the official election results.

Pashinyan lashed out at the former official on Thursday, branding him as Karapetyan's "Trojan horse" inside his government who "wrote notes contradicting the prime minister's instructions."

"Now I am calling on law enforcement, I am giving them a crime report it. Let them investigate the activities of the Trojan horse," he told journalists.

He said law-enforcement authorities must specifically "check" Drmeyan's bank accounts and other assets and find out how "a person serving the interests of a private company was in this building."

Pashinyan offered no proof of his allegations. Nor did he back up his claim that the Wings of Unity acted as a "tail" of the ruling party's three main election challengers, including Karapetyan's Strong Armenia bloc. Tatoyan's party never collaborated with the bloc during or after the elections.

The Office of the Prosecutor-General swiftly announced that it has begun acting on Pashinyan's comments.

Meanwhile, Drmeyan dismissed the allegations, saying that they "have no relation to reality" and result from his political activities. Pashinyan "will have to refute them," he said, hinting at legal action against the premier.

"Law and justice will prevail, and the public will see that 'the government is not you,'" he wrote on Facebook.

Although Tatoyan and his party did not immediately react to the development, they will likely present it as further proof that the prosecutors are executing the prime minister's illegal orders.

ARMENIA

Sales of Bottled Water, Alcoholic Beverages Suffer after Russian Ban

YEREVA (Public Radio of Armenia/ Panorama.am) — Russia's state product labeling system, "Chestny Znak", has suspended the sale of more than 70,000 bottles of drinking water and soft drinks imported from Armenia following an order by the Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing (Rospotrebnadzor).

According to the Center for Research in Perspective Technologies (CRPT), the operator of the "Chestny Znak" system, the measure was introduced to "prevent possible harm to the life and health of Russian citizens" after authorities identified violations of mandatory product requirements.

The restrictions apply to specific production batches of BJNI medicinal table mineral water produced by RRR Mineral Water Plant CJSC (Armenia), "Prosto Azbuka" natural drinking water, including children's water, produced by WATERLOCK LLC (Armenia), and DARBAS-brand "Mojito" carbonated soft drink produced by Arsen ev Nerses LLC (Armenia).

The CRPT stressed that the suspension affects only products manufactured on specific dates and does not apply to the companies' other products.

"The sale of the batches identified by Rospotrebnadzor is currently prohibited in retail stores and online sales channels until all necessary inspections are completed," the CRPT said.

According to CRPT Deputy Director General Revaz Yusupov, the system has prevented the sale of 48 million bottles of drinking water that failed to meet expiration date or other mandatory requirements since the beginning of 2026.

It is not just bottled water sales that are suffering. Retail sales of Armenian brandy and wine in Russia fell sharply in the first six months of 2026, outpacing declines in the wider alcohol market, industry data showed, Kommersant reported.

Sales of Armenian brandy dropped by 12.2 percent year-on-year to 1.37 million decalitres between January and June, reducing Armenia's share of Russia's brandy market to 20 percent, down by 1.7 percentage points. Market participants linked the fall to a suspension by consumer watchdog Rospotrebnadzor of products from three Armenian producers, as well as distributors cutting back supplies as a precaution.

Wine sales from Armenia fell by 11.8 percent to 239,650 decalitres in the same period, with June alone seeing an 18.9% decline to 33,800 decalitres. Armenia's share of Russia's still wine market remains below 1%.

ANDRANIK GHAZARYAN PHOTO

Preliminary Investigation Completed in Avetik Chalabyan Case over Alleged Voting Fraud

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The preliminary investigation into criminal proceedings concerning the alleged preparation by a group of individuals to obstruct the exercise of electoral rights has been completed with regard to Avetik Chalabyan, coordinator of the Hayakve initiative.

The Investigative Committee of Armenia announced the development in a statement on August 3.

"As previously reported, within the framework of criminal proceedings being investigated by the Main Department for the Investigation of Crimes Against the State, the Foundations of the Constitutional Order and Public Security of the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Armenia, apparent factual data were obtained indicating that Chalabyan, acting as coordinator of the Hayakve initiative, sought to obstruct the free exercise of electoral rights by persons eligible to vote in Armenia's parliamentary elections held on June 7, 2026.

According to the investigation, on February 4, 2026, Chalabyan met with representatives of a foreign state at a café in Yerevan. During the meeting, he allegedly sought to persuade them, while appealing to their interest in securing the victory of a political force of their choice in the parliamentary elections, to act as part of a group and by prior agreement, using their official powers or the influence arising from those powers, to obstruct the free exercise of voting rights by Armenian citizens eligible to vote.

Specifically, he allegedly urged them, through owners of organizations operating in the foreign state, to compel Armenian citizens employed by those organizations and eligible to vote to travel to Armenia and vote in favor of the Strong Armenia alliance in the parliamentary elections held on June 7, 2026. According to the investigation, the representatives of the foreign state agreed to the proposal.

As a result of investigative and procedural actions, the person allegedly responsible for the offence was identified. By decision of the supervising prosecutor, public criminal prosecution was initiated against Chalabyan under Article 43-210, Part 2, Clauses 5 and 6 of the Criminal Code, on charges of preparation, by a group acting by prior agreement, to obstruct the exercise of electoral rights through the use of official authority or influence arising from such authority.

Avetik Chalabyan

Detention was imposed on Chalabyan as a preventive measure.

The criminal case against him has been forwarded to the supervising prosecutor together with the indictment," the statement said.

Baku Sees Constitutional Referendum Taking Place in Armenia

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia's leadership may soon hold a constitutional referendum to meet Azerbaijan's key precondition for signing a peace treaty between the two nations, a senior aide to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said on Tuesday, August 4.

Azerbaijan objects to a preamble to the current Armenian constitution referring to a 1990 declaration of independence, which in turn cites a 1989 unification act adopted by the legislative bodies of Soviet Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The only legal way to remove that reference is to adopt a new constitution through a referendum.

While rejecting the Azerbaijani precondition in public, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has repeatedly called for the kind of constitutional change that is demanded by Baku. Pashinyan said last month that he has a popular mandate to enact such a change after his Civil Contract party's victory in the June 7 parliamentary elections rejected as fraudulent by the Armenian opposition.

"We are receiving signals that the process of adopting a new constitution will begin in Armenia in the near future," Aliyev's chief foreign policy aide, Hikmet Hajiyev, told the Turkish TV channel Haber Global.

"It is possible that a referendum will be organized in Armenia," he said. "After the removal of the demands addressed to Azerbaijan in the preamble to the Armenian constitution, we will no longer see any obstacles to the final signing of a peace agreement."

Hajiyev visited Armenia and met with the secretary of the country's Security Council, Armen Grigorian, one week after the disputed elections. The meeting took place in the northern Tavush province. Pashinyan was also in Tavush on a short holiday that day, a fact that prompted opposition and media speculation that he held secret talks with Hajiyev.

The Armenian premier said afterwards that Hajiyev's trip was aimed at "managing" the risk of another Armenian-Azerbaijani war. He had regularly stated before that peace has already been established between the two South Caucasus states.

The current constitution stipulates that the draft of a new constitution must be approved by at least two-thirds of the parliament deputies before being put on a referendum. Pashinyan's party fell short of such a majority in the June 7 elections.

Pashinyan has yet to clarify exactly how he is planning to overcome this hurdle. He said on July 9 that the new Armenian parliament's composition does not allow the new constitution's adoption "solely through intra-parliamentary mechanisms."

Some Armenian opposition figures and commentators have speculated that Pashinyan could hold the referendum without the draft constitution's mandatory parliamentary approval.

Kurdish Shopkeepers Hospitalized after Alleged Racist Mob Attack in Istanbul

ISTANBUL (Scandinavian Center for Freedom) — Two Kurdish shopkeepers were hospitalized in July after being beaten with sticks by a large group in Istanbul in what their family described as a racially motivated attack, the Bianet news website reported.

Nuh Yıldız said the assailants shouted anti-Kurdish insults as they beat and dragged him and his uncle, Abdurrahman Yıldız, for more than 30 minutes in the city's Sarıyer district on July 21. He said police detained the injured men when they arrived rather than members of the attacking group.

The assault broke Nuh Yıldız's arm in two places and injured his foot. His uncle, was also injured.

The violence followed a July 14 dispute involving another family member, Adem Yıldız, and local business owners. Police detained Adem Yıldız during that confrontation and released him six days later, according to the report.

Nuh Yıldız said members of the other group later invited the family to meet and settle the dispute, telling them they did not want the disagreement to escalate.

Three family members went to their shop for the meeting, prepared to apologize if necessary, Yıldız said. He said the other group attacked them as soon as the premises were opened, damaging the shop's sign before beating them.

Yıldız said the men initially avoided fighting back because of his uncle's previous facial surgery and instead tried to protect themselves.

He said the attackers repeatedly insulted their Kurdish identity and cursed the state for protecting Kurds.

Yıldız said he was unable to stand after the assault and only then realized the extent of his injuries. He spent four days at Baltalimanı Bone Disease Teaching and Research Hospital before being transferred to Prof. Dr. Cemil Taşcıoğlu City Hospital, where he said doctors told him he would require surgery on his arm.

He also accused members of the group of forcing him underneath a vehicle and stealing money from his pocket during the attack.

He said four people were subsequently detained but that the family had received no information about whether a court had ordered them to be arrested and jailed pending trial.

The family filed criminal complaints but has since received messages ordering it to close its Sarıyer shop and another business, stay away from the neighborhood and withdraw the complaints, Yıldız said.

According to Yıldız, intermediaries told the family that the alleged attackers would "forgive" them only if they withdrew their statements.

"We are still being threatened," Yıldız said. "This happened to us, but we do not want it to happen to anyone else. What was done to us should not go unpunished."

Sarıyer district in Istanbul

Police Arrest Six Jewish Extremists After Attack On St. James Monastery in Jerusalem

ATTACK, from page 1

Three of the attackers were barred from the Old City for 15 days, and the other three were being brought before the Jerusalem Magistrate's Court, where police are asking that their detention be extended.

"The Israel Police views all manifestations of violence and racism with the utmost severity and will continue to act decisively to locate those responsible, bring them to justice, and safeguard public safety," police said.

Israel has been struggling to stop spitting attacks on Christian clergy and vandalism of church property in the Old City.

In April, after a series of similar incidents, the Foreign Ministry appointed veteran diplomat George Deek to a newly created role of special envoy to the Christian world.

Speaking to Fox News on August 1, President Isaac Herzog said Israel was "dealing with" attacks on Christians "aggressively."

The Higher Presidential Committee for Church Affairs in Palestine in a statement on August 3 condemned the attack carried out by the attackers, saying it "constitutes a new provocation targeting the Christian presence and its holy sites in the Holy City.

In a statement, the Committee affirmed that this attack is part of a continuous series of colonist attacks targeting churches, mosques, clergy, and holy sites. It added that the incident reflects escalating settlement policies aimed at imposing new realities across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, while Israel's military offensive in the Gaza Strip continues, in what it described as a violation of international law and freedom of worship.

The Committee added that the attack coincided with the continued crimes committed against the Palestinian people, which resulted in the killing of 18 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. This reflects a persistent pattern of violations targeting Palestinians and their holy sites, and underscores the dangerous escalation taking place throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

The committee called on the international community to uphold its legal and moral responsibilities, to pressure the occupying authorities to halt colonist attacks and ongoing violations against the Palestinian people and their holy sites, to hold those responsible accountable, and to provide international protection for Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, as they are an integral part of human and religious heritage.

There appeared to be no statement from the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. However, on its page on the platform X, formerly known as Twitter, the Patriarchate had posted a comment directed at US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee: " @GovMikeHuckabee we call on you again to condemn these acts of hate against Christians in Jerusalem. We call on you again to ask the Israeli government to CRIMINALIZE these acts for what they are. These are hate crimes anywhere in the West. Why aren't they hate crimes here?"

Attacks on Armenians as well as other Christians are common in the city. Another similar incident was recorded in 2023.

INTERNATIONAL

Detention Center for EU Illegal Immigrants Not Discussed, Foreign Ministry Says

YEREVAN (News.am) — A proposal to set up a detention center in Armenia for illegal immigrants from European Union (EU) member states has not been submitted to Yerevan, and such a matter has not been discussed with the Armenian side. The spokesperson for the Armenian foreign ministry, Ani Badalyan, offered this response to reports that at the EU Council meeting on August 4, Italy will submit for discussion the matter of setting up detention centers in a number of countries, including Armenia, for illegal immigrants in the EU.

"No such proposal was made to us [i.e. Armenia], no such matter was discussed with us," Ani Badalyan noted.

As reported earlier, Euronews wrote on Monday that at the EU Council meeting on Tuesday, Italian Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi will submit a proposal to set up, in a number of countries, detention centers for illegal immigrants in the European Union.

Pashinyan Warns Russia Trade Dispute Could End EAEU

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has warned that the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) risks becoming dysfunctional unless restrictions affecting Armenian exports are resolved, saying the issue extends beyond Armenia and threatens the bloc itself.

Speaking at a press briefing this week, Pashinyan commented on his recent phone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, which was initiated by the Armenian side and focused, among other issues, on trade restrictions affecting Armenian goods entering the Russian market.

"The dialogue was successful because we had a long conversation," Pashinyan said.

He said he reiterated Armenia's right to pursue alternative foreign policy and economic options, stressing that the country's course had received a democratic mandate in the recent parliamentary elections.

Referring to restrictions on Armenian exports to Russia, the prime minister argued that the problem should not be viewed solely as Armenia's.

"This is not Armenia's problem. It is an EAEU problem, because what is effectively happening is that the Eurasian Economic Union is paralyzed and not functioning," he said.

"If this issue is not resolved quickly, allow me to predict that this will mark the beginning of the end of the EAEU," Pashinyan warned.

Asked whether Armenia could consider leaving the Russia-led economic bloc, the prime minister replied: "No, we have no such plan."

INTERNATIONAL

Armenian Wrestlers Shine in Baku World Championships

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Armenian Greco-Roman wrestling team returned on July 31 from the U17 World Championships in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku with three medals.

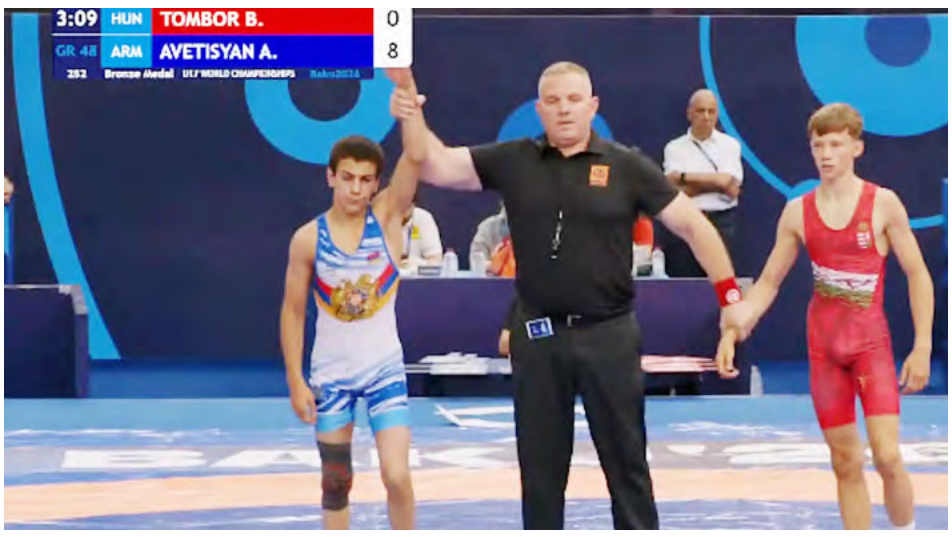
Janes Nazaryan won the gold medal in the 71 kg weight category, while Ararat Avetisyan (48 kg) and Gevorg Harutyunyan (51 kg) claimed bronze medals.

Speaking at a press conference, head coach Gagik Khachatryan praised his team for doing a "tremendous job," while saying that it could have achieved even more.

"Our team competed with 10 wrestlers and came away with three medals. I am very pleased with our medalists; they truly did a tremendous job. This is the World Championships, where the strongest wrestlers compete and the battle for medals is extremely difficult. We also had other athletes who were capable of winning medals, but it did not work out. Naturally, we will analyze our shortcomings and mistakes and continue working on them," Khachatryan said.

Referring to the medalists, Khachatryan said they had given the team great pride by raising Armenia's flag and hearing the Armenian national anthem played in Baku.

"It was a very emotional and inspiring moment. When Janes won the gold medal and Armenia's national anthem was about to be played, we even thought they might not allow it, but there were no problems at all. The officiating was also fair. To be honest, we had concerns before traveling, but the situation on the ground turned out to be completely different," Khachatryan said.



Ararat Avetisyan in Baku, left

Gold medalist Janes Nazaryan became a U17 world champion for the second time. He said the responsibility was even greater this time, especially given the level of competition.

"Since I had also won gold the last time, I was the center of attention for all the participants. There was pressure, but I managed to overcome it. I am satisfied with my bouts, and we worked well together with the coaches. There were some mistakes, but, thank God, they did not affect the overall result. Of all my matches, I would single out the final against Russia's Aslan Dzuev. At first, the bout did not go according to our plan, but thanks to my coaches' guidance, I managed to achieve a good result," Nazaryan said.

Janes Nazaryan in Baku

Gevorg Harutyunyan and his X-Ray showing his broken bone

Team member Gevorg Harutyunyan fought through injury to win the bronze medal. He injured his hand in his opening bout, but his determination to win a medal was so strong that he ignored the pain and continued competing to finish in third place.

"I wrestled opponents from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Georgia. I suffered an injury to my hand in my very first bout, and it affected me somewhat. Otherwise, I think I could have gone further. It was difficult, but once I realized I had a chance to win the bronze medal, I ignored the pain in my hand and fought until the end," Harutyunyan said.

Ararat Avetisyan, who added another bronze medal to Armenia's tally, said the competition was very strong and that he was satisfied with finishing third under those circumstances. The medal is Avetisyan's third bronze medal at the international level.

"The opponents were strong, but my desire to win a medal was even stronger. I am happy that I managed to overcome the difficulties and claim the bronze medal. During the medal ceremony, I felt great pride seeing Armenia's flag raised in Baku," Avetisyan said, adding that he now intends to work on his mistakes and shortcomings and prepare even better in the future.

Central Asian States and Azerbaijan Create Roadmap for Cooperation

The leaders of the five Central Asian states and Azerbaijan, meeting on the shores of Lake Issyk Kul in Kyrgyzstan on July 31, signaled an intent to deepen trans-Caspian connections. The meeting's final document, known as the Cholpon-Ata Declaration, was perhaps more symbolic than substantive, reaffirming participants' desire to expand trade and maintain regional security. The document "reflects the high level of trust among Central Asian states and the Republic of Azerbaijan, their commitment to the principles of peace, good-neighborliness, and sustainable development, as well as their desire to further expand regional cooperation," read a Kyrgyz presidential statement.

The meeting formalized Azerbaijan's status as a full participant in Central Asian councils, expanding a format known as the C5 to C6. Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov told attendees that Kyrgyzstan would use its tenure as a member of the UN Security Council to promote the common interests of C6 states. Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev noted that "relations with the countries of Central Asia are among" Baku's top foreign policy priorities.

Central Asian leaders also used the occasion to sign a variety of bilateral agreements. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan signed an allied relations treaty and other documents; Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan also signed agreements covering transport, energy and trade.

The leaders of the five Central Asian states and Azerbaijan met in Kyrgyzstan for both official meetings and informal communication (Photo: president.uz)

Islamabad is trying to persuade Kazakhstan to prioritize Pakistani ports over Iranian. Kazakh Ambassador Yerzhan Kistafin met with Pakistan's minister of Maritime Affairs, Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry on July 29 to discuss trade-related issues. Chaudhry offered Kazakhstan access to port facilities in Karachi, Port Qasim and Gwadar, according to a Pakistani government statement. It noted that Islamabad is "keen to enhance engagement with Kazakhstan in ports, shipping, trade facilitation and regional connectivity." In late June, Kazakh officials expressed interest in building a logistics facility at the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, despite ongoing tension between Iran and the United States.

Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have launched a digital system, known as eTIR, to expedite cross-border trade. The new system reduces the time needed for customs clearance by eliminating paperwork in favor of electronic entries that are shared. The first test runs of the eTIR system involved a truck carrying televisions and music equipment from Azerbaijan to Uzbekistan via Turkmenistan, as well as four trucks carrying commodities, including cotton and water, crossing the Caspian Sea from the Turkmen port of Turkmenbashi to Azerbaijan. "The implementation of the eTIR system is … important in terms of increasing the attractiveness of the Middle Corridor and increasing the volume of cargo transportation via this route," according to a statement issued by Azerbaijan's customs service.

The New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy has developed an initiative called the Silk Seven-Plus (S7+), a blueprint to enable states in Greater Central Asia to realize their economic growth ambitions. It is a multi-phase connectivity plan to strengthen the sovereignty of regional states. The S7+ envisions the establishment of a trade crescent connecting the Caspian Basin to the Arabian Sea, unlocking Greater Central Asia's full trade potential. The items included in this roundup are relevant to the development of the S7+ concept.

(This story originally appeared on www.Eurasianet.org on August 3.)

Community News

Marriott Reverses Course on 'Genocide Tourism' In Karabakh

WASHINGTON — Marriott Bonvoy has dropped its controversial tourism package to ethnically cleansed Artsakh in the wake of a five-day international human rights campaign led by the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) and its counterparts and coalition partners around the world.

The fourteen-hour package offered travelers a guided tour across Artsakh, including the Azerbaijani-occupied cities of Shushi and Stepanakert. Its advertising made no mention of Artsakh's millennial history as a cradle of Armenian civilization and the Christian faith, nor did Marriott's promotional materials reference the Azerbaijani assault, blockade, and ethnic cleansing that emptied Artsakh of its 150,000 indigenous Armenians. Marriott International has a market capitalization of over $100 billion.

The Center for Armenian Research and Analysis (CARA) broke the story on July 27, publishing research that raised alarms over the tour across multiple traditional and social media platforms.

"Marriott had no business profiting from the suffering of Artsakh's ethnically cleansed Armenians – no right to run tours normalizing Azerbaijan's genocide of an indigenous population," said ANCA Executive Director Aram Hamparian. "We were encouraged by the rapid global response that got this tour taken down within five days – less than 120 hours – and will, of course, remain vigilant against all those who seek to enrich themselves through genocide."

The tour, bookable directly through Marriott's activities platform and eligible for Marriott Bonvoy points, offered entry to the "Karabakh zone" and a stop at Artsakh's best-known monument, Tatik-Papik, "We Are Our Mountains." CARA's analysis found that the listing described the monument only as a "notable example of regional stone art and architecture," with the word Armenian appearing nowhere in the description. "That silence is not sloppy copywriting," the CARA report stated. "It is part of the plan."

Activists interested in sharing their views with Marriott can call 786-321-7264 or write to marriott-activities@travelcurious.com.

Artsakh's 150,000 displaced Armenians have been barred by Azerbaijan from a collective, protected, and sustainable return home. Nineteen Armenian hostages remain in Azerbaijani custody. Azerbaijan continues to destroy Armenian churches across the region. And Azerbaijani troops continue to occupy the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia.

The Mamik and Papik monument at night

A worship service (Badarak) at St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church, highlighting the role of Armenian churches in preserving faith, culture, and community (Photo courtesy of Grace Yacobe).

From Philly to Capitol Hill: Two Expressions Of Armenian Identity

By Grace Yacobe
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WASHINGTON/PHILADELPHIA — Though a mere 139 miles separate Philadelphia from Washington, the Armenian communities in those two cities are much more different than the physical distance implies. While both communities began with a handful of Armenians, they arose at different times, with different aims.

Philadelphia's Armenian community was established by immigrants fleeing the Armenian Genocide who strove to preserve their Armenian identity through churches, schools, and cultural organizations. Washington's, on the other hand, developed much later, around influence and its ability to bring Armenians together in the nation's capital to shape policy and advocate for Armenia. It drew Armenians whose careers centered on government, diplomacy, journalism and public policy: a distinction that continues today.

St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, an institution of the Philadelphia Armenian community (Photo courtesy of Grace Yacobe).

The difference between the two communities reflects the different historical circumstances that shaped them. Philadelphia's Armenian community grew largely in response to displacement following the Armenian Genocide of 1915, as survivors and immigrants rebuilt their lives and created institution centered around churches, schools, cultural organization and family connections. Washington's Armenian community developed as Armenian Americans became increasingly integrated into the political, diplomatic, and professional institutions of the United States. In 2025, 41.2 percent of federal civilian employees worked in the Washington metropolitan area, making it the nation's largest hub for public service.

see IDENTITY, page 8

Der Matossian Appointed Zoryan's Genocide Research Director

TORONTO — The Board of Directors of the Zoryan Institute has unanimously appointed Professor Bedross Der Matossian as Director of Genocide Research, succeeding the late Professor Vahakn N. Dadrian, who led the Institute's Genocide Research Program for more than a decade and left an enduring scholarly legacy.

Born and raised in the Old City of Jerusalem, Bedross Der Matossian is professor of modern Middle East history and the Hymen Rosenberg Professor in Judaic Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He received his PhD from Columbia University in 2008 and has taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the University of Chicago. In 2026, he was awarded the prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship in recognition of his pioneering research on mass violence.

Dr. Bedross Der Matossian

An internationally recognized scholar of the Armenian Genocide, the late Ottoman Empire, and modern Middle Eastern history, Professor Der Matossian is the author of several acclaimed books, including *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire* and *The Horrors of Adana: Revolution and Violence in the Early Twentieth Century*. He is also the editor of *Denial of Genocides in the Twenty-First Century* and *Shattered Truths: Denial of Genocide in the Digital Age*, and the co-editor, with Edita Gzoyan, of *The Concentration Camps of the Armenian Genocide*.

Upon his appointment, Der Matossian stated: "I am deeply honored and humbled by the confidence the Board of the Zoryan Institute has placed in me. To follow in the footsteps of Professor Vahakn N. Dadrian is both an extraordinary privilege and a profound responsibility. His scholarship transformed the field of genocide studies and set a standard of intellectual rigor and moral courage that continues to inspire generations of researchers. His are truly monumental shoes to fill, and I accept this role with humility and with a steadfast commitment to advancing the Institute's mission through rigorous scholarship, meaningful collaboration, and the pursuit of historical truth."

Der Matossian's appointment marks a new chapter in the Institute's longstanding commitment to advancing the study of genocide through rigorous scholarship, international collaboration, and public education, while building upon the distinguished legacy established by Professor Dadrian.

COMMUNITY NEWS

From Philly to Capitol Hill: Two Expressions of Armenian Identity

IDENTITY, from page 7

Power Moves in DC

As the nation's capital, Washington provided Armenians with unique opportunities to engage with government, advocacy, and public policy, shaping a community where civic involvement became closely connected to Armenian identity.

Aram Bakshian Jr., a political aide in the Reagan and Nixon Administrations and a historian of Washington's Armenian community, wrote in the June 1995 issue of AGBU Magazine "perhaps the most 'minimalist' definition of an Armenian community applies to Washington, DC." By this description, Bakshian highlights that its origins differed from traditional immigrant communities. Unlike other cities where Armenian neighborhoods formed around cultural institutions, Washington's Armenian presence began with individuals who carried their heritage into the nation's capital and gradually built connections through civic engagement, and professional networks rather than geography alone.

Araz Balian, left, alongside fellow members of the Hamazkayin Meghry Dance Ensemble, performs traditional Armenian folk dance during the Mother's Day Luncheon at Armenian Martyrs' Congregational Church in Philadelphia (photo courtesy Alec Balian)

Early Armenians arrived in Washington as merchants, students and professionals but the community expanded significantly after World War II as Armenians became increasingly involved in government, diplomacy and public service. St. Mary's Armenian Church and Soorp Khatch Armenian Apostolic Church both became an important community institution in the 1950s.

The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), one of the country's leading Armenian advocacy organizations, is headquartered in the city, strengthening the city's role as a center for Armenian political engagement. Similarly, the Armenian Assembly of America was established in Washington in 1972 as a nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing Armenian interests through advocacy, education and public policy.

Although Washington lacks a single Armenian neighborhood, its institutions have become the heart of community life. Maria Stepanyan, president of the University of Maryland Armenian Student Association, said that distinction defines the region.

"In other cities, you might find Armenian community centers, schools, clubs, or cultural organizations spread throughout the city. Here, our two churches — St. Mary's and Soorp Khatch — really serve as the heart of the community," Stepanyan said.

The DMV — as the broad area that encompasses DC, and parts of Maryland and Virginia is known— makes these intuitions even more important, as the Armenian community is spread across a wider geographical area.

"Since there isn't one central Armenian neighborhood, people stay connected through institutions rather than geography," Stepanyan explained. "The churches are the strongest anchor of the community, but universities, advocacy organizations, and professional networks also play a major role."

Washington's location has also shaped the way many young Armenians engage with their heritage.

"Growing up here, it's almost unusual to meet an Armenian young person who hasn't participated in some form of advocacy," Stepanyan said. "Many students have interned with organizations like ANCA or the Armenian Assembly of America, participated in advocacy days on Capitol Hill, or attended rallies and protests organized by groups like the Armenian Youth Federation (AYF). Because these opportunities are so accessible, advocacy becomes part of the culture of the community."

That same commitment drew Michael Tatevossian from Los Angeles to Washington after graduating from college. Tatevossian, the programs director at ANCA, became involved with the organization through a research internship while in college.

"I've always been a policy nut, but after graduating, I moved to Washington, D.C., to pursue a career in public service," he said.

Tatevossian said he did not find it difficult to find his place in Washington after leaving the large Armenian population in California..

"While the community here is much smaller than in Los Angeles, it's incredibly welcoming and closely connected. Through the ANCA, I quickly found a strong network of Armenians who share many of the same professional and community interests," he noted.

He added that he believed Washington's professional environment grows into fruitful relationships strengthening its overall community.

"Professional connections here have grown into genuine friendships for me. These relationships go on to sustain community events, organizations, and tradition," he added.

Maria Stepanyan (left) poses with friends, including author Grace Yacobe (second from left), during a gathering at St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church in Washington, D.C., to watch the USA vs. Bosnia and Herzegovina soccer match (photo courtesy of Grace Yacobe)

Tatevossian argues that a community's strength is not measured not by its size, but by the people willing to invest in it.

"Communities thrive because the representatives of that community, and those within it, invest their time and energy into building relationships and creating opportunities for others," he said. "In Los Angeles, the community is all around you — you sort of take it for granted. Here in D.C., and in other places across the country, you have to seek it out. That intention will ensure its growth for the next generation."

continued on next page

St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church in Washington, D.C., representing the historic Armenian presence in the nation's capital (photo courtesy of Grace Yacobe).

from previous page

Philadelphia Story

Today Philadelphia is home to five Armenian churches, an Armenian school, in addition to many bakeries and restaurants, businesses, with nearly twice the Armenian population of the Washington metropolitan area.

Before the Armenian Genocide, only a small number of Armenians lived in the Philadelphia area. As the Genocide displaced thousands of Armenians, many of those refugees settled in there. The city offered opportunities to rebuild their lives through its growing manufacturing economy, particularly in textile and garment industries. Affordable neighborhoods and land allowed Armenian families to establish churches, cultural organizations, and eventually schools that became the foundation for community life.

Tanya Bardakjian's family settled in Philadelphia when her mother obtained a work visa to work as a seamstress in the 1970s from Aleppo. Although their closest family was in New York, they eventually became connected to the Armenian community through St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Church in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

Bardakjian, a Global Medical Affairs Lead at Sarepta Therapeutics, witnessed her parents establish the Philadelphia chapter of the Tekeyan Cultural Association.

"A robust Armenian community needs a church and cultural associations." Bardakjian said, "A school is an added bonus because it brings people together."

These institutions developed quickly as the Armenian population grew in the early part of the century. St. Sahag & St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church was established in 1917, followed by the Armenian Martyrs' Congregational Church in 1925, St. Mark's Armenian Catholic Church in 1926, and St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church and Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church.

One of the most important preservers of the Armenian identity in Philadelphia was the Armenian Sisters Academy (ASA). Founded in 1967, the ASA was established by request of Msgr. Stephen Stepanian, and the pastor of St. Mark's Armenian Catholic Church in Philadelphia. Three Armenian sisters, Sr. Valentine, Sr. Hripsime and Sr. Arousiag, arrived from Lebanon to establish a full time Armenian day school with an initial enrollment of 16 students. The school quickly became a community effort and with the support of the greater community the school moved to a larger campus and enrollment numbers skyrocketed. Many of the school's graduates frequently rank in the top 20 percent in the nation according to TerraNova test scores, and are often accepted at top-tier universities.

Araz Balian, a 2022 graduate of ASA, believes institutions such as the school and the churches remain the defining strength of Philadelphia's community.

"What makes our community unique is how close we are. We have a deep love and support for one another, and our five Armenian churches and one Armenian school work together as one united community," she said.

Philadelphia's strength has long been its close-knit relationships formed though churches, schools and community organizations. Balian believes each has something valuable to offer.

"I think Philadelphia can be inspired by Washington's dedication to advocacy and its efforts to influence public policy in support of Armenia. At the same time, Philadelphia's close-knit community and strong relationships are something that any Armenian community can appreciate and learn from," she said.

In both areas, maintaining identity, values, language, and Armenian heritage requires purpose. Separated by just 139 miles, they have become two different expressions of the same goal: ensuring that the Armenian identity continues to thrive for generations to come.

(Grace Yacobe is a Penn State student driven by culture, curiosity, and a big cup of coffee. She serves as president of the Armenian Student Association at Penn State and writes about science, culture, public policy, and the people and stories shaping our communities.)

Michael Tatevosian speaks to Leo Sarkisian Internship participants at the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), sharing his experiences in advocacy and public service with the next generation of Armenian-American leaders. (Photo courtesy of Michael Tatevosian)

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.

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

ADVERTISE IN THE MIRROR

COMMUNITY NEWS

At Library of Congress, Dr. Mouradian Sheds Light On 250 Years of Armenian Life in America

By Haykaram Nahapetyan
Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent

Dr. Khatchig Mouradian

WASHINGTON — In 1948, Librarian of Congress Luther Evans praised Armenian Americans for enriching the Library of Congress's Armenian collections with books, manuscripts, and other materials. He described their efforts as "one of the most appropriate ways for Americans of Armenian heritage to preserve the history and culture of their ancestral homeland."

That letter remains preserved in the Library of Congress archives as a symbolic milestone in the history of one of the world's most important Armenian collections.

Nearly eight decades later, Armenian materials are dispersed throughout the Library's 24 reading rooms, ranging from rare manuscripts and historical maps to newspapers, photographs, government documents, and personal archives. This remarkable collection formed the centerpiece of a lecture by Dr. Khatchig Mouradian, the Armenian and Georgian Area Specialist at the Library of Congress, who guided the audience through more than 250 years of Armenian-American history as reflected in the Library's holdings.

Martin the Armenian: The First Documented Armenian in America

The story begins in the early 17th century.

According to historical records, Martin the Armenian was the first documented Armenian to arrive in colonial America. Originally from Persia (modern-day Iran), Martin reached Jamestown, Va., by way of Europe.

"This marks the beginning of the documented Armenian presence in America," Mouradian said. Historical documents identify him variously as "Martin the Persian," "Martin an Armenian," and simply "Martin the Armenian." By 1619, Martin had acquired approximately 95 acres of land and was cultivating tobacco. When English customs officials attempted to impose higher import duties on his tobacco because they regarded him as a foreigner, Martin petitioned the Virginia Company, arguing that, as a resident of Virginia, he was entitled to the same treatment as other colonists.

"He won the case," Mouradian noted, while displaying the original Virginia court records on two large screens to his left and right — a rare opportunity for the audience to see these historic documents.

Armenian Interest in the New World

Before the more sizeable Armenian immigration to the United States began, Armenian intellectuals in Europe were already introducing their readers to America through books and maps.

One remarkable example presented during the lecture was an Armenian-language biography of George Washington, published in Vienna in 1855 by the Mekhitarist Congregation. The volume recounts Washington's military career, the American Revolution, his presidency, retirement and death.

"It was not simply hero worship," Mouradian explained. Rather, Armenian readers encountered a balanced and thoughtful portrait of one of America's founding fathers decades before many Armenians ever set foot in the New World.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's iconic *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, first published in 1852, appeared in Armenian translation only two years later again through the efforts of the Mekhitarian Order. Historical records show that Rev. Harrison Gray Otis Dwight (1803–1862), the first American missionary to work extensively with Armenians, wrote to Stowe's husband expressing his amazement that the famous novel had reached "the sons of Haig" in their own language. The author herself later expressed delight after receiving a copy of the Armenian edition.

As Armenian immigration increased during the late nineteenth century, newcomers began establishing institutions that would preserve their identity in their adopted homeland.

In 1890, Armenian community leaders in Worcester, Massachusetts, resolved to establish a church "in order to preserve these immigrants from being alienated." Within a year, they had purchased land and completed construction.

Mouradian displayed a *Boston Globe* newspaper's historical clipping reporting on the church's establishment, alongside with a photograph of what became the first Armenian church in the Western Hemisphere.

Armenian Genocide Through Original Documents

The lecture inevitably turned to the darkest chapter in Armenian history.

"As night fell on Saturday, April 24, 1915, Ottoman Turkish police officers paid surprise visits to dozens of Armenian addresses in Istanbul. Within hours, writers, artists, and lay and religious leaders found themselves greeting one another at an unlikely rendezvous spot — the Ottoman capital's central prison," Mouradian said while recounting the beginning of the Armenian Genocide.

Among the most striking documents preserved at the Library of Congress is a letter signed by Talaat Pasha, the principal architect of the Armenian Genocide, accepting an invitation to dine with United States Ambassador Henry Morgenthau in April 1915.

While Armenian intellectuals languished in prison awaiting deportation and death, Talaat attended a diplomatic dinner, assuring Morgenthau of his "most sincere friendship." The juxtaposition offers a chilling illustration of the calculated nature of the genocide.

One of the Library's most remarkable Armenian treasures is the handwritten journal of genocide survivor David Atamian.

Born in 1892 in the town of Behesni, Atamian survived deportation, persecution, starvation and exile before eventually reaching the United States. Over many years, he recorded his experiences in 14 handwritten volumes comprising more than 10,000 pages.

Donated to the Library of Congress during the 1940s, the journals were immediately recognized as one of the institution's greatest acquisitions. At the time, the library described them as "perhaps the most significant, certainly the most unusual acquisition of the year."

During the lecture, Mouradian read several deeply moving passages from Atamian's diary.

"Will I be able to sit here tomorrow? ... Will I be able to sleep here in my bed tomorrow? Where will I be tomorrow?"

For Atamian, "tomorrow" ultimately became America. In his adopted homeland, he served as a translator for the U.S. State Department, mastering Armenian, Turkish, Persian, French, and several other languages he had once dreamed of learning. He also published poetry that appeared in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

Celebrating Armenian-American Scholarship

The lecture concluded by highlighting Armenian-American academic achievement through the life and career of the late historian Nina Garsoïan (1923-1922).

Having arrived in the United States as a child refugee, Garsoïan became one of the world's foremost scholars of Armenian and Byzantine history. She was the first woman historian to receive tenure at Columbia University and later became the first woman dean of Princeton University's Graduate School.

Today, her correspondence, lecture notes, manuscripts, and research materials are preserved at the Library of Congress, ensuring that future generations will be able to study not only Armenian history but also the development of Armenian studies in the United States.

Concluding the lecture, Mouradian reminded the audience that preserving history is an ongoing responsibility.

"As we reflect on the next 250 years," he said, "I look at us all as those who are going to continue preserving, studying, exploring our cultural heritage, and passing it on to the next generation."

Visit mirrorspectator.com or the *Mirror-Spectator*'s YouTube channel for selected excerpts from Mouradian's lecture, including remarks by Joan Weeks, Head of the Near East Section and Turkic World Area Specialist at the Library of Congress. The video and audio excerpts used are the courtesy of the Library of Congress.

COMMUNITY NEWS

St. Nersess Seminary Hosts Second International Conference, Deacon Training Program

ARMONK, N.Y. — In July and July, St. Nersess Seminary held two programs.

On June 3, scholars from across the world began to converge on the campus of St. Nersess Seminary for a three-day hybrid, international conference titled "Sitting as a Stranger: Evagrius in the Desert and Beyond," devoted to the life and influence of the 4th-century monastic thinker, writer, and spiritual father, Evagrius of Pontus.

From his ascetic cell in the Egyptian desert, Evagrius' teachings spread across the known world, shaping the thought, discipline and aspirations of monks from the Middle East to the Caucasus mountains and eastward to China, as well as westward to Europe and eventually to the New World.

The conference opened on the morning of June 4 with words of welcome from Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese, Fr. Mardiros Chevian, Dean of St. Nersess Seminary, and Dr. Roberta Ervine, seminary Director of Studies and co-organizer of the conference. Throughout the three days of the conference twenty-three speakers in eleven panels discussed Evagrius's many roles and wide-reaching influence.

The first morning's sessions were dedicated to Evagrius in Armenia. Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy, offered a paper on "Evagrius in Nerses Lambronats'i's Commentary on the Psalms," followed by Professors Robin Darling Young (emerita, Catholic University of America) on the Armenian and Syriac translations of Evagrius' Gnostikos and Peter Cowe (Distinguished Narekatsi Professor of Armenian Studies at UCLA) on "Evagrius' Place in the Curriculum of the Northern Vardapets." After a brief break, Dr. Jesse Arlen, presented on "Evagrian works in the Curriculum of Armenian Monastic Academies," while Fr. Hovsep Karapetyan (Washington D.C.), spoke about the "Armenian reception of Evagrius' Ban Khratu."

Other presenters touched on Evagrius as a spiritual guide, metaphysician, philosopher, and contemplative theologian, as well as his presence in Syriac, Latin and Buddhist writings. For Panel Five: Evagrius in the Arabic and Chinese Worlds, Fr. Alexander Treiger, joined the Zoom Webinar from Halifax, Canada, and presented "Evagrius in The Noetic Paradise" followed by Fr. Francis Tiso, traveling from Isernia, Italy, offered an engaging paper on "Evagrius in China: The Book on Profound and Mysterious Blessedness (Zhixuan anle jing)".

The deacons and staff at St. Nersess Seminary assembled for the deacon training program

Evagrius' thinking on time and corruption, space and geometric structure, the life of the soul, spiritual progress and spiritual practice, and the importance of physical location to the exercise of prayer were all touched on, as were his place in orthodox and miaphysite thought, and the modern applicability of his teaching on thoughts and sin.

A special moment on the last day of the conference was an online interview with Coptic monks Abunas Pistavros Elmacari and Abuna Makar El Baramousy from Wadi El Natrun, Egypt. They presented the practice of spiritual life in the Egyptian desert today.

Also participating remotely were Archbishop Boghos Levon Zekiyan from Venice, Italy, Prof. Alexandru Ionuț Tudorie, dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, and Prof. Peter Bouteneff as panel respondents.

Finally, the keynote address by Stephen J. Davis, Woolsey Professor of Religious Studies and Professor of History at Yale University, "Evagrius Ponticus in the Coptic Orthodox Church: A Modern Origenist Controversy and the Contested Legacy of a Monastic Saint," closed the conference with an integrative rich keynote address connecting the double meaning of the conference theme of "Sitting as Strangers" and offered an exegetical reading of a Coptic illumination of Evagrius and his teacher Origen.

Deacons' Training Program Welcomes Altar Servers from the Eastern, Western, and Canadian Dioceses Plus Belgium

From June 26 to July 5, the Deacons' Training Program welcomed 44 young men from the Eastern, Western, and Canadian Dioceses and Belgium.

The participants, both first-time and returning attendees, gathered to learn the music and rituals of the Badarak and other services of the Armenian Church, as well as their meaning and importance.

The program was led by co-directors Fr. Haroutiun Sabounjian (2018 seminary graduate) and Deacon Alex Calikyan (2019 seminary graduate). The staff included counselors Deacon Johnny Chadoyan (a 2019 graduate), Deacon Alexander Khoja-Eynatyan, Arman Tarkhanian and Aram Krajekian, who also took photos during the conference. Fr. Mardiros Chevian, Dean, was present during the conference and supported the directors.

The day after arrival, a Karasoonk Hokehankist was held for Fr. Karekin Kasparian in the St. Hagop Chapel. In attendance were his family, clergy, faculty and staff members, and Deacons' Training Program participants. A memorial luncheon followed. Der Karekin will always be remembered for his foundational role in establishing the seminary in Evanston, IL, as a young deacon. He was instrumental in opening the seminary in 1961 under the leadership of its founder, Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan. He also played a key role in developing the Summer Conferences and the Deacons' Training Program.

Daily Armenian language classes were offered, ranging from beginner to advanced. Participants also gained fluency in Deacons' chanting in Armenian through four classes that were offered by different instructors: Symbolism, Etiquette, and Reverent Participation in the Holy Badarak (Fr. Tateos Abdalian); Chants of the Holy Badarak (Fr. Gomidas Zohrabian); Censing Patterns of the Holy Badarak (Fr. Andreas Garabedian, a 2019 seminary graduate); Deacon's Chants of the Baptism and Marriage Service (Fr. Haroutiun Sabounjian); Deacon's Chants of the Night and Morning Hours (Deacon Alex Calikyan).

During the week, students participated in daily Bible studies, morning and evening worship, and cultural activities.

On the first Sunday of the program, the group traveled to Fr. Haroutiun's home parish in New Britain, Conn., the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection, where they participated in the Divine Liturgy and choir.

Throughout the week, there were evening lectures and activities offered by guest clergy, including Qualities and Character of Service (Deacon Armen Terjamanian, 2020 seminary graduate); Sacramental Theology of Wedding / Baptism (Fr. Sevak Gabrielyan); Christ/Holy Spirit in the Diaconate (Fr. Abraham Malkhasyan); Symbolic Significance of Badarak (Fr. Davit Karamyan); Witnessing Beyond Liturgical Worship (Deacon Hrach Kasaryan).

The participants also made the annual trek to Point Pleasant Beach in NJ, where the group enjoyed time on the beach and the boardwalk.

Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese and President of the Seminary's Board of Directors, spent time with the participants and offered his blessings to them.

On the last day of the program, the group celebrated Divine Liturgy in the St. Hagop Chapel with Fr. Haroutiun Sabounjian as the celebrant. It was a special morning together before everyone departed.

"This year's Deacons' Training Program was not only our largest group in the history of the program, but the curiosity, passion, spiritual depth of our participants was truly remarkable," shared Fr. Haroutiun Sabounjian. "I leave this year's DTP deeply grateful for the time and talent shared by our instructors and staff, while also being inspired, encouraged, and hopeful about the future of the Armenian Church."

"Each year, my heart is full and spirit revitalized watching these young men grow into the deacons and altar servers our Lord has called them to be in the Armenian Church," shared Deacon Alex Calikyan. "Many thanks to all who contributed their time and talents to making this year's deacons training more successful than ever."

The participants enjoyed wonderful meals throughout the week, prepared by Chef Joe Gatzmer. The program was supported by the seminary staff, including Deacon Levon Altiparmakian, Lucy Krikorian, Robin Perlmutter, and Donna Sirounian.

"We traveled from Belgium to the United States to attend the St. Nersess Seminary Deacons Training Program. We leave with grateful hearts, deeply inspired and spiritually strengthened by this unforgettable experience. Thank you all for your guidance, hospitality, and prayers. God bless the St. Nersess Armenian Seminary," wrote Arakel Karapet, Daniel Gonski, and Aleks Khodadadyan, acolytes of St. Grigor Narekatsi Church in Antwerp, Belgium.

"Whether it was meditation at night or working on my chanting of the deacons litanies for Badarak during the day, the memories I have made here will stay with me forever," stated Nareg Bamboukian, Holy Cross Armenian Apostolic Church, Laval, Quebec, Canada. Four participants from this parish were driven down and back by their pastor, Fr. Komitas Mirzakhanyan, a seven hour drive.

COMMUNITY NEWS

GITC and Novara Global Impact Sign Partnership to Expand Opportunities for ACT College Students

NEW YORK — ACT College, Armenia's first state-licensed vocational technology college, is set to receive new technology resources, scholarships, and educational opportunities through a partnership between the Gyumri Information Technologies Center (GITC) and Novara Global Impact (NGI), a Los Angeles-based nonprofit organization.

Signed in New York on June 10, the Memorandum of Cooperation aims to strengthen hands-on learning and expand opportunities for students pursuing careers in technology and the creative industries.

Under the agreement, NGI will provide iPads, computers and other equipment to modernize ACT College classrooms and laboratories, while also contributing technical expertise and operational support to help advance the institution's continued growth.

As part of the agreement, ACT College will establish the Novara Lab, a dedicated technology learning space equipped through NGI's support, as well as the Novara Annual Scholarship, which will be awarded each year to students demonstrating exceptional achievement and promise in technology and the creative industries.

The memorandum formalizes and expands a longstanding relationship between the two organizations and creates a framework for ongoing collaboration in education, technical training and community development. The partnership will include quarterly initiatives and joint programs designed to advance educational opportunities while supporting broader goals related to human rights, democracy and sustainable development.

The agreement also lays the groundwork for ActTech, a joint conference that NGI and ACT College will co-host in Los Angeles this October. Organizers say the event will serve as a platform for new workshops, training programs and research initiatives developed through the partnership.

The signing in New York

The memorandum was signed by Amalya Yeghoyan, executive director of GITC and founder of ACT College, and Vardan Isayan, board chair of Novara Global Impact. Also in attendance were Artur Manukian, executive director of NGI, and Bree Carriglio, executive director of development and institutional marketing for the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR).

"This memorandum marks an important milestone in our shared mission to put real opportunity in the hands of students," Yeghoyan said. "By combining ACT College's academic excellence with Novara Global Impact's resources, expertise and international networks, we are creating expanded opportunities for students, professionals and communities. The Novara Lab and Novara Annual Scholarship will carry this partnership forward for years to come, equipping the next generation of Armenian talent with the tools to lead."

Manukian said the initiative reflects Novara's belief in education as a catalyst for long-term impact.

"At Novara, we believe that investing in education is one of the most powerful ways to create lasting change," he said. "Through the Novara Lab, technology equipment and annual scholarship, we are not only supporting classrooms, but helping young people in Armenia gain the tools, confidence and future-ready skills they need to lead, innovate and serve their communities."

ACT College, formerly known as Armenian Creative Technologies College, is located in Parakar, Armavir Province, and serves students at both the high school and college levels. A candidate school for the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, ACT College is Armenia's first vocational technology and creative industries college. Operating under GITC, the institution focuses on hands-on education designed to prepare students in Armenia and the diaspora for careers in technology, engineering and creative fields.

Novara Global Impact is a Los Angeles-based organization dedicated to advancing education, capacity building and community development through international partnerships. The organization provides technical expertise, staffing support, equipment and operational resources to mission-driven institutions in Armenia and throughout the Armenian diaspora.

Daughters of Vartan Tzouig Otyag #33 to Hold 5th Anniversary Gala

HAVERHILL, Mass. — The Daughters of Vartan Tzouig Otyag #33 is proud to announce its upcoming 5-Year Anniversary Gala, which will be held on October 23, 2027.

The milestone celebration will commemorate five years of fellowship, service, cultural preservation and community involvement. Since its founding, Tzouig Otyag #33 has brought together women dedicated to supporting the Armenian community through charitable initiatives, educational programs, faith-centered activities, and cultural engagement.

The anniversary gala will provide an opportunity for members, families, friends and supporters to gather in celebration of the organization's accomplishments and the impact it has made over the past five years. The evening is expected to include a formal dinner, entertainment, recognition of members and supporters, and reflections on the chapter's growth and future vision.

Additional details regarding the gala, including the venue, ticket information, sponsorship opportunities, and the evening's program, will be announced in the coming months.

For now, community members are encouraged to save the date: October 23, 2027, and join the Daughters of Vartan Tzouig Otyag #33 in celebrating five meaningful years of service, sisterhood, and Armenian heritage.

Nardolillo Funeral Home
Est. 1906
John K. Najarian, Jr.
Rhode Island's Only Licensed Armenian Funeral Director
1278 Park Ave. Cranston, RI 02910 **(401) 942-1220**
1111 Boston Neck Rd. Narragansett, RI 02882 (401) 789-6300
www.nardolillo.com

Telephone (617) 924-7400
Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Inc.
Continuous Service By The Bedrosian Family Since 1945
558 MOUNT AUBURN STREET
WATERTOWN, MA 02472
MARION BEDROSIAN
PAUL BEDROSIAN
LARRY BEDROSIAN

James "Jack" Giragosian, CPC **Mark J. Giragosian**
Giragosian FUNERAL HOME
576 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472, Tel: 617-924-0606
www.giragosianfuneralhome.com

Arts & Culture

Cannes' Critics' Week Reveals Lineup of Armenian Filmmakers Taking Part in Next Step Studio Program

By Leo Barraclough

CANNES *(Variety)* — Cannes Film Festival's Critics' Week has revealed the participants of next year's Next Step Studio program, which will focus on Armenia. The filmmakers taking part are Armik Israyelyan, Raffi Movsisyan, Sona Khachatryan and Naira Sargsyan.

Each of the four Armenian directors will be paired with an international filmmaker, and the filmmaking pairs will then develop and shoot a film each. The films will be shot in Yerevan in March 2027, filmed in the Armenian language, and produced with a fully Armenian cast and crew. The completed films will premiere at Critics' Week in Cannes in 2027. They will be supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia.

Israyelyan is an alumnus of the KinoEyes European Film Masters program and studied at the American University of Armenia. Before becoming a director, she worked as a videographer and media creator at UCRAFT. Israyelyan's "The List" recently took home the best short film award at the Unica Annual Film Festival. She has participated in Erasmus+ film projects.

Movsisyan graduated from the Yerevan State Institute of Theater and Cinema in 2012, majoring in Film Studies in the master's program.

From 2012 to 2017, he worked at the Golden Apricot Yerevan International Film Festival as a coordinator of Armenian film programs. From 2018 to 2019, he served as an advisor to the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Armenia. Since 2018, he has been a coordinator of film programs at the Tumo Center for Creative Technologies.

He wrote and hosted the program "Unseen Cinema" on Channel One, and wrote and hosted a number of programs on the Bun TV channel. In 2021, he directed his debut short film "Homecoming," which premiered in the competition program of the Krakow Intl. Film Festival. He is the producer of three animated films.

Khachatryan graduated with a bachelor's degree in Film Directing from the Yerevan State Theatre and Film Institute in 2024, and in 2026 received her master's degree in Film Art from the same institution. In 2021, she directed her first documentary film, "Ani From the Planet Namseki," which was screened in Armenia as part of the "One Minute, One Shot" film festival.

In 2022–2023, her second documentary project, "Edge," was selected for development by the Georgian multimedia platform "Chai Khana." The film was created in collaboration with Chai Khana and was later screened at the Yerevan Short Film

see CANNES, page 17

Laura Farré Rozada

'Araspel' Brings Award-Wining Journey through Armenian Music To ESL Rochester Fringe Festival

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — Award-winning pianist Dr. Laura Farré Rozada invites audiences to discover an musical landscape with "Araspel", a captivating recital presented at the 2026 ESL Rochester Fringe Festival. The performance will take place on Saturday September 19, at 8 p.m., on Sunday, September 20, at 8:30 p.m., and Monday, September 21, at 6 and 7:15 p.m. at Biltmore Bar & Lounge. Tickets are available through Rochester Fringe at https://rochesterfringe.com/tickets-and-shows/Araspel.

Every Fringe offers audiences the chance to discover something unexpected. "Araspel" is precisely that experience.

While names such as Chopin, Debussy and Rachmaninoff have long occupied the concert stage, the rich tradition of Armenian piano music remains largely unknown outside its homeland. Through ""Araspel"," Farré Rozada opens the door to this remarkable repertoire, revealing music of striking beauty, emotional depth and dazzling virtuosity inspired by Armenia's ancient culture, folk traditions and resilient history.

Far more than a piano recital, "Araspel" is a musical journey that transports listeners through lyrical landscapes, vibrant dances, meditative reflections and exhilarating virtuosity. Featuring works by Komitas, Arno Babadjanian, Gayane Chebotarian, Eduard Abramian and other remarkable composers, the program celebrates a musical heritage that deserves a place alongside the great traditions of the classical repertoire.

The project has already attracted significant international recognition. Farré Rozada's album "Araspel" has received sixteen awards in the United Kingdom, Spain and the United States, confirming both the artistic excellence of the recording and the growing international interest in this extraordinary repertoire.

"Some of the most beautiful piano music ever written remains virtually unknown outside Armenia," says Farré Rozada. "With 'Araspel,' I hope audiences will experience not only remarkable compositions, but also the history, poetry and spirit of a culture whose musical voice deserves to be heard around the world."

Named a "Rising Star" by BBC Music Magazine, pianist and mathematician Laura Farré Rozada has built an international career distinguished by artistic curiosity and fearless programming. She has performed in major venues including Carnegie Hall in New York, London's Southbank Centre, Barcelona's Palau

see ARASPEL, page 15

Roland Hayrabedian

'My Musical Sensibility Comes from My Armenian Roots'

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/MARSEILLE — French choirmaster Roland Hayrabedian (born 1953, in Marseille) is recognized for his commitment to contemporary vocal music. In 1978, he founded the Chœur Contemporain, and in 1987, the vocal ensemble Musicatreize, which he continues to direct as artistic director.

Throughout his career, he has conducted leading orchestras and choirs in France and abroad, including the Philharmonic Orchestra of Radio France, the National Orchestra of Lorraine, the National Choir of Ireland and the Nederlands Kamerkoor.

Hayrabedian has devoted much of his career to promoting the music of living composers, working closely with figures including Maurice Ohana, Edith Canat de Chizy, Zad Moultaka, Oscar Strasnoy, Philippe Schoeller and Alexandros Markeas. He is regarded as one of the foremost interpreters of Maurice Ohana's vocal music and has recorded nearly the composer's complete vocal output. He has collaborated also with numerous stage directors and choreographers. Since 1984, he has taught conducting in Marseille and Aix-en-Provence. His extensive discography includes more than thirty recordings, many of which have received prestigious international awards.

Dear Roland, you have championed the music of many contemporary composers. What qualities do you look for in a modern work before deciding to perform it?

For me, meeting the composer is essential. I need to gauge whether what drives them stems from a genuine necessity. I have always sought out powerful works — pieces that, when I conduct them, give me the feeling they can transform me or transport me somewhere new. Meeting the person behind the music is therefore crucial, because once a work has been commissioned, there is no choice but to perform it and champion it with energy and honesty.

HAYRABENIAN, page 14

Books

Ara Zaryan's *The Fortifications of The Syunik Region: 9th-14th Centuries: Remnants of A Glorious Past*

By Arpi Sarafian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

"Build fortresses, not churches," urges Raffi (Hagop Melik Hagopian) as he deplores the oppressive conditions of Armenians living under Ottoman rule in Turkey in the 19th century. "If instead of filling our churches with clouds of sweet-smelling incense you had burned gunpowder, our homeland would already be free," writes the celebrated novelist in his 1878 novella *Jalaleddin*.

The Fortifications of The Syunik Region: 9th-14th Centuries (Tigran Mets Publishing, 2026) is architect Ara Zaryan's meticulously researched study of the structural and architectural features of the notable fortresses, along with their defensive systems, of the Province of Syunik in medieval Armenia. These key strongholds — with only 25-30 of the around ninety original structures preserved for visual study — were built by the ruling princes and the noble lords (*nakharars*) who recognized the importance of military preparedness in keeping the region and the populace safe. Princely castles were in fact designed as sophisticated military strongholds to survive sieges. In the early Middle Ages, "Self-defense was the guiding principle behind all administrative, cultural and economic policies in the region of Syunik," writes Zaryan.

Ara Zaryan

This groundbreaking study, based on the architect's 1983-1990 excavations, research and documentation, was ready for publication some thirty years ago. It is perhaps by some providential design that a book that sends a clear message about the importance of maintaining military preparedness to safeguard a region from potential enemies should see the light at a time when — following our humiliating defeat in the 2020 44-day Artsakh War and the subsequent ethnic cleansing of Artsakh in 2023 — the lack of such preparedness is much lamented. Indeed, the epigraph by the prominent twentieth century Armenian writer Gostan Zaryan, Ara Zaryan's grandfather, evokes a deteriorating military defense system:

Fortresses are crumbling. Citadels are burning
The sun has shattered its diamonds at the peak of Ararat . . .

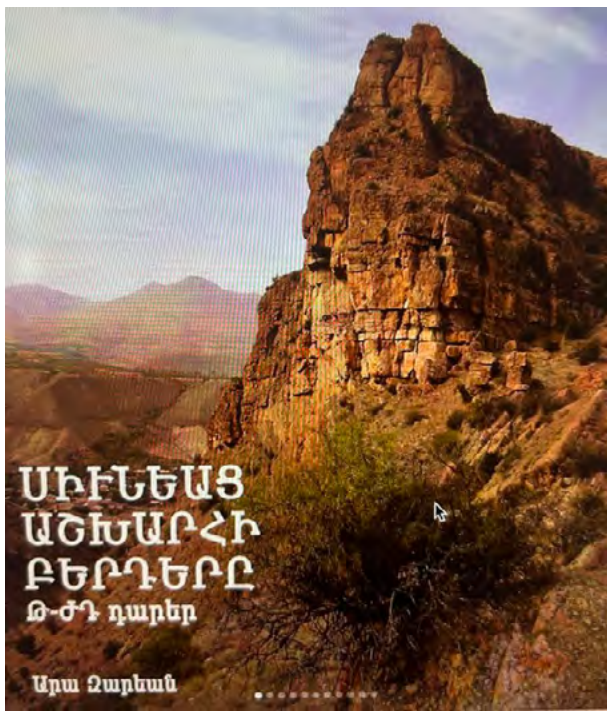
Nonetheless, the grandson's project of researching and documenting Syunik's landmark architectural strongholds brings into focus the glory of a past that foreshadows an equally glorious future for Armenia, albeit under very different circumstances.

Syunik, the ninth of the 15 provinces of Historical Armenia, is the southernmost province of present-day Armenia — and a historically significant part of Ancient Armenia — with natural barriers delineating the political boundaries of its fourteen divisions (*Kavars*). A mountainous terrain, high peaks, river valleys and deep gorges on all sides make Syunik a strategic military region difficult for enemies to access. The province has in fact been described as a natural military stronghold. That much of historic Syunik is within present-day Armenia's parameters has made it possible for Zaryan to access the fortresses and to conduct extensive in situ surveys. The architect has personally photographed, measured and drawn detailed outlines of the floor plans and the structural layouts of the fortresses. These are an invaluable part of the documentation of the architectural particularities of the fortifications. It is worth noting that Zaryan's study includes the Kashatagh region of the Republic of Artsakh and the Tchahouk-Shahaponk and Yerendjak Regions in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhijevan — both part of the Syunik Province for short periods but currently under Azerbaijani rule.

The Fortifications of The Syunik Region examines the structural components of fortresses with their defensive platforms — towers, walls, gates, entrances etc. — always highlighting the safety and the security features of the fortifications. Special attention is paid to the selection of the sites of the fortresses which were always chosen with defensive considerations. Their main characteristic, notes Zaryan, is the integration of the natural landscape — rugged cliffs, water, high peaks reaching up to 3,000 meters — with the architectural monument. Placing the fortress on heavy mountain rocks, for example, made it nearly impossible to scale. When there were no natural barriers, thick walls were constructed to set the parameters and protect the structure against attack. These walls were reinforced with towers and buttresses to make physical invasion difficult. Keeping the fortresses defendable from potential enemies involved strategic planning, as in entrances designed to be easily accessible in order to trap the enemy.

Besides analyzing all resources — fortified princely residences, gatehouses, watchtowers — necessary to withstand threats, Zaryan's study examines and documents civil buildings such as *caravanserails* and structures for the manufacture and storage of munitions that assumed elements of military defense. *Caravanserails* were fortified roadside inns built along trade routes to protect merchants and their goods from constant raids and thefts. They were designed to be accessible to the caravans in daytime, as they used zenith lighting, admitting natural light directly from the sun through skylights built overhead.

Starting with the tenth century, important monasteries were placed under the supervision of fortresses to guarantee their safety. Yet, existing reports study these monastery-fortresses mostly as conventional religious/public complexes. Perhaps because the convent-fortresses are difficult to access, their structural, architectural and site selection features are almost absent from these reports, writes Zaryan, who studies them from the viewpoint of defensive architecture. He cites the Makenyats monastery in the Gegharkunik Province, one of the first monastery-fortresses, as a good example of the expert use of



natural obstructions. Massive basalt boulders, rising directly from the banks of the river, are an organic part of the defensive high walls built on them, notes the architect.

Syunik's structural capacity to respond to threats and a populace inclined to independence have helped the survival of the princely clans in the region, asserts Zaryan. That the kingdom of Syunik was one of the latest Armenian kingdoms to collapse must be testimony to the success of its defensive system. The enthusiastic architect notes that the visibility of key features of the fortresses — observation towers, defensive walls, citadels, parapets, shooting ranges etc. — in Armenian Medieval Miniature Art is evidence of the existence of numerous fortresses in the Armenian Highlands in the Middle Ages. Incorporating the military aspect into the spiritual highlights the importance of a strategic defense system to the welfare and the survival of a region, he adds. A lesson to heed.

The massive volume is the first study that identifies the patterns, with their strategic function and roles, behind the designs of the Syunik fortresses of the 9th -14th centuries, providing a deeper understanding of Medieval Armenia's military defense system, avers Dr. Ashot Grigoryan, Chairman of the Board of the Alexander Tamanyan National Museum-Institute of Architecture in Yerevan, Armenia, in his Foreword. Grigoryan describes *The Fortifications of The Syunik Region 9th-14th Centuries* as "a major contribution to the scientific study of Armenian architecture." The book offers rich photographic documentation — with hundreds of live and historical photos — an illustrated Glossary of Terms, an extensive Bibliography, maps, floor plans and original drawings for the individual fortresses.

The study is supported by the Tamanyan National Museum-Institute of Architecture. *The Fortifications of The Syunik Region* is written in Eastern Armenian using classical (Western) Armenian orthography.

The Fortifications of The Syunik Region: 9th-14th Centuries is published by the AGBU Vahram Abdalian Cultural Fund, established by Vahe-Vahian in 1980 in memory of his late son, to help preserve the Armenian cultural heritage by publishing manuscripts that contribute to that effort. The handsome volume is a valuable addition to the 11 works already published by the Fund.

Roland Hayrabedian: 'My Musical Sensibility Comes from My Armenian Roots'

HAYRABEDIAN, from page 13

As the founder of Musicatreize, you have spent nearly four decades expanding the repertoire for vocal ensembles. How do you see the future of contemporary choral music in an era dominated by digital media?

I started, of course, by creating works that were handwritten. Sometimes even manuscripts that are very difficult to decipher! Sometimes very complex works, but it seemed obvious to me that they had been "heard" by the composer. The composer's ear is "seen" in his writing. Today, digital means, copying and pasting, or what the Internet allows us to collect makes creation more fragile. This is why the composer must, in my opinion, always question the necessity he has to compose...

Has your Armenian heritage influenced your artistic identity or musical choices in any way?

I am certain that my Armenian heritage has influenced my artistic identity. I undoubtedly owe who I am to my father; he was not a professional musician, yet when he sang, he moved me deeply. I am convinced that my musical sensibility comes from my Armenian roots.

What is the story of your family?

This is undoubtedly, and unfortunately, a banal story. My paternal grandparents arrived at the time of the Armenian Genocide by boat in Marseille. My father was born in Zonguldak (Turkey). They brought with them their two youngest children, including my father. My grandfather was one of the priests of the Armenian church of Marseille. He was probably an open man, very broad-minded, letting his children integrate as best they could into French society of the time.

You have worked with musicians from many cultures. We first met in 2006 in Yerevan, when you worked with the Hover Chamber Choir. I was one of its members. Later that year, you gave a joint concert with the choir in Marseille. Looking back, what has been your connection with Armenian music and composers?

During my first visit to Armenia in 2006, I was impressed by the quality of the Hover Choir and helped arrange for them to come to Marseille. I heard works that were new to me and deeply moving. From that point on, I was in contact with several Armenian composers, though unfortunately, nothing came of those initial attempts. Yet, I did not give up on the idea. Later, I met Michel Petrossian in France, and a long-standing collaboration began!

Could you share your impressions of your concert in Yerevan on July 12, where you conducted Michel Petrossian's composition dedicated to Sergei Parajanov?

The artists from Musicatreize and I were dazzled by the acoustic quality of the Babadjanyan Hall. But I was especially pleased with the audience's attentiveness. In Kapan, too, a few days earlier, the audience seemed happy to discover a new work. It strikes me that audiences in Armenia are not jaded. In any case, in Yerevan — the city where the Parajanov Museum is located — it seemed to me that there was a genuine exchange between the artists and the listeners.

I have very fond memories of your wife and children from nearly twenty years ago, when I had the pleasure of being a guest in your home in Marseille. At that time your son, Hoviv, was still a child, and I recently learned that he has become an orchestra conductor. How is his career developing, and has he also developed an interest in Armenian music and culture?

Hoviv's career is developing steadily and seriously. I am glad he is taking the time to delve deeply into his craft. He has become a very fine conductor, and I believe he is interested in Armenia, given that he has made the necessary contacts to come and make music in Yerevan! My daughter Houri, who sings and composes her own songs, has also tried to connect with pop musicians. That just goes to show how interested they are in Armenia!

Do you have any Armenian music related project for near future?

Unfortunately, there are no projects involving Armenian music for the time being, but that shouldn't be long in coming!

Recipe Corner

by Christine Vartanian Datian

Warm Grain Salad with Creamy Tahini Dressing

Soom Foods is a Philadelphia-based woman-owned company. It is the trusted brand for premium, silky-smooth tahini paste and tahini products by James Beard award-winning chefs and home cooks. The company wants to bring more flavor and versatility into your kitchen with Soom tahini. Their tahini has gained national recognition from Saveur, Food & Wine, Bon Appetit, the New York Times, The Kitchn and more. Not to mention, the "Soom Sisters" — Shelby, Jackie, and Amy — graced the Forbes 30 Under 30: Food and Drink list in 2018. From breakfast bowls and sheet pan dinners to ice cream sundaes, cakes, and cookies, tahini deserves a spot in your everyday routine. Go ahead, drizzle, dip, spread, or stir tahini into just about anything you make.

Soom Foods offers a variety of great tahini options along with wholesale and gifts for all tahini lovers. Their premium and organic tahini are both made with White Humera Ethiopian sesame seeds, and manufactured using the same process. The texture and flavor is exactly the same. The only difference between these two products is that Soom Organic Tahini is USDA certified organic. Soom Tahini is naturally free of gluten and do not contain gluten in the ingredients. Soom products do not contain any animal products and are vegan. All Soom products are dairy-free. Soom products do not contain soy in the ingredients.

"Each serving of Soom Premium Tahini has 6g of plant-based protein, and is filled with vitamins, minerals, and healthy fats. Who knew one little seed could do so much? Tahini is a rich and creamy spread made from one simple ingredient, sesame seeds. It has been a staple in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean kitchens for thousands of years. Today, tahini remains central to traditional dishes like hummus, baba ghanoush, and halva. But with its versatility, tahini has become a global pantry essential. Along with its deep nutty flavor, this tiny but mighty seed is considered a superfood by many people."

This salad features high-protein Kaizen rice (or your favorite grain), blistered cherry tomatoes, fresh herbs, and a bright tahini-lemon dressing made with Soom tahini, and is packed with flavor, texture and plant-based protein. Finished with crunchy pistachios and juicy pomegranate seeds, it is a colorful, wholesome meal perfect for lunch, brunch or any weeknight dinner. (Kaizen rice is a high-protein, low-carb, grain-free, and gluten-free, plant-based rice substitute made from lupini flour, fava bean protein, and tapioca.)

INGREDIENTS:

For the salad:
1 package Kaizen rice (or your favorite grain)
1 pint of cherry tomatoes
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Sea salt and pepper, to taste
1/4 cup fresh dill; chopped
1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped
1/4 cup pistachios, chopped
1/4 cup pomegranate seeds

For the dressing:
1/2 cup Soom Premium or Organic Tahini
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon maple syrup
3 tablespoons water plus more as needed
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon fresh dill, chopped
Sea salt and pepper, to taste

PREPARATION:

Make the dressing. Whisk together tahini, lemon juice, maple syrup, water, extra virgin olive oil, and fresh dill. May be thick at first, add additional water in 1 tablespoon intervals until desired consistency is reached. Season to taste with sea salt and pepper.

Prepare Kaizen rice according to package directions. Strain, rinse, and set aside.

Prepare blistered tomatoes. Warm pan over medium/high heat. Add 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Add whole cherry tomatoes. Toss gently to coat and allow to cook until blistered; stirring occasionally. Season with sea salt and pepper.

Assemble the salad: Add rice to serving bowl. Pour half of the dressing over top and mix. Add tomatoes, fresh herbs, chopped pistachios and pomegranate. Toss and serve. Use remainder of dressing for individual servings and enjoy.

Note: If you're not able to get Kaizen rice you can substitute to a grain of your choice like farro, quinoa, or orzo.

For this recipe, go to: https://soomfoods.com/blogs/recipes/warm-grain-salad-with-creamy-tahini-dressing?_pos=1&_sid=4cbf2f907&_ss=r

For all recipes, see: https://soomfoods.com/blogs/recipes

For Soom's Top Ten recipes, see: https://soomfoods.com/blogs/recipe-roundups/popular-recipes

Find Soom Tahini at a variety of grocery stores like Whole Foods, Walmart, Publix, and Harris Teeter. Find Soom products on a shelf near you or order from Thrive Market or Amazon.

For where to buy Soom products locator, go to: https://soomfoods.com/pages/store-locator

'Araspel' Brings Armenian Music to ESL Rochester Fringe Festival

ARASPEL, from page 13

de la Música Catalana, the Armenian State Philharmonia in Yerevan, the Armenian American Museum in Los Angeles and festivals across Europe, North and South America, Asia and the Middle East. A pianist, mathematician and researcher, she is internationally recognised for bringing overlooked repertoire to new audiences through award-winning performances, recordings and interdisciplinary projects.

Unlike many concert programs built around familiar masterpieces, "Araspel" offers audiences something genuinely rare: the opportunity to encounter music that is both immediately accessible and almost entirely new. It is an invitation to discover a rich artistic tradition through the hands of one of its most passionate international advocates.

Whether audiences are devoted classical music lovers or simply looking for one unforgettable event at this year's ESL Rochester Fringe Festival, "Araspel" promises an experience unlike any other—a celebration of discovery, storytelling and exceptional artistry that lingers long after the final note.

The 12-day ESL Rochester Fringe Festival is one of the nation's largest fringe festivals and has been recognized by The New York Times as "one of the country's more prominent multidisciplinary events." It is also New York State's largest performing arts festival. Since its inception in 2012, nearly a million people have attended thousands of performances presented by regional, national and international artists. The festival's mission is to offer platforms for artists, new audiences for venues and unparalleled public access to exceptional art across every discipline.

Listen to "Araspel": https://orcd.co/laurafarrerozada_"Araspel"

Tickets are available through Rochester Fringe at https://rochesterfringe.com/tickets-and-shows/Araspel.

ARTS & CULTURE

Tenor Liparit Avetisyan Stands atop the Opera World

OPERA, from page 1

Avetisyan said, "For me, it was always an activity very close to the soul and beloved, thanks to which, for example, my father would communicate his mood, either making our guests happy, or the contrary, creating a melancholy mood them because he sang our folk songs — Komitas's songs."

One day at school, during regular class time, there was a party or celebration at which the students had to sing together. Avetisyan said, "I learned the song like everybody else and sang it in that manner. The teacher later asked my parents, 'Did you notice Liparit had a beautiful voice?' My mother said, 'Yes, he always sings. He sings at home. He also sings with his father.' In a word, without thinking, without making any special plans, singing became a part of my life."

His school in Theodosia had no voice department. Therefore, Avetisyan said, he was told to choose any musical instrument to learn, while he would also have lessons twice a week in the boys' choir. He chose guitar and in addition to the official lessons in the choir, began to study outside of school with the director of the choir, who was a graduate of the classical department of the Odessa Conservatory.

In addition to his studies, his mother obtained various musical notations of the works of Komitas and Sayat Nova from friends and relatives in Armenia for him. During the next three or four years he began to participate in various festivals and competitions, and sang as soloist with the choir.

In a sudden turn of events, the choir director informed him that a vocal division has been added to the curriculum, in which he enrolled. Years after graduating, Avetisyan said, he found out that this division had been opened specially for him. The choir director was asked at the time

From left, Liparit Avetisyan, conductor Marco Armiliato, and Rosa Feola at the Metropolitan Opera this spring (photo courtesy Liparit Avetisyan)

by the principal whether she was sure that Avetisyan would become a singer. She had replied that she was not only sure of that but was confident that he would become a world-famous singer.

Avetisyan applied and was accepted to the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory at 17. He studied there from 2008 to 2011, living alone in a dormitory. His mother would come to visit, but he only saw his father and the rest of his family in Crimea during holiday breaks.

He exclaimed, "All possibilities were there before the student to develop and become more educated and advanced. The museums, the number of theaters, this was a miracle! I was able to live for over three years there and study, and so Moscow for me, as I always say, was a great lesson of life."

He afterwards transferred to Yerevan's Komitas State Conservatory. He noted that both Yerevan and Moscow were part of the same post-Soviet culture, so the educational system and way of thinking were practically the same. On the other hand, he pointed out that the Moscow Conservatory presented many more opportunities and resources, starting with its large library and including matters of comfort.

Avetisyan recalled that the Armenian conservatory had a different atmosphere and he found a great teacher there, Rafayel Hakobyants. Avetisyan said he remembers that "the atmosphere that he created in his classroom was inimitable and unforgettable because he was a very interesting figure." Though Hakobyants passed away in 2014, Avetisyan said that his memories of him remained extremely vivid.

Normally a student at the third level would have vocal classes three times a week. "But I assure you each day, in the morning before I would come to the Conservatory, I could enter his home. We would work. My voice would form. We would try two pieces, then we would go to the Conservatory, him to his classes and I to my classes. Then later, imagine, during the course of the day, whenever I wanted — whenever I wanted! — I could come again, however many times I wished. We worked 3 or 4 times a day. We continually searched for new things, we argued, we laughed, we cried. These were wonderful years. I can place from my student years these three years in Armenia with Rafayel Hagopian on a different, unique level," Avetisyan said.

Initially, there was one difficulty in Armenia. As he was only 3 when he left Armenia with his family, he spoke Armenian but unlike his older brother and sister, who continued to visit Armenia's schools over the years, he did not know how to read or write. At the same time, in Crimea, he said, "We created our little Armenia in our home. There were Armenian families in our circles. We had contact with our traditions and culture. We preserved everything as if we lived in our homeland, in our Armenia. So for that reason, I could speak. In fact, when I came from Moscow to Armenia, they all were amazed how this boy, who has not lived in Armenia throughout his whole life, speaks Armenian so well."

Soon enough though, Avetisyan learned how to read and write Armenian too, and in Armenia, he began to enter and win music competitions and perform in operas.

On International Stages

He began to come to international notice and began to perform in Russia, Germany and various other European stages from 2016. After his debut in Cologne, he soon appeared at world renowned stages such as the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Berlin State Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Zürich Opera, Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, Opera Australia, Semperoper Dresden and Hamburg State Opera.

He began to constantly traveling and performing in opera houses in various parts of the world. Each country has its own season for opera. If the Metropolitan Opera in New York closes in early June, in Europe the season might continue till July. Secondly, during the summer, while all opera houses are closed, there are festivals in Europe. This means Avetisyan is working practically nonstop all year round.

When asked about his favorite places to perform, Avetisyan diplomatically replied: "For me, as an artist each stage is a sacred place and the most important place at the moment if I am standing there. Of course, if you are in this field, then there are historical serious places which have great influence, in which you must play a role."

Liparit Avetisyan in his Metropolitan Opera debut as Alfredo in Giuseppi Verdi's opera "La Traviata," with Rosa Feola as the courtesan Violetta (photo courtesy Liparit Avetisyan)

Though he has already performed on most of the important stages in Europe and America, he said "of course there are still theaters where I have not performed, because the number of such places is so great that I think that an entire lifetime is not sufficient to participate and sing in all of them." He observed that, for example, he has sung very little in Italy, due to organizational and financial issues, but hopes to work it out so that he will gradually have more performances there. He already has scheduled a role in Verdi's "Rigoletto" in Teatro Regio di Parma — the Parma Opera House — for next season.

He found that his experiences in the different countries he performs in tend to be similar. He said, "Generally, our classical world is very much alike. The music is the same and nearly all the people who are involved with classical music are very like one another in their ways of thinking and their ways of perceiving life." However, he did observe that in Germany or the US, they keep performers busy with schedules and are always watching the clock, while in Italy or Spain, everything is more relaxed and comfortable.

Moreover, countries like Germany, Austria and Switzerland like to do modern opera stagings, whereas in Italy they preserve the classic style of productions for the most part..

Avetisyan has something of a mystical conception of what artists like himself do. He declared: "I believe when each artist transforms into different roles and lives the full life and story of that character, whether or not he wants it, he leaves a piece of his soul there. Consequently, I feel this same sensation when I step onto a historical stage and understand what artists have created and performed there and submitted their connection with the universe. It is a magical thing and very pleasant."

Armenia and Work-Life Balance

When Avetisyan first came to Armenia, though his parents and siblings remained in Crimea, he had relatives in Yerevan on both sides of his family. Avetisyan then got married and his first son was born in Armenia in 2014. Avetisyan's mother came that spring to help his wife, while his father periodically visited. Avetisyan had two more children later.

He said, "The heaviest and most difficult part of our profession is that we travel a lot, and everything becomes complicated when children reach the age that they begin school. Before it was much easier. We were very often together and we could travel together. Now, the three boys are all school age, so we are restricted somewhat in our desires. We have to work with the school system."

For example, at the start of this summer, he related that he had not been in Armenia since October of the prior year. It is difficult for him to travel for short periods to Armenia because there are not many direct flights and his time is very limited. He pointed out that if he has three free days and spends one day traveling, he needs to rest after such a trip so that he is in shape to sing properly. Instead, he arranged for the children and his wife to travel to Greece or other parts of Europe for various holidays and vacations.

"For three years now, I have not had a break, even in the summers. For this reason, I asked my manager this year not to find anything for me in the summer so I will have three months with my children to relax. Of course, relaxation sounds a little wrong, because I have so many new roles to learn that it is not really resting. Nevertheless I will be with the children and this is important," Avetisyan said.

While he does not give many performances in Armenia, he and his manager attempt to arrange at least two or three a year. This June, for example, he presented a big concert show called "Liparit and Friends" with the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sergey Smbatyan, and Armenian pop (estradayin) stars.

He explained: "I am a man who loves to do experiments … that concert has a beautiful idea, that we bring together the two poles of classical and pop music. I wish to show the public that we have pop singers of a very high level, estradayin singers. … They can perform in a very appropriate and beautiful way next to classical artists and a symphonic orchestra, and in no way be inferior to those artists."

The musical arrangements or instrumentations were done by Martin Ulukhanyan. Avetisyan said, "We practically have created new works from zero. We take a given pop artist's hit, and based on that hit, a separate line is written for me, and that turns into a duet. One part of the concert is their pop songs with me, and the second part of the concert is classical music or classical duets with the pop singers — that is, now they come to my world."

continued on next page

from previous page

Training and Roles

Voice training and preservation, Avetisyan said, is a very individual practice and each artist has a different approach. He said, "We cannot forget that first of all it is our musical instrument, which, among other things, is connected to our mental health, our physical health and our essence. Voice is a very interesting thing. God has given to each person the possibility of having voice, and I can say one thing: you must be very careful and respectful about your voice and yourself in general, because you and your entire body is your musical instrument."

That means, he said, that "you must cherish, love and behave with great respect with your voice. Do not talk too much. For me, the most important thing is to sleep at least 8 hours a day. It is important not to laugh loudly, not to get upset." In this fashion, he said, his voice, which is his musical instrument, can be precisely "strung" or set, after which comes the technique which singers forge over many years.

As a whole, operas take roughly six weeks to prepare for a new production and perhaps three or four for revivals, Avetisyan said, while for individual performers like himself, if he had already have learned and memorized the role earlier, all he has to do is repeat it on the airplane on the way to the location. However, if he needs to learn the role from scratch, he said it would depend on the nature of the role, especially the length and the language. Some can be learned as quickly as in two weeks while others need a month.

Singers, he said, "live as sportsmen. We always practice. We always try to find new things in every role. That comes both from emotions and from the nature of the role or character. We are always seeking and finding new things."

He said that he discusses with his manager what roles are better for his physiology and age. "Fortunately," he said, "my voice is spinto [a tenor voice of powerful dramatic quality with a weight between lyric and dramatic]. I am not a lyric tenor. In other words, with age, my repertoire will continue to broaden and increase."

He remarked that for over 10 years he primarily sang bel canto or lyric roles, which correspond to his physiological age and do not harm his voice, but slowly now, he is doing more spinto roles as he grows older. In the forthcoming opera seasons, he has two big debuts that are more spinto, Don Carlo in Giuseppi Verdi's eponymous opera, and Simon Boccanegra, again in an opera of the same name by Verdi.

As for which roles he loves, he responded succinctly: "All the roles that I do, in the operas in which I participate, become beloved for me because it is not possible otherwise. … When you create that role, you become a part of that story. It does not matter if it is a positive or negative figure, or if you as an artist are in agreement with the way of thinking or acts of that character. That role becomes dear to you because you begin to relive the emotions of that character. You try to relive his way of thinking."

He added: "As far as Armenian music goes, it has always been very dear to me and pleasant. I dreamed of singing Saro in the opera "Anoush" and had the good fortune of making my debut as Saro in 2013 in our National Theater. I can say one thing: I used to sing with my father our folk songs, old romantic songs, and I understood always that whatever I do the Armenian always lies at its core."

He observed that there are around 35 Armenian artists in classical opera around the world, if not more working in good venues, and when these Armenian surnames ring out, it is a great source of pride. He said often Armenian sopranos appear in productions with him, and these turn into some of his most beloved projects.

Discography

Avetisyan can be heard on a number of CDs or DVDs, including recordings of operas such as Verdi's "Otello," in which he plays Cassio, with Antonio Pappano as conductor (Sony, 2020, Cat: 19439707932); Verdi's "Rigoletto," in which he plays the Duke of Mantua, with Antonio Pappano as conductor and recorded at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, London (Opus Arte DVD, 2022), and Gaetano Donizetti's "L'elisir d'amore," in which Avetisyan plays Nemorino, with Sesto Quatrini as conductor at the Royal Opera House in London (Opus Arte DVD, 2024).

Avetisyan released his first solo album in 2025: "Beloved Arias" with the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra conducted by Constantine Orbelian (Delos).

The recording of operas is usually done live, Avetisyan explained. During the performance, microphones are set up in various places in addition to cameras. While it is possible to first record both live video and audio, on rare occasions a second recording on another day is done of audio in case there are any minor slip-ups or extraneous noises. For example, sometimes singers clear their throat. However, Avetisyan noted that most of the time, no one wants to pay for this extra work. A section would have to be removed from the second recording and mastered and attached to the video, which is tremendously time consuming and costly.

Avetisyan said he loves Armenian spiritual music and declared: "I go crazy over it. It is so simple and complicated at the same time." Therefore, he is preparing a solo CD for which he has already recorded five pieces that he will release himself, without a label. Due to his busy schedule, it is the third year that he has come to a studio in Armenia to do recordings for it, often with Vahe Begoyan's choir. He said he plans to record seven or eight more pieces, either a Capello or with an organ.

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

AUGUST 9 — Kamurjner Cultural Connections presents an evening with Lucia Papikian, soprano, in a concert titled "Beyond Reach," with Michele Wong, piano. Music by Sibelius, Donizetti, Berg and Liszt. Sunday, 5 p.m., Armenian Cultural Foundation, Arlington. Free Admission.

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

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

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

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

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

SEPTEMBER 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., Baikar 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 Hovhaness, 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 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.

Cannes' Critics' Week Reveals Lineup of Armenian Filmmakers Taking Part in Next Step Studio Program

CANNES, from page 13

Festival, where it received the Festival Director's Award and the EurasiaDoc Special Award. "Edge" was also showcased at Cinema Village in New York as part of the Socially Relevant Film Festival.

In 2024–2025, Khachatryan directed her first short fiction film, "Relic." The project received the main cash prize at the pitching competition of the Yerevan State Theatre and Film Institute, as well as awards from Hoshkee Film and Armine Anda, Picartix Production, and Open Platform. Currently, Khachatryan is developing her first feature fiction film, "Process." The project was selected for the SolidArt program in Armenia and received a cash prize, as well as a Special Mention at the GAIFF Pro Project Market of the Golden Apricot Film Festival.

Sargsyan graduated from the Yerevan State Institute of Theater and Cinematography in 2017. From 2007 to 2010, she did her Ph.D. in the same institute, and published various articles on cinema language and film structure. She worked as an assistant director in Armenian public television and was the casting assistant to Maria Saakyan for her 2006 film "Mayak." Her debut as a scriptwriter and director came with the 2020 short film "General Cleaning." Her second short film, "The Eternal Red," was released in 2025.

Following an open call for applications in Armenia, Next Step Studio received 25 submissions. A shortlist of 12 projects was drawn up, and the shortlisted filmmakers were interviewed on July 16 at the House of Cinema in Yerevan by a selection committee composed of Juliette Canon, Short Film Coordinator and Next Step Coordinator at Critics' Week, French producer Dominique Welinski and Armenian producer Artyom Baghdasaryan.

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR
SINCE 1932

An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE UNITED STATES

EDITOR
Alin K. Gregorian

MANAGING EDITOR
Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR
Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

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

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

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

VIDEO CORRESPONDENT
Haykaram Nahapetyan

The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is published weekly, except two weeks in July and the first week of the year, by:
Baikar Association, Inc.
755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472-1509
Telephone: 617-924-4420
FAX: 617-924-2887
www.mirrorspectator.com
E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com
For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

© 2026 The Armenian Mirror-Spectator
Periodical Class Postage Paid at Boston, MA and additional mailing offices.
ISSN 0004-234X

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

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

COMMENTARY

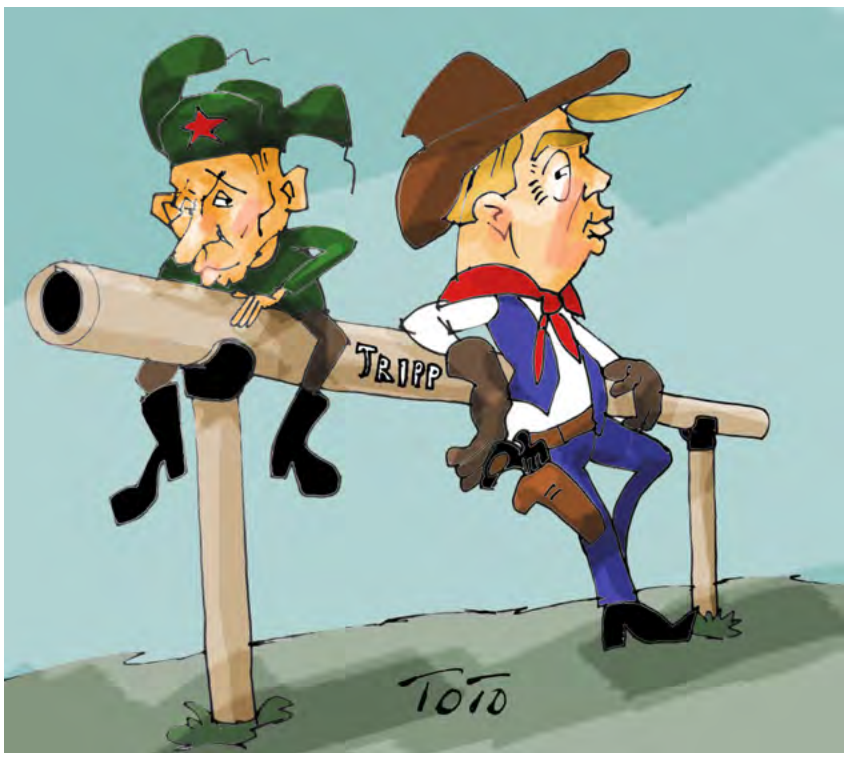
What Currently Prevents Implementation Of the TRIPP Project?

By Suren Sargsyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The TRIPP project, its construction prospects, potential challenges, possible timelines, as well as the political and economic issues surrounding it, continue to remain at the center of attention for Armenian political, economic, and expert circles. However, the most important question in this entire discussion remains: what conditions, processes, and regional actors could hinder the implementation of TRIPP?

TRIPP is not merely a business project. It could become a strategically significant American presence in the South Caucasus, connecting not only Armenia and Azerbaijan but also potentially linking Central Asia with Europe through an integrated logistics chain, including routes passing through the territories of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Such a development would fundamentally transform the logistics architecture of the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and Europe.

This is well understood by the Trump administration, and it is equally understood by regional actors such as Russia and Iran, for whom any form of American strategic presence near their borders or in neighboring regions runs counter to their interests. From this perspective, every effort has been made to prevent Washington from establishing a strategic foothold in the South Caucasus.



It is evident that as long as the confrontation between the United States and Iran continues, and the two sides exchange missile strikes not only against strategic military targets but also, hypothetically, against economically strategic projects associated with the United States across the broader Middle Eastern region, TRIPP — had it already existed at this stage — would likely have become one of Iran's primary targets.

From this perspective, it is important that TRIPP does not yet exist, and it is equally important that the project be implemented only at a stage when, at a minimum, issues related to direct military confrontation between the United States and Iran have been resolved or excluded. Iran has for a considerable period of time sought to obstruct the implementation of this project. Even if active military hostilities between the United States and Iran come to an end, the issue will likely continue to exist within the broader framework of strategic and military competition between the two sides.

There are also issues related to Russian interests, and these are driven not by Russia's military presence but by its economic presence in the South Caucasus. The primary issue concerns Russian Railways and the Armenian railway system, whose management has been entrusted to Russia. In particular, Russian Railways serves as the concessionary operator of the South Caucasus Railway company in Armenia.

A few days ago, in an interview, Russian Railways CEO Oleg Belozyorov stated that Russian Railways (RZD) is fully fulfilling all of the obligations it assumed under the concession agreement signed with Armenia.

Belozyorov also emphasized that South Caucasus Railway is one of Armenia's largest and most important employers. According to him, the total volume of investments made during 2008–2025 from the resources of Russian Railways (RZD) and the company's own revenues amounted to approximately US$396.3 million.

This figure could indicate the amount that Russia may demand from Armenia as compensation if Armenia decides to take back the concessionary management of the railway from Russia. Such a demand would represent a substantial financial burden for Armenia.

The issue here may not be that Russia wants to relinquish concession management, but rather that it seeks to secure some form of participation in the TRIPP project in exchange. This is because the implementation of the project would significantly reduce Russia's influence in the South Caucasus, and this is something of which Moscow is well aware.

Various economists argue that this project is important for Armenia not as much as from an economic perspective but, even more importantly, from a strategic standpoint — particularly in terms of providing Armenia with access to the outside world. This includes the possibility of utilizing the potential opening of the Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani borders, which could have a significant impact on the economic structure of the Republic of Armenia.

We once again come to the conclusion that the TRIPP project is not so much a business initiative as a project that could have strategic significance for the United States' regional presence and for transforming the entire logistics architecture of the South Caucasus region.

(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

Young Meher Sculptor Should Be Noted

To the Editor:

I appreciated your extensive coverage of the dedication of the Armenian Heritage Walk at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the restoration of the Young Meher statue. The article captured the spirit, unity, and cultural significance of this important achievement for the Armenian community.

I was saddened, however, that nowhere in the article was the sculptor of Young Meher, Armenian-American artist Khoren Der Harootian, identified or acknowledged.

Born in Ashodavan, Armenia in 1909, Der Harootian survived the Armenian Genocide. After years of displacement and loss, he found refuge in Worcester, Mass., with his mother, brother and four sisters. Their father, Der Haroutune Harootunian, was massacred along with 29 family members during the Genocide. Those experiences profoundly shaped his life and artistic vision.

Khoren Der Harootian was an internationally recognized sculptor and painter. His work was exhibited in New York, London, Paris, Florence and Armenia. It is held in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 1974, he was commissioned by the Philadelphia Armenian Bicentennial Commemoration Committee to create the 22-foot bronze sculpture Young Meher. It was unveiled in 1976 as part of the Armenian-American "Thank You America" commemoration.

Reflecting on the creation of Young Meher years later, Der Harootian said, "It seemed like I was in a sacred ceremony and I was not the sculptor, but the souls of the martyrs were directing my hands."

As the Armenian community honors its heritage and those who came before us, Khoren Der Harootian's Young Meher stands as an enduring testament to the resilience, faith, memory, and survival of the Armenian people.

Carolyn Bozkurtian
Belmont, MA

COMMENTARY

MY TURN

by Harut Sassounian

If Pashinyan Jails Catholicos Karekin II Will Armenians Still Remain in a Coma?

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is crossing all permissible red lines, exceeding every limit on his power.

In the past eight years, Pashinyan has violated hundreds of laws and multiple provisions of the Constitution. Meanwhile, a large number of Armenians have been thrown in jail, not for violating the law, but for simply disagreeing with him — a fundamental right that all citizens are supposed to enjoy in a democratic state.

Pashinyan has made it clear that laws do not apply to him. He can violate any law, and no judge can stop him, as he has boastfully claimed.

Ever since seizing power in 2018, Pashinyan has viciously attacked the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church and its leadership. Despite his unchristian behavior, he frequently quotes the Holy Scriptures to deceive his gullible followers. The Holy Bible cites Matthew 4:5-7, Luke 4:9-12, and Psalm 91:11-12 — in which the devil, also quoting Scriptures, urged Jesus to throw Himself down from the top of the Temple, claiming that the angels would save him. Jesus responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

Even though there has been an unsubstantiated rumor for a long time that the Catholicos had fathered a child, Pashinyan waited for seven years after coming to power to exploit this rumor when it suited his narrow political purposes. For over a year now, he has abused his high office by trying to depose Catholicos Karekin II.

Pashinyan has made public calls, issued personal threats, and even used vulgar language on his Facebook page to force the Catholicos to resign. Having failed in all of these attempts, he went as far as blackmailing 10 high-ranking clergymen to force them to side with him against the Catholicos. Under the guise of "reforming" the Church, he formed a "citizens' committee" to replace the Catholicos. It is mind-boggling that a man who is too incompetent to rule the country wants to meddle in the internal affairs of the Church and decide who should be the next Catholicos. This is none of his business.

Naturally, all of these efforts are clear violations of Armenia's Constitution, which calls for the separation of church and state. But, since Pashinyan has established an autocratic one-man rule, he persists in trying to impose his will. In early January, when Catholicos Karekin II and a committee of six bishops dismissed Bishop Gevorg Saroyan as the Primate of the Masyatsotn Diocese, Pashinyan urged Saroyan to reject the church's internal decision and file a lawsuit to block his dismissal. The church leadership then defrocked him on January 27.

The court illegally ordered the Catholicos not to dismiss Saroyan and banned Karekin II from leaving the country, depriving him and the six bishops of the Supreme Spiritual Council of the opportunity to participate in an important episcopal conference in Austria. Nevertheless, the conference was held, and the 25 bishops who gathered from around the world expressed their support for the Catholicos and criticized Pashinyan's government for prosecuting the Church.

The preliminary hearing for the trial of the Catholicos and the six other bishops is set for August 7, at 4 p.m., at the Vagharshapat (Etchmiadzin) Court. This is the first time that the independent Republic of Armenia has filed criminal charges against a Catholicos of All Armenians. During their centuries-long rule, neither the Ottoman Empire nor Tsarist Russia ever brought legal charges against any of the Catholicoi. The only exception was the murder of Catholicos Khoren I, who was strangled to death by Soviet security agents on April 6, 1938.

The dragging of the Catholicos to court is an illegal act and a flagrant abuse of power by Pashinyan's government. Armenians have been telling the world with great pride for over 1,700 years that Armenia was the first state to adopt Christianity. Yet, their own government is treating the Church's leadership as criminals.

The only good news is Catholicos Karekin II's announcement that he will not resign even if he is arrested and imprisoned. He will continue to serve as the legitimate Catholicos even while sitting in jail.

The Pashinyan government has, over the past eight years, committed a series of unprecedented anti-Church acts:

— In 2018, it canceled the diplomatic passports of clergy members.

— It eliminated the subject of "History of the Armenian Church" from the public school curriculum.

— In 2024, it discontinued the services of the chaplains stationed at penitentiaries.

— It terminated the spiritual services of the chaplains in the Armed Forces.

— It plans to confiscate all Church buildings and properties.

— Its security forces raided the grounds of Holy Etchmiadzin to arrest an archbishop.

— It arrested and imprisoned several high-ranking clergymen on bogus charges.

— In violation of Parliament's rules, the authorities did not allow the Catholicos to say a prayer at its opening session on August 2, 2026.

— It collected hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxes and penalties from the Church on candles bought by worshippers, even though the Church is a non-profit organization and those purchasing candles are making donations.

Judge Hakob Manukyan should dismiss the charges against the Catholicos and the six bishops on August 7 so that he will not become an accomplice to Pashinyan's illegal actions. Otherwise, Judge Manukyan will become the subject of international ridicule when the European Court of Human Rights eventually rules that his verdict violated Armenia's Constitution.

Meanwhile, Armenians both in Armenia and the Diaspora should wake up from their long-lasting state of complacency and raise their voices in protest. If they continue to remain silent even after the Catholicos is arrested and imprisoned, then they do not deserve to have a Church or a homeland.

Armenia Should Follow the Greek Model to Safeguard Its Ethiopian Community

By Michael Rubin

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia — The Ethiopian-Armenian community is small but plays an outsized role in modern Ethiopian history. While Armenian diplomats and traders visited Ethiopia for centuries, a more permanent trading community established itself in Addis Ababa in the late 19th century before the Armenian Genocide, though flight from Ottoman repression soon swelled its ranks. Armenians felt comfortable in Ethiopia.

Like Armenia, Ethiopia is a civilizational state. Armenia became the first Christian kingdom in 301, but only just barely. Aksum — corresponding to modern day Ethiopia — was close behind, adopting Christianity just a few decades later. Like the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is one of Christianity's most ancient. Both churches share similar theology and reject the A.D. 451 Council of Chalcedon.

Until the Communist Derg ousted Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974, Ethiopians embraced Armenians. Armenians held trusted positions within Emperor Menelik II's court between 1889 and 1913. The Armenians operated churches and schools which became the backbone to allow Ethio-Armenian culture to thrive. The Derg unleashed a rain of terror and Marxist confiscation of private property. The state nationalized Armenian schools, while the Communist regime allowed Orthodox worship, seizure of church property constrained both the Ethiopian and Armenian communities.

The Armenian General Benevolent Union has previously written on the Armenian community's storied history in Addis Ababa and Harar, and the difficulties they have suffered alongside Ethiopian compatriots over the past half century. Numbers reflect those difficulties: Ethiopia's Armenian population has declined from 1,600 people to perhaps 120, with some counts placing the community's numbers even lower. St. George Armenian Apostolic Holy Church largely remains shuttered. Declining enrollment led the Armenian community to open the Kevorkoff Armenian National School to Ethiopians, though even this shuttered.

On May 28, 1991, the Derg finally fell as the fractious Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front took the capital. Ethiopians of all religions celebrated. Meles Zenawi took power and ruled the country until his 2012 death, after which Hailemariam Desalegn took over. Incumbent Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has ruled Ethiopia since 2018.

The problem many Armenians face is that while the Derg is gone, the state's mindset of imminent domain and central planning remains. While Ethiopians despise the Derg, subsequent governments have retained much of the stolen Armenian property. While title disputes slow restitution in other cases, the Armenian titles are clear cut. The constitution also allows the government to seize and destroy property for the public good. The current Ethiopian government appears obsessed with transforming Addis Ababa into an African Dubai. In the name of modernizing the capital, Abiy has launched a corridor project that has seen the destruction of much of old Addis Ababa, including Armen Sefer, the old Armenian neighborhood, to make way for more modern apartments and towers.

While on the positive side, there is not widespread discrimination or Armenophobia as in Turkey and Azerbaijan, Ethiopian bureaucrats, without much sense of history or appreciation for diversity, see little logic to allowing the Armenian community to maintain some centers which their population no longer fills, and there has been pressure for the Armenians to turn over property or, as with the school, to forfeit administrative control.

Abiy sees himself as a great modernizer, as an Ethiopian equivalent of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann who, in the early 19th century, remade Paris. Religiously, he also embraces the new, practicing as a fervent Pentecostal Christian rather than adhering to the older traditions of the Orthodox church. But, as Abiy seeks to rebrand himself after several years of war to the luster off his Nobel Peace Prize, he might work to reverse the damage the Derg did to society. Rather than allow a community that has done much to build Addis and promote the cosmopolitan city's culture to wither because of forces unleashed by one of the 20th century's most brutal regimes, Abiy should return Armenian property and, in so doing, breathe new life into the community.

With diplomatic support from Yerevan, the Ethio-Armenian community could survive. Here, Greece provides a model. In 2023, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education took the Hellenic Greek International School in Addis Ababa to court demanding it adhere to Ethiopian organizational standards rather than retain communal governance. Ethiopian bureaucrats also argued that the school's for-profit English center violated tax provisions. For Greeks, the Ethiopian action triggered parallels to Turkey pursued a slow cultural genocide against the Greek Orthodox community in Istanbul when the Turkish government took over Greek schools and seminaries.

When Ethiopia's Federal Supreme Court imposed a state-appointed board to oversee the Greek school, the Greek foreign ministry launched quiet but urgent diplomacy coupled with deputy foreign minister-level visits that culminated in a December 2025 agreement to designate the school as the Greek Community Cultural Heritage Legacy School and guarantee operational autonomy.

see SAFEGUARD, page 20

Veronika Zonabend Issues Statement Pleading for Her Husband

On July 31, Veronika Zonabend, the wife of Ruben Vardanyan, issued a statement on www.freearmenianprisoners.com.

She said, "This week marked 100 days since Ruben was transferred to the Umbaki penitentiary complex. He has been held since September 2023, and in all that time he has not once been able to see his family in person.

"Previously, I addressed the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Sabina Aliyeva, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, regarding preparations for an international women's humanitarian delegation to Baku.

"The purpose of this initiative remains purely humanitarian: to visit Armenian detainees held in Azerbaijan, deliver letters, photographs and permitted personal items from their loved ones, and help maintain their connection with their families," she wrote.

She added, "To date, I have received no official response to either appeal."

She said that on July 30, she sent follow-up official letters to Sabina Aliyeva and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, setting out concrete proposals for the practical organization of the humanitarian visit."

She added, "I ask Ms. Aliyeva and her Office to facilitate a visit to Armenian detainees held at the Umbaki Penitentiary Complex, clarify the possible format of the visit, the procedures for access and the delivery of family parcels, and provide clear assurances regarding the safe entry, stay and unhindered departure of the delegation members.

"We are ready to discuss various formats to be agreed through official channels, including a visit by the full delegation, a smaller group of participants, or a visit accompanied by a representative of the Office of the Commissioner.

"It is of fundamental importance to us that the agreed format allows direct humanitarian contact with the detainees and the delivery of personal correspondence and permitted items from their families."

In her statement, she noted that she had asked Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia to designate an official to coordinate this initiative and provide the necessary diplomatic and practical support for its preparation.

Armenia Should Follow the Greek Model to Safeguard Its Ethiopian Community

SAFEGUARD, from page 19

The Armenian community faces slightly different problems, but the precedent of the return of cultural property and operational autonomy remains relevant. While both Armenia-based civil society and diaspora groups rally to protect cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh and Jerusalem, they and the Armenian foreign ministry in Yerevan should not forget Ethiopia. Abiy may respond, but only if asked.

Michael Rubin is director of policy analysis at the Middle East Forum in Washington, DC, and a distinguished fellow at India's Usanas Foundation.

Tekeyan Cultural Association Greater New York in collaboration with the Armenian Radio Hour of New Jersey presents

ROMANTIC SOUL:
MASTERPIECES FOR PIANO TRIO

Featuring works by
Khachaturian, Mendelssohn, Naregatsi, Babajanian and others

TANYA GABRIELIAN
piano

ANI KALAYJIAN
cello

ERIC SILBERGER
violin

Sunday, September 27, 2026

4PM

West Side Presbyterian Church
6 S Monroe St, Ridgewood, NJ 07450

Tickets $75, $50, $40