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‘Our Goal Is not to Undermine Our Relations’: Pashinyan To Visit Russia Three Times in December

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

YEREVAN (OC-Media.org) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has announced that he intends to visit Russia on December 3, 11 and 22 for negotiations, saying he hopes Armenia ‘will be able to maintain a friendly atmosphere in our relations’ with Russia. The planned trips come after the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) stripped Armenia of its voting rights in the bloc.



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin (official photo)

The decision did not come as a surprise to Yerevan, who stopped making contributions to the bloc after CSTO did not respond to their request for military help against Azerbaijani incursions into Armenia in 2021 and 2022. Armenian Security Council Secretary Alen Simonyan decried the lack of aid that they received in a poetic exchange with Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova on 12 November, the day after the CSTO ruling.

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Armenian Opposition Slams Pashinyan Government Over ‘Political Prisoners’

By Shogik Galstyan

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Opposition groups held parliamentary hearings on alleged political prisoners in Armenia on Monday, November 16, as lawmakers from the ruling Civil Contract party skipped the session, rejecting claims that anyone in the country is jailed for political reasons.

The hearings in the National Assembly were initiated by the opposition Hayastan (Armenia) alliance and attended by members of the Strong Armenia bloc, as well as political and public figures not represented in parliament.

Speakers at the event noted that the leaders of both parliamentary blocs — former President Robert Kocharyan and Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan — as well as Gagik Tsarukyan, the leader of the Prosperous Armenia Party, which fell just short of the threshold to enter parliament in the June elections, are currently imprisoned on what they described as politically motivated charges.

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Urogynecology Subspecialty Improves Lives for Women In Armenia

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

YEREVAN — Some six years ago, there was no medical subspeciality in female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery (FPMRS), also known as urogynecology, in Armenia. A simple inquiry led to the establishment of a fellowship program that led to the creation of this subspeciality and improved the lives of many Armenian women.

Dr. Samuel S. Badalian is the Chief of the Department of Women’s Health at Bassett Healthcare Network in New York, as well as a clinical professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons. Badalian had been coming for many years to Armenia to perform surgeries. Each time he said he would work on maybe 10-15 patients but realized that this approach was not sufficient and it would be better to create a program in Armenia.



Dr. Zaruhi Grigoryan at one of the new rooms in the Urogynecology Service in Wigmore Women’s and Children’s Hospital in Yerevan (photo Aram Arkun)

Badalian decided that first research was needed to find out the prevalence

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Boston’s Armenian American Medical Assoc. Holds 55th Anniversary Gala

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

BOSTON — The Armenian American Medical Association (AAMA) of Boston celebrated its 55th anniversary with a gala banquet at Boston’s Seaport Hotel on November 7 which was attended by nearly 255 members and friends.



Dr. Vatche Minassian gets a gift of royal elixir from AAMA President Alexa Diranian Ekchian (photo Julie Manoogian, courtesy AAMA)

Dr. Ari Damla served as the master of ceremonies. Damla, who resides in Watertown, is an assistant professor of Musculoskeletal Radiology and the Radiology Residency Program Director at Boston Medical Center and the Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine.

Damla pointed out that the AAMA is one of three major Armenian medical associations in the United States, but, he said, “It’s more than just a regional committee. It’s more than just a national committee as well and really has global outreach. It’s truly a driving force in the community. Our local education includes outreach to vital medicine care and international projects.” Indicating the importance of the gala, Damla reflected, “The work driven by the people in this room truly does change lives.”

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Toufayan Bakeries Marks Centennial With Giveaways, National Tour

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

RIDGEFIELD, N.J. — For Armenians, bread traditionally has been vital — sacred, one might even say. In fact, in Armenian, one can call eating a meal “Hats Ootel,” literally eating bread.

The New Jersey-based Toufayan Bakeries comes with this legacy and celebrates its centennial this year, marking it as one of the oldest specialty bakeries in the US.

Karen Toufayan, vice president of marketing, and part of the third generation of family involved with the company, recently spoke about the company’s roots in Egypt as well as events marking the organization’s centennial.



Harry Toufayan and his daughter, Karen Toufayan

“My grandfather, Haroutun, started it back in 1926 in Egypt, where they had immigrated after the Genocide,” she said. Later, in the 1960s, he and his family moved to the New York/New Jersey area.

At first, the operation in the US was small, as it was in Egypt. “It was really simple, with a small oven and bakery and Middle Eastern/Armenian grocery store,” Toufayan said. The family lived above the shop in a two-bedroom apartment.

He first started with pita bread. “He was the first person to bring pita bread to the modern-day supermarket, right in front of the deli department,” she said.

As for the celebrations, she added, “The events we are doing this year are two-fold. First we are appreciating our retail partners by having several pop-ups along the East Coast of the United States. … What we did was we had a lot of interaction with consumers that were going in and out of the

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NEWS *from* ARMENIA

Mayor Proposes Traffic Measures

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Yerevan Mayor Tigran Avinyan has said that addressing the worsening traffic congestion in the Armenian capital will require fully segregating bus lanes, introducing restrictions on passenger car traffic in certain areas for public health reasons, and implementing ongoing measures to reduce traffic violations.

Speaking at a City Council meeting on November 16, he said the number of passenger cars must be reduced to ensure normal traffic flow in the city and that public transportation be given priority.

Avinyan added that the construction of the Arshakunyats-Isakov road and the Noragavit overpass would help improve traffic flow.

Addressing the link between construction and traffic congestion, he said that buildings do not cause traffic jams; people and cars do.

Avetisyan's 'Revival' to Be Shown in Armenia

YEREVAN (Pan.am) — Director Jivan Avetisyan's feature-length film "Revival" will be shown in all cinemas in Armenia starting March 4. Representatives of the film's international cast will also be present at the premiere.

"Reborn" is his fourth full-length film. It is a joint production of Armenia, Cyprus and Lithuania. The film is a science fiction arthouse drama , during the creation of which modern advanced technologies were used, reports Aysor.am.

The film's plot reflects on the events of the 2020 war , while also exploring themes of human memory, artificial intelligence, and spiritual rebirth.

Universal Health Insurance Covers over 1.8 million Citizens

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — More than 1.8 million citizens were covered by Armenia's Universal Health Insurance System in the first nine months of this year, with 60% of them having already used various healthcare services under the insurance scheme.

Hayk Babayan, acting director general of the Universal Health Insurance Fund, said at a press briefing this week that an average of 350,000–370,000 beneficiaries use the insurance scheme each month.

A total of 164 billion drams in reimbursements was paid out over the nine-month period.

Women used healthcare services more frequently than men but care for the latter was mroe expensive.

"Treatment is more expensive for men because they tend to seek medical attention later, arriving at hospitals at the last moment when they require urgent surgery. This sends an important message to men: they should consult a doctor as soon as they experience symptoms rather than wait until the last moment," Babayan said.



Turkey Launches Regular Cargo Flights To Armenia as Relations Improve

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

YEREVAN (OC-Media.org) — Turkish Cargo, the cargo transportation service of the flag carrier Turkish Airlines, completed its first scheduled cargo flight between Istanbul and Yerevan on Sunday, November 15, Turkish sources report. No further details have been provided about the volume or nature of the cargo transported.

In 1993, Turkey unilaterally severed diplomatic relations with Armenia and closed its shared land border in solidarity with Azerbaijan during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. The border has remained closed since then, including for cargo transit by rail.

"Executed through the coordination of regional management and the operations team, this special flight provides efficient and reliable transport solutions between the two countries while continuing to expand the global logistics network", Turkey-based aviation website Aeroportist reported.

The cargo operation follows the launch of regular passenger flights by Turkish Airlines on the Istanbul–Yerevan–Istanbul route in March 2026, as the two countries have taken steps towards normalizing relations.

Previously, the only air connection between Yerevan and Istanbul was provided by the Turkish low-cost carrier Pegasus, after Armenian airline FlyOne Armenia was forced to suspend its operations through Turkish airspace due to a Turkish government-imposed ban in 2023.

The latest cargo operation comes days after Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Antalya on the sidelines of the COP31 Leaders" Summit.

The two leaders "discussed the process" of normalizing bilateral relations and "emphasized the importance of advancing this process toward a logical conclusion".

Following the meeting, Pashinyan expressed confidence that "in the near future we will achieve full normalization of relations with Turkey", adding that during their meeting, "we both noted that we have made progress and are very close to the final step: establishing diplomatic relations and fully opening the borders".

Despite a 2022 agreement to allow third-country citizens and diplomats to cross their shared land border, Turkey has linked its full reopening to progress in the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process. In turn, Armenian officials have accused Azerbaijan of obstructing the normalization process in April.

The cargo flight, however, is the latest in a series of developments in bilateral relations this year.

In October, Armenia and Turkey discussed restoring and commissioning the Gyumri–Kars transmission line as Yerevan pushes to secure alternative energy sources and to normalise ties with Ankara.

Earlier, in May, Pashinyan announced that the Akhalkalaki–Kars railway connecting Georgia and Turkey "is now open" for Armenian exports and imports.

That same month, Turkey lifted restrictions on trade with Armenia, allowing bilateral trade to proceed without goods having to be re-registered in a third country before crossing the border.

Separately, Armenian and Turkish business representatives held several meetings.

Opposition Slams Pashinyan Government over 'Political Prisoners'

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Speaking at the session, Lilit Galstyan, a lawmaker from the Hayastan faction and head of the parliamentary human rights committee, accused Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of personally directing the persecution of political opponents from the parliament's rostrum. As evidence, Galstyan cited past warnings by Pashinyan that he would send opponents to the notorious "National Security Service dungeon." Pashinyan has repeatedly denied directing any arrests, dismissing such remarks as mere political rhetoric.

Civil Contract lawmakers did not attend the proceedings. Volodia Hakobyan, secretary of the ruling party's faction, told RFE/RL's Armenian Service that his party stayed away from the event because "there are no political prisoners in Armenia." Hakobyan added that it was "ridiculous" for allies of former President Kocharian to raise the issue, hinting at what Civil Contract and its supporters assert were large-scale persecutions of opposition figures during his 1998-2008 presidency.

Civil Contract's decision to skip the session follows a move last week by the ruling majority in the parliament's committee on state and legal issues to reject a draft opposition statement on democratic backsliding in Armenia under the Pashinyan government, which also referred to the presence of political prisoners. During that committee debate, ruling party lawmaker Arman Yeghoyan dismissed the opposition's assessments, arguing they had "nothing to do with reality."

During Monday's hearings, Gohar Meloyan, of the Strong Armenia bloc, called for an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the in-custody death of her teammate, Arsen Gevorgian. Meloyan alleged that Gevorgian, a mayoral candidate in Stepanavan who had been arrested on vote-buying charges, died from an apparent heart attack due to a lack of proper medical care.

Government officials have disputed that claim. Last week, both Justice Minister Srbuhi Galyan and the head of the Penitentiary Service stated that Gevorgian had received all necessary medical treatment prior to his death.

Former lawmaker Naira Zohrabyan also used her address at the hearings to criticize Justice Minister Galyan, who had emotionally stated last week that she and her underage child were being targeted in the wake of Gevorgian's death.

"You are a representative of a political party whose supporters harassed my child during the 2018 political upheaval by telling her that her mother had died and instructing her to go to the morgue to retrieve my body. You are a member of the team that placed coffins outside the doors of living people," Zohrabian said.

Opposition lawmaker Anna Grigoryan, who chaired the session, intervened to state that children should not bear responsibility for the actions of their parents, either in 2018 or today.

Among those who spoke at Monday's hearings was the 14-year-old daughter of Aregnaz Manukyan, a leading member of the opposition Mayr Hayastan party who is being prosecuted as part of a high treason case against party chairman Andranik Tevanyan.

After her imprisonment in July, Manukyan, whom the opposition also considers a political prisoner, was barred for weeks from seeing or speaking with friends or relatives, including her daughter. Law enforcement authorities reluctantly allowed the girl to visit her mother in prison in August following an uproar from opposition and public figures.

ARMENIA

Meds Masrik Kindergarten Expands With Paros Foundation's Help

MEDS MASRIK, Armenia — On October 30, community leaders, kindergarten staff, parents and children, joined representatives of the Paros Foundation and Focus on Children Now for a ribbon cutting ceremony marking the completion of the rebuilding and expansion of the Meds Masrik Kindergarten.

Made possible through the generous support of the Cultural Society of Armenians from Istanbul (CSAI), Detroit, two large, previously unused buildings, on the kindergarten's campus were completely rebuilt. This work facilitated the kindergarten's expansion, allowing for two additional groups of children (up to 50 more children) to enroll and additional staff to be hired to operate these new groups.

"The Cultural Society of Armenians from Istanbul are proud to be able to support this important work. The expansion of the kindergarten not only gives more children the opportunity for early education, but also creates more jobs in Meds Masrik," said Arthur Koncagul, CSAI Board Member.

In addition, long-time Paros Foundation partner, Focus on Children Now, funded the reconstruction of a third building on campus, which houses the kitchen, nurses' station, and administrative offices. They also provided furniture for the newly renovated buildings.



Head of the Vardenis Consolidated Community, Mayor Khachatryan cuts the ribbon to the newly renovated kindergarten wings.

The Paros Foundation began working with the community of Meds Masrik in 2020.

For more information, visit www.parosfoundation.org.



Children, parents, staff and guests happily celebrate the ribbon cutting at the Meds Masrik Kindergarten

Bear and Two Cubs Roam in Jermuk

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — A mother bear and her two cubs have been spotted roaming the Armenian resort town of Jermuk.

A video filmed by locals shows the animals walking around the town.

The Ministry of Environment commented on the footage, warning residents that encounters with wild animals, particularly a mother bear accompanied by her cubs, can be dangerous for both people and the animals.

The ministry urges citizens not to approach bears, attempt to photograph or film them at close range, feed them, or attract their attention.

Citizens are also urged not to gather around the animals or block their escape routes.

The ministry emphasized that wild animals are an integral part of the natural environment and that safe coexistence with them requires cautious and responsible behavior.



A still from the video showing the mama bear and her two cubs

Azerbaijani Serviceman Charged with Shooting and Beating Woman In Armenia

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — An Azerbaijani serviceman who crossed into Armenia illegally, broke into a house in Syunik Province and shot and severely beat a woman has been formally charged, with his case now referred to court.

The criminal case against Nasimi Musayev was filed with the court on November 16 and assigned to judge Hrach Dajunts. It will be heard at the Court of General Jurisdiction in Goris.

According to the indictment, Musayev, who is serving in the Azerbaijani armed forces, crossed Armenia's state border on Sept. 26 through the administrative territory of Ishkhanasar in Syunik Province. He was carrying an AKM assault rifle, 140 rounds of live ammunition, 10 blank cartridges and a bayonet knife.

After entering Armenia, Musayev made his way to the village of Shaki in the Sisian community. Between September 30 and October 1, he broke into a private home without the occupants' consent.

He stole a mobile phone, a smartwatch, a pair of trousers, 9,000 drams in cash, a bank card and two left shoes. The total value of the stolen property was estimated at 26,000 drams ($68), according to the indictment.

At around 2 p.m. on October 1, two minors living in the house, Rozi and Kajik Avetisyan, returned home and encountered the armed intruder.

Musayev threatened the children with his AKM rifle, forced them to sit on a sofa and hand over their mobile phones, and prevented them from leaving the house, unlawfully depriving them of their freedom.

Their mother, Ani Avetisyan, rushed to the house after hearing her daughter scream during a phone call, alerting her to the presence of an armed man inside.

Musayev opened fire inside the house, firing six rounds from his rifle. One bullet struck Avetisyan in the left thigh. He then threw her onto a bed and repeatedly struck her in different parts of the body.

The woman sustained life-threatening injuries, including a gunshot wound to her left thigh, a multiple-fragment fracture of the femur, extensive blood loss and damage to muscles and a neurovascular bundle. She also suffered a near-amputation injury to the base of her left thumb, wounds to other fingers, a burn, bruising and multiple abrasions, according to the indictment.

After the attack, Musayev fled and hid in a barn adjoining a house on Sixth Street in Shaki. Law enforcement officers found and arrested him at around 4:15 p.m. on Oct. 1.

Musayev faces charges of illegally crossing Armenia's state border, unlawfully transporting and possessing firearms and ammunition, trespassing, theft, unlawfully depriving two minors of their freedom and seriously injuring a woman.

INTERNATIONAL

Armenia Ready to Open Border with Turkey, Speaker Says

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenia is ready to open its border with Turkey and establish diplomatic relations immediately, National Assembly Speaker Ruben Rubinyan said on November 17.

He noted that border checkpoints on both sides of the Margara-Alican crossing have been renovated and are ready to become operational.

Rubinyan also reported that Turkey has begun renovating the section of the Kars-Gyumri railway running through its territory up to the Armenian border.

Rubinyan added that the normalization process is continuing, with discussions taking place at the level of the two countries' foreign ministries.

Armenia, NATO Discuss Further Development of Partnership in Brussels

BRUSSELS (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Ararat Mirzoyan met with Kevin Hamilton, NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, in Brussels on November 16.

The sides discussed the development of the Armenia-NATO partnership, including opportunities to further expand cooperation within existing partnership frameworks.

They also addressed Armenia's participation in the NATO-led peacekeeping mission in Kosovo and the continuation of its involvement.

The discussions also covered regional developments.

Mirzoyan, EU Commissioner Discuss Partnership

BRUSSELS (Armenpress) — Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Ararat Mirzoyan on November 17 met with the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Marta Kos.

The two sides discussed the implementation of the Armenia-EU strategic partnership agenda and the deepening of the economic component of this cooperation, informs the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Mirzoyan and Kos highlighted the implementation of initiatives to promote the regional connectivity agenda as an important factor in the development of mutually beneficial regional cooperation.

Also, they touched upon the work to translate political commitments into concrete programs and investments in transport infrastructure, digital and energy connectivity, and strengthening resilience.

Mirzoyan noted that Armenia appreciates the application of the EU's Autonomous Trade Measures for Armenia's products, the joint work on the practical application of which is yielding results in the form of an increase in the export of Armenian products to EU countries.

Pashinyan Meets with Aliyev, Erdogan

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev discussed further steps to advance the peace process between their countries, including the development of transport links and economic ties, at a meeting in Dublin, Ireland, on November 12, the Armenian government said.

The talks on the sidelines of the 9th European Political Community summit focused on "practical steps towards further consolidating peace between the two countries" following the Washington Peace Summit hosted by US President Donald Trump on August 8, 2025, according to a statement released by Pashinyan's press office.

The two leaders discussed progress in developing the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), a US-backed regional infrastructure project providing a transit route for Azerbaijan via Armenia, including the planning and design of its railway and highway components, as well as prospects for transit connectivity along the TRIPP route, the statement said.

They also reportedly welcomed the transit of goods to and from Armenia through Azerbaijani territory, noting that a total of 105,000 tons of cargo have been transported to Armenia through the territory of Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan the day before in the Turkish resort city of Antalya.

The talks took place on the sidelines of the COP31 United Nations climate summit, which Turkey is hosting. The two leaders stressed the importance of advancing the normalization process and "bringing it to a logical conclusion," according to a statement released by Pashinyan's press office.



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meets with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Antalya on November 11.

They also reportedly highlighted agreements reached and steps taken so far, as well as the need to further promote trade and economic relations between the two neighboring countries.

The two leaders discussed regional developments, emphasizing that the establishment of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan "has given fresh impetus to regional cooperation."

According to the statement, Erdogan and Pashinyan also addressed efforts to unblock regional transport links, including steps towards implementing the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), a United States-run transit corridor for Azerbaijan via Armenia.

Also attending the meeting were Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan, Armenian Environment Minister Hambardzum Matevosian, and Ibrahim Kalin, director of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization, an RFE/RL Armenian Service correspondent reported from Antalya.

Erdogan was quoted by the Armenian leader's press office as welcoming Pashinyan's visit to Antalya and his participation in the leaders' summit, while the Armenian prime minister congratulated the Turkish president on the organization of the event. Pashinyan also reportedly offered condolences over fatalities caused by an explosion at a metalworking factory in Izmir.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Prime Minister Pashinyan described it as positive.

He told RFE/RL's Armenian Service that they also discussed why the agreements reached so far had not yet been implemented.

"Yes, we addressed all the issues," he said, without elaborating on how the Turkish side responded to that matter.

"We expect further developments in our relations," he added.

Asked by a reporter whether Armenia had plans to open an embassy in Ankara, Pashinyan replied that it depended on the Turkish side. "We are ready to establish diplomatic relations even today," he emphasized.



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev met on the sidelines of the European Political Community summit in Dublin, the Republic of Ireland, on November 12, 2026.

Pashinyan to Visit Russia Three Times in December

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Pashinyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin held their last meeting on September 1, which ended with open disagreements on Armenia's EU aspirations. Putin insisted that Armenia hold a referendum choosing between the EU and the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). In turn, Pashinyan rejected the call, saying it was not yet 'mature enough'. The Armenian leader has consistently said that he will put EU membership to a referendum at a later stage.

Following the talks, Pashinyan described the meeting as "very good" and announced the decision with Russia to "continue our frank and constructive conversation during my upcoming visit to Moscow."

Pashinyan disclosed the dates of the upcoming visits to Russia on 13 November, during a discussion with experts at the Institute of International and European Affairs in Dublin, where he visited to attend the 9th summit of the European Political Community.

"Our goal is not to undermine our relations with Russia. We do not want to make problems for Russia," Pashinyan said.

When asked whether Russia wants to create problems for Armenia, Pashinyan laughed and said "Who knows?" before adding, "I hope that is not Russia's intention."

Pashinyan also reiterated that developing Armenia's relations with the EU was not intended to worsen its ties with Russia.

Acknowledging that Armenia cannot simultaneously be a member of the EAEU and the EU, Pashinyan said his government's main political objective had been and remained creating an alternative for Armenian citizens.

"For a long time, the perception, even in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), was that Armenia had no alternative. [...] Even one of the EAEU leaders [Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka] publicly stated that Armenia had nowhere else to go except the EAEU. And that statement triggered certain political processes," Pashinyan said.

In response to a question about how he envisions Armenia in 20 years, Pashinyan said, "as part of the EU." The statement follows Pashinyan's remarks in early November, when he for the first time indicated a timeframe for Armenia's potential EU membership application, saying the country could formally apply in 2027 or 2028.

In recent months, relations between Armenia and Russia have also been strained by several factors, including Russia's restrictions on Armenian exports since April, citing sanitary reasons, and continued uncertainty over the future management of Armenia's railways, which are operated by Russian Railways under a 30-year concession agreement signed in 2008.

Tensions have also extended to Armenia's membership in the Russia-led CSTO. Earlier in November, the CSTO stripped Armenia of its voting rights and its ability to appoint representatives to senior positions within the bloc over its failure to pay membership fees.

Community News

Sargis Meliksetyan Raises $7,000 for Next Generation of Clinical Pharmacists In Armenia

BOSTON — What began as a tribute to his brother's unfinished dream has grown into an international fundraising journey connecting sport, remembrance, and the future of healthcare in Armenia. Following his participation in the 2026 TCS New York City Marathon on November 1, Sargis Meliksetyan has raised approximately $7,000 through his fundraising initiative in support of the Vahe Meliksetyan Foundation (VMF).

The campaign, titled "I Run for Vahe. I Raise for VMF," is dedicated to advancing clinical pharmacy in Armenia and creating educational and professional development opportunities for the next generation of clinical pharmacists.



Sargis Meliksetyan running in the NY Marathon

Meliksetyan's New York Marathon was the first chapter of a much larger undertaking: Seven Continents, Seven Marathons. Through this ambitious challenge, he aims to participate in seven marathons across seven continents, using each race as an opportunity to raise awareness and financial support for the foundation's mission.

"My first marathon was in New York, and it was an incredibly emotional experience. Every kilometer reminded me of Vahe and the dream he never had the opportunity to fulfill. Raising approximately $7,000 is already a meaningful achievement, but this is only the beginning. I want to turn every marathon into an opportunity to make a lasting contribution to Armenia's healthcare system and the education of young professionals," said Sargis Meliksetyan.

The next stop on his journey will be the Paris Marathon on April 4, 2027, where he will continue the Seven Continents, Seven Marathons challenge and its fundraising mission.

The initiative is particularly personal for Sargis. His brother, Vahe Meliksetyan, was a clinical pharmacist, scientist and lecturer at the Yerevan State Medical University. He was killed during the 2020 Artsakh War.

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Zaven P. Akian, chair of AUA's Board of Trustees

AUA Raises $11 Million At Anniversary Gala

BEVERLY HILLS — The American University of Armenia (AUA) raised $11 million at its 35th Anniversary Gala on November 7 at the Beverly Hilton. The event brought together alumni, philanthropists and institutional partners to celebrate the University's impact and invest in its next chapter.

Held under the theme "Paving the Way for Armenia's Future Leaders," the gala marked 35 years since AUA's founding in 1991 and recognized the supporters who have helped expand educational opportunity and academic excellence in Armenia.

Gala co-chairs Liza Bagamian and Tanya Tsarukyan welcomed guests and reflected on the significance of the anniversary.

"AUA's mission is personal to both of us. Seeing this level of unprecedented support from our community was deeply moving and we are grateful to everyone whose continued generosity carries AUA's vision forward," Bagamian and Tsarukyan said.

In his remarks, AUA President Dr. Bruce M. Boghosian reflected on the University's 35-year journey and the opportunities ahead, emphasizing the role of philanthropy in advancing its mission.

"We cannot predict exactly what Armenia or the world will look like in 10, 20, or 35 years. Many of the students walking in the hallways of AUA today will work in fields that probably do not yet exist. Our students will face challenges we cannot yet foresee. What we can give them today, however, is the ability to think, to question, to learn, to create and to lead. That is what preparing future leaders means to me and it is why I am confident about AUA's next chapter. I am convinced that AUA's best days lie ahead of us," said Boghosian.

The evening featured a keynote address by entrepreneur and investor Magdalena Yeşil, who reflected on the transformative role education played in her life and the importance of preparing Armenia's next generation for the opportunities and challenges of a rapidly changing world.

"The only reason why I am here today is my engineering training. That put me on the map. That gave me a trajectory. And I truly believe that Armenia is particularly well suited to educate the next generation of Armenian engineers who don't just change Armenia, but can change the world. Armenia is our home," Yeşil said. "No matter where we live, we have to focus on the future of Armenia. And why I am excited about AUA is that this institution is focused on nothing else but the future of Armenia," she added.

AUA co-founder and President Emeritus Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian presented the inaugural AUA Founders' Award for Academic Stewardship recognizing three philanthropic commitments to the University's academic future through the establishment of endowed visiting professorships at the Zaven P. and Sonia Akian College of Science and Engineering:

Magdalena Yeşil Endowed Visiting Professorship

Drs. Ara and Alice Apkarian Endowed Visiting Professorship

Dr. Jack Munushian Endowed Visiting Professorship

The endowments will enable AUA to bring distinguished scholars to Armenia for extended academic appointments, strengthening teaching, research and collaboration with students and faculty.

"When we founded AUA 35 years ago, we could not have imagined all that the University would become. We knew that if we built it well, others would carry it forward. Tonight, I see that founding vision sustained by the people who continue to invest in AUA and believe in what it can make possible for Armenia," Der Kiureghian said.

AUA's Vice President of Advancement Gaiane Khachatrian thanked the donors whose generosity over the years has helped build a university that has influenced higher education and broader change in Armenia.

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Gagat Conference Aims to Pair Young Graduates With Mentors

BOSTON — The Gagat Youth Career Development Conference, a two-day event (January 15-16, 2027), will be held at the Boston Marriott Newton where young Armenians meet each other and learn from experienced Armenian professionals. Young adults from all across the East Coast are welcome.

In Armenian, Gagat means "summit," a nod to Mount Ararat and the Armenian highlands. The conference hopes to connect young Armenian adults with Armenian professionals and community organizations, offering the networking and career development resources they need to launch into adulthood as proud, united diasporans.

The conference program includes:

Industry insights: Conference tracks led by Armenian professionals in finance, engineering, healthcare, tech, law, media, entrepreneurship, and more.

Fireside chats: Candid conversations about career pivots, setbacks, and the leap from student to professional.

Organization open house: Armenian organizations and professional groups present their programs, internships, and volunteer opportunities, and show young adults how to get involved in the community

Social events: The Daron Folk Ensemble performs and leads a dance workshop, followed by a social mixer with DJ Nabler.

"Every young Armenian has a personal summit to reach, and our job is to help them get there. Gagat brings together a wide range of experts so our youth can tap into our community's wealth of knowledge and resources in a centralized platform and grow professionally while staying grounded in who they are. We are building a future where professional success and Armenian heritage go hand in hand, for the preservation and advancement of our communities and homeland in unity," said Lusine Baghsarian, operations manager and founder of the Gagat Youth Career Development Conference.



Zaven Keuroghlian

Gagat's keynote speaker is Zaven Keuroghlian, co-founder and CEO of Zartonk Media, an independent Armenian multimedia outlet based in Los Angeles.

To register and for more information, visit https://www.gagatconference.org/

COMMUNITY NEWS

Matosian of Women's Support Center Discusses Domestic Violence at Detroit Talk

DETROIT — On November 9, at the Iroquois Club in Detroit, Maro Matosian founder and executive director of the Women's Support Center (WSC) spoke to a large gathering of women from the Detroit Armenian Women's Club, the Armenian Renaissance Association, the Daughters of Vartan, as well as other community members.



Maro Matosian

Linda Karibian, organizer of the event, welcomed the participants and introduced the speakers.

WSC Board Member Lenna Garibian, from Boston, spoke about the importance for Armenian diasporan communities to be aware of the problem of domestic violence. She was emotional in describing the murder of a woman and her adult son, well-known and active members in the Armenian community.

Matosian then covered the achievements by the WSC during the past 16 years. In 2010 domestic violence was a taboo subject and both society and the Armenian Republic denied that there was such a problem in Armenia. Presently, thanks to the advocacy of the WSC, the country has introduced strong legislation and increased services to protect victims of domestic abuse.

During the Q&A session, participants asked many questions and shared examples of abuse in their respective communities.


From left, Lenna Garibian, Linda Karibian and Maro Matosian

OBITUARY

Lillian (Krikorian) Etmekjian

Veteran, Travel Buff and Lifelong Learner

NEWTON, Mass. — Lillian Krikorian Etmekjian of Newton passed away peacefully on November 12, 2026 at age 99.

Lillian is survived by her children Charles Etmekjian and his wife Irene, and Roxanne Etmekjian and her husband Nerses Joubanian; her grandchildren John Etmekjian and his wife Deborah Seif, Steven Joubanian, Lauren Opila and her husband Sky, and Melanie Joubanian and her husband Christopher McCabe; and 7 great grandchildren: Jessica, Ethan, and Addison Etmekjian, Reagan and Lucas Opila, and Rory and Cameron McCabe.



She was preceded in death by her parents Jacob and Anna Krikorian (Hagop and Anna Der Hagopian), her husband of 34 years James Etmekjian, and her younger sister Diana Brosnan.

Lillian was born in 1927 on the family farm at Hampshire Road in Methuen, MA where she lived with her beloved parents, paternal grandparents, and Uncle Krikor. The family, especially her father, instilled in her a strong sense of fairness and community. She graduated from high school as Salutatorian in 1944 and was first in her family to go to college, graduating from UMass Amherst with a B.S. in foods and nutrition in 1948.

Passionate about civil rights, she was active in organizing and activism, then upon graduation, pursued a career as a dietitian.

Most notably, she worked for the US Public Health Service at Brighton Marine Hospital in Boston, 1950-52, where she served as a Commissioned Officer in the US Armed Forces, Lieutenant Junior Grade, receiving an Honorable Discharge and recognition as a Veteran of the Korean War. Proud to serve her country, she made sure to bring her uniform on every family move.

She married James Etmekjian in June 1952, and on their honeymoon spent the summer driving round trip to California, including stops on Route 66, building a postcard and photograph collection of the places and relatives they visited.

She then transitioned to life as a homemaker, raising 2 children and volunteering in the Armenian community, while taking courses in literature and classical music, then completing an MA in history at the University of Bridgeport. The family moved frequently for her husband's education and career as a Professor of Romance Languages and Armenian, settling as far away as St. Louis, where she steadily kept up with family and friends, while making new connections wherever she went. Settling in each place (Providence, RI; Newton, MA; Bayside, NY; St. Louis, MO; a summer in southern France; Stratford, CT; and back to Newton, MA) she was known for her great capacity for friendship, and a kindness that saw past social, cultural, and racial barriers.

In 1974, Lillian rededicated herself to nutrition and dietetics, starting a new job at Boston State Hospital, from which she retired in the early 1990s. During this time, she developed a love of international travel with her husband, traveling to Armenia three times and Jerusalem. When her husband passed away in 1986, she drew on her resilience and began a new chapter, taking up bridge and making new friends.

She traveled the world with her sister Diana after they both retired, visiting all seven continents, including journeys to the Arctic Circle and Antarctic Circle. She also frequently traveled on cruises with her bridge friends to see new parts of the world and for fun.

Throughout her later years, her life was rich with the love of her grandchildren, taking them on trips, exposing them to the arts, and expressing the importance of family togetherness. She also instilled a love of board games and card games in her grandchildren, hosting Monopoly, Scrabble, and Canasta tournaments. She was always near her loved ones, including her beloved cat Tigger, and would even have time to make pancakes for her granddaughter Melanie on Saturday mornings.

Always interested in family and historical research, she became the historian for her family and her husband's. She learned to use a computer, tirelessly cataloging hundreds of individuals, reaching out to descendants for their family stories and saving the information for future generations. She made many new warm connections in the process.

Lillian was awarded a certificate from the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) in 2025 for being a member for 70 consecutive years (since its founding), and having served for a few years on the Board of Directors in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Funeral services will be held on Saturday, November 21, 2026 at 10 AM at St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA, preceded by visiting hours in the church sanctuary at 9 AM. Interment will follow at Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to St. James Armenian Church, the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) or UMass Amherst Libraries (minutefund.uma-foundation.org/project/6295/donate).

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Urogynecology Subspecialty Improves Lives for Women In Armenia

UROGYNOCOLOGY, from page 1

of urogynecological disorders in Armenia. He came back from Armenia and called Dr. Vatche Minassian, whom he had known since 2005 from the American Urogynecological Society meetings. In 2010 Badalian had invited Minassian to come to Armenia and together they organized the first urogynecological conference there with many lectures.

Minassian is associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Harvard Medical School and a urogynecologist practicing in the Boston area. He served as chief of urogynecology at Brigham and Women's Hospital until September 2025. (See accompanying article on the Armenian American Medical Association of Boston honoring Minassian in this issue.)

Minassian recalled that Badalian's immediate spur to create a program was the interest expressed by a young Armenian OB-GYN. Realizing that nothing had been published on how often pelvic disorders occurred in Armenia, Minassian agreed that epidemiologic research was necessary to establish the prevalence of these conditions. Badalian suggested to Minassian that a study should include the Armenian provinces as well as the capital.

They designed a study and gave questionnaires which were filled by 540 patients. The data was sent to Dr. Elena Sagayan in San Francisco for analysis, and the final paper titled "The Prevalence of Pelvic Floor Disorders and Degree of Bother among Women Attending Primary Care Clinics in Armenia," was published in the *European Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology and Reproductive Biology* in 2020. The shocking discovery from the study was that the quality of life of women who had urogynecological surgery was actually worse than women who never had any surgery.

This meant that the surgeries at the time were being done without a true understanding of the anatomy or proper surgical techniques, and thus the Armenian Ministry of Health needed to support the creation of a urogynecological fellowship to teach Armenian physicians how to practice in this field.



Dr. Lusine Sahakyan presenting her paper on conservative management of urinary incontinence at the GynArmenia International Conference in Gynecology 2026 in Yerevan (photo Aram Arkun)



From left, Drs. Samuel Badalian, Anzhela Lekhlyan, Zaruhi Grigoryan and Vatche Minassian at Wigmore Women's and Children's Hospital in Yerevan (photo Aram

Badalian said he sent a copy to Minister of Health Arsen Torosyan, who agreed with the idea, and sent an email to the dean of the Armenian National Institute of Health. When the process stalled, Badalian went back to Minassian and said that they need to create this fellowship themselves.

Starting the Fellowship Program

In order to create a formal fellowship program, they needed to identify suitable mentors. Minassian's connections with many physicians in the US and the world, and Badalian's own connections, led the duo to come up with mentors from different countries, including Raisa Platte, a residency program director at Cornwell Health, Michigan, Armen Kirakosyan, a urogynecologist from Buffalo, NY, Gevorg "George" Kasyan, a urologist from Moscow State Medico-Stomatological University, Russia, and urogynecologist Dr. Tony Bazi of the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. Together as volunteers they created the International Urogynecology Association for Armenia (IUGAA) in 2020. Assistant Professor Paul Hanissian from Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, NH, joined them virtually, and later John AlJamal from Tufts Urogynecology also helped.

The next step was how to select the fellows. That was challenging, Badalian said, because they needed to find young doctors who want to stay in Armenia. They reached out to a few hospitals in Armenia.

Badalian and Minassian realized that it would not be possible to start the program while living in the United States, so Badalian applied for a Fulbright Scholarship to teach urogynecology in Armenia and spend six weeks there instead of one week at a time. During his first Fulbright visit, Badalian set up Zoom meetings with all the mentors to interview applicants for the fellowship program. Finally, they agreed to accept four OB-GYN physicians and one urologist in the program, who were working at three different Yerevan hospitals.

The program had to take place in the hospitals where the fellows were working and earning salaries, as the mentors had no way of providing salaries themselves. Badalian explained that they spoke with the hospital administrations to allow the fellows to follow the mentors when they were visiting in the various hospitals. The hospitals agreed because wherever they went, the mentors would do surgeries, which they did not know locally how to do.

With his Fulbright, Badalian said he was able in 2021-2022 to make three six-week visits and work hands on with the fellows, after which the other mentors could come for alternating one-week visits, sometimes twice a year, to see patients and operate with the five fellows.

The first six weeks were the toughest, Badalian recalled, because instead of surgery, he taught ethics and quality care, how to interact and speak with patients, and how to set up rooms. He said that the Soviet-style health facilities had no privacy or respect for patients, and people went to operating rooms even without changing their clothing. When Minassian came to visit after Badalian, he still was not happy with the physicians' attitude, behavior and interaction with patients, though there was some improvement already.

However, as the program began during the COVID-19 pandemic, the teaching model was also hybrid one, with Zoom lectures, case presentations and journal clubs to discuss new publications and current standards. A WhatsApp group for daily case discussions was created.

During the first year, every week on Friday, the mentors gave lectures to the fellows and then there would be questions and answers. Every six months, a written exam with 60 questions was given to the fellows over 60 minutes.

During the second year, the fellows started giving talks, on topics assigned by the mentors, who became the audience. In the third year, the fellows gave case presentations and the mentors analyzed and questioned them. Then they had to do research projects. They were taken to the library, met with statisticians, and learned how to conduct research and analyze data.

The fellows gradually started to focus their clinical practice more on urogynecology care. Three urogynecology symposia were held in Armenia introducing the subspeciality and the fellows to the local medical community.

Wigmore Hospital

In 2023, the faculty established an agreement with the Wigmore Women's and Children's Hospital in Yerevan to create the first urogynecological center in Armenia. Wigmore was originally designed to only be a children's hospital, but Badalian said they were able to convince them that children's health without women's health does not work, so obstetrics and urogynecology were added.

Wigmore existed for nine years, but the current clinic is only around three years old now, Badalian said. The building was built as a pediatric hospital with four floors being used.

Wigmore hired two of the fellows and gave privileges to perform surgeries to the other three. It purchased all the needed testing equipment as well as surgical equipment and instrumentation.

In negotiations with Wigmore, the investors and administrators were told that besides proper equipment, proper offices were needed equipped according to US standards. "Every single piece of equipment for exam rooms was ordered on our request: exam tables, lights, curtains, how doors are locked and how things are done," Badalian said. They accepted all of it.

Badalian declared, "The beauty of this place — why we chose to come here —

see WOMEN, page 8

COMMUNITY NEWS

Urogynecology Subspecialty Improves Lives for Women In Armenia

WOMEN, from page 7

was that they gave us an opportunity to create our own department. They gave us all the necessary equipment to establish it and move forward, which means autonomy." He said the leadership in this hospital is progressive. Many other places work under an existing urology department, which makes it harder to implement changes.

Recognition and Next Steps

In 2024, the Avdalbekyan National Institute of Health of the Armenian Ministry of Health approved the pathway to obtain recognition of the field and in 2025 recognized urogynecology as a stand-alone subspeciality. The fellows in the program became the first urogynecologists of Armenia.

The fellowship training program received accreditation from the governing body of the International Urogynecology Association (IUGA). At first, Badalian said, the organization did not want to accept it but after multiple meetings and discussions it agreed and wrote a letter to the Minister of Health of Armenia to that effect.

All five fellows graduated in 2025 and presented their research in June of that year at the 50th International Urogynecology Association meeting in Barcelona, Spain. One fellow was recognized for the best video presentation. Badalian said, "This was the biggest day of celebration for us [mentors]."



From left, Drs. Gor Shadyan, Lusine Sahakyan, Tigran Ter-Isahakyan at the GynArmenia International Conference in Gynecology 2026 in Yerevan (photo Aram Arkun)

Badalian said, "Now they have become our colleagues. They are not our fellows anymore." On a television show in Armenia, when he was asked about it, he said, "You cannot imagine our satisfaction and happiness when you see those patients actually getting the help they need, and without us." Minassian concurred.

A second group of fellows was then recruited from the Armenian provinces. While people living in the provinces near Yerevan can come to the city for treatment, there are financial and time-related issues for those in more distant areas. Therefore, two fellows were selected for the next stage of the fellowship who will be expected to work in the provinces after graduating.



Dr. Vatche Minassian, left, and Dr. Samuel Badalian, in front of the Wigmore Women's and Children's Hospital in Yerevan (photo Aram Arkun)

Minassian noted that residency and fellowships in Armenia generally are tuition-based, unlike in the US where stipends are paid, but they made sure the urogynecology program was free of charge, as all mentors volunteered their services. In the second phase of the program, to prepare fellows to work in the provinces, the Armenian National Institute of Health will charge a nominal fee of nearly $200 per fellow.

The Friday noon education Zooms are still continuing, Badalian said, with both the mentors and the new colleagues in Armenia participating. Difficult cases are discussed there and in the WhatsApp group. Badalian said with great joy that at times the mentors themselves bring up their difficult cases and the former fellows provide their advice. Some of the latter now also review papers for the *International Urogynecology Journal*, for which one of the mentors, Dr. Tony Bazzi, is an editor.

In some ways the Armenian program even has advantages over fellowships in the US. Minassian said they have learned from six different mentors who physically came to Armenia, as well as a seventh who has been involved via Zoom and education, as well as an eighth. In the US, on average, urogynecology fellows usually learn techniques from three or four faculty.

Minassian noted that the program for Armenia became accepted as a hybrid model of fellowship training in developing countries or countries where such training is not available. He said that only 30 percent of the world at present has an official fellowship in this field.

Minassian said: "When we meet or talk with our international colleagues, many of them show interest and they're in awe, wondering how did we do it? How can we learn from you? So we're trying to strategize how can we export this knowledge and skills that we've developed to the outside world. This is an Armenian-based program that we'd like to export to other places. You need a lot of volunteer time and effort, and people on the ground who understand its importance and can provide the support to bring it forward."

Badalian and Minassian published a paper in 2023 about this in the *International Urogynecology Journal* titled "Establishing Urogynecology Subspecialty in Armenia: The Armenia Project." Several countries at present are interested in creating similar programs, Badalian and Minassian said.

An alternate approach would be, they noted, once at least 10 urogynecologists are trained and ready to work in Armenia, a program could be started there for doctors from other countries and Armenia would be an international center for training.

The First Graduates of the Fellowship

Dr. Zaruhi Grigoryan is the head of the Urogynecology Service at Wigmore Women's and Children's Hospital in Yerevan. A graduate of Yerevan State Medical University who completed a residency at Margaryan Hospital (formally called Research Center for Maternal and Child Health Protection), she was working in 2021 at the Armenian-American Wellness Center as a gynecologic surgeon when her colleagues told her about the urogynecology fellowship. Although she thought it would be very difficult because it is in English, she has a family and children, and her regular work lasts till 6 p.m., she said she very much wanted to be in the program because it is new, very interesting and there were no other such programs in Armenia. She said, "We always told everybody that this is the specialty that can change the destinies of people [i.e. patients], and of course our

AUA Raises $11 Million at Anniversary Gala

AUA, from page 5

"This remarkable institution has prepared a strong workforce for Armenia, educating generations of engineers, innovators, entrepreneurs, public health professionals, political scientists and ethical journalists, but most importantly, responsible citizens," said Khachatrian. She recognized the benefactors of the evening, whose transformational gifts will support the advancement of AUA going forward and honored members of the AUA community who are no longer with us but have been instrumental in building AUA since its inception.

Zaven P. Akian, chair of AUA's Board of Trustees, outlined a vision for the University's next phase of development, including campus expansion, new academic programs and a greater role in Armenia's digital transformation.

"For Armenia, AUA is more than a university. It is a strategic national asset. And for Armenians in the diaspora, it provides one of the most meaningful ways to participate in Armenia's future. It allows us to invest in the next generation of Armenian leaders," Akian said.

The gala also featured reflections from two AUA alumni whose experiences underscored the University's impact beyond the classroom.

Hakob Janesian (BSDS '24) traced his connection to AUA from attending its Afterschool English Program as a child to studying data science as an undergraduate. "At AUA, I found the freedom to ask questions, explore new perspectives and pursue a better future and the resilience to keep moving forward. I am grateful to the donors who make that opportunity possible for students like me," Janesian said.

Vanane Ararktsyan (LL.M. '11), executive director of the Keron Development Foundation, reflected on her family's long-standing relationship with AUA. Her father, Babken Ararktsyan, supported the university's establishment as a founding member of the first government of the Republic of Armenia. "My father believed in AUA at a defining moment in Armenia's history and I had the privilege of experiencing its impact firsthand as a student. Today, 35 years later, I am proud to carry forward my family's connection to the University and the vision of an educated, independent-minded generation capable of contributing to Armenia's future," Ararktsyan said.

The gala concluded with a musical performance by award-winning Armenian singer Emmy Bejanyan.

Sargis Meliksetyan Raises $7,000 for Next Generation of Clinical Pharmacists In Armenia

MARATHON, from page 5

Established in 2021, the Vahe Meliksetyan Foundation works to advance clinical pharmacy and promote safer, evidence-based healthcare in Armenia. Through scholarships, educational initiatives, research support, and international professional development opportunities, the foundation seeks to prepare a new generation of qualified clinical pharmacists.

Despite the growing interest in clinical pharmacy, Armenia continues to face significant challenges in developing this profession and integrating clinical pharmacists into its healthcare system. Investing in young specialists and providing access to international knowledge and experience remain essential steps toward addressing these challenges.

For Sargis, the seven-marathon journey is about transforming a personal loss into a long-term commitment to education, healthcare, and the future of Armenia.

Support the campaign here: https://l.imast.am/u/beoG71Rw

COMMUNITY NEWS

Boston's Armenian American Medical Assoc. Holds 55th Anniversary Gala

AAMA, from page 1

Keynote Speaker Dr. Hagop Youssoufian

Alexa Diranian Ekchian is the first physician assistant serving as AAMA president. She spoke briefly about the work of the organization before introducing the keynote speaker, Dr. Hagop Youssoufian, a physician-scientist who has more than 25 years of experience in drug development. He's a consultant for biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies focused on cancer therapeutics, and an adjunct professor of medicine at Brown University. He received his medical degree from the University of Massachusetts Medical School and completed his training at the Cleveland Clinic, Johns Hopkins and Massachusetts General Hospital.

Youssoufian spoke about his personal professional journey, accompanying his talk with slides. He grew up in Aleppo, Syria, and went to the AGBU Lazar Najarian-Calouste Gulbenkian School. His parents were part of the Armenian healthcare ecosystem, with his father a pharmacist and his mother a nurse. He recalled: "People came to our house to get their blood pressures checked and vaccinated."



Keynote speaker Dr. Hagop Youssoufian (photo Julie Manoogian, courtesy AAMA)

In 1971, they immigrated to the US, and the influence of his cousin Dr. Nishan Goudsouzian, a prominent Harvard anesthesiologist, had its effect on him, along with several other mentors. After graduating Watertown High School and then Boston College, he went on to medical school at the University of Massachusetts and started to do research. He lost his parents at a fairly young age while he was at the Cleveland Clinic.

After his fellowships, Youssoufian was a visiting scientist at the Whitehead Institute at MIT, where he did research, and then became an assistant professor of medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital and then Section Chief of Medical Genetics at the Baylor College of Medicine till 2001.

After a tropical storm devastated his lab, he switched fields to become a pharmaceutical physician and succeeded in getting a number of drugs approved against cancer. His first job was head of experimental medicine at Bristol-Meyers Squibb. He went on to work at various other well-known pharmaceutical and biotech companies, including Sanofi Aventis as a distinguished scientist, ImClone as Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Zipharm Oncology as president of research and development (R&D) and CMO, Progenics as executive vice president of R&D, and BIND Therapeutics as CMO.

Youssoufian gave several examples about trials of colon and ovarian cancer drugs, which block the effects of mutations in the KRAS gene.

Finally, Youssoufian suggested, among other things, that Armenia could be a valuable participant in the field of late stage clinical trials because patients there are usually not as heavily pretreated as in Western countries, which is attractive to drug developers, and they have a closer relationship with their doctors, unlike in places like India.

Honoree Dr. Vatche Minassian

Dr. Sam Badalian introduced the evening's honoree, Dr. Vatche Minassian. Badalian is Chief of the Department of Women's Health at the Bassett Healthcare Network in New York and a clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Columbia University's Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons. Born in Armenia, he graduated Yerevan State Medical University and then obtained a PhD and a Doctor of Medical Science degree in physiology, before completing a postdoctoral fellowship in obstetrics and gynecology at Columbia University. He chairs the Membership Committee of the International Urogynecological Association.

Badalian said his over 20 years of friendship with Minassian began in 2005 at a meeting of the American Urogynecologic Society, when he asked the latter a simple question: do you speak Armenian? They became such good friends that at the American Urogynecologic Society they started calling them "the Armenian gang."

Badalian explained how together they ended up creating a fellowship program to introduce the subspeciality of urogynecology to Armenia (see the accompanying article on this program).

He said, "When I look back, I realize that this achievement has never been about fellowship or about published paper or research findings. It was about the women who deserve better care, about the young physicians who deserve to learn more, and about the country who deserve to receive appropriate care for their people. Vatche's dedication, generosity, and honour and commitment have been invaluable for this mission. He has given not only his expertise, but his time, his knowledge, and his heart to Armenia."



Dr. Shant Parseghian gives the closing remarks (photo Julie Manoogian, courtesy AAMA)

Badalian declared: "I never could imagine that this friendship could continue so long and you and I would be able to work together and benefit generations of women and physicians in Armenia."

Minassian completed his medical degree at the American University of Beirut Medical Center in Lebanon in 1994, where he also did his internship. He moved to the US in 1995, where he completed his residency in obstetrics and gynecology at UCLA and the University of Iowa (1999). He practiced three years as a generalist at Texas Tech University before completing his fellowship training at Mt. Sinai Hospital at the University of Toronto in Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery in 2004.

He then moved to the Geisinger Medical Center in Pennsylvania to work as a urogynecologist till 2011, until he was appointed chief of Urogynecology at Brigham and Women's Hospital, where he served through September 2025. He is an associate professor of OB/GYN at Harvard Medical School and the author of more than 85 publications, editorials and book chapters. He is at present in an executive MBA program in Brandeis University.



Dr. Vatche Minassian receives certificate of honorary professorship from Dr. Gail Guzelian (photo Julie Manoogian, courtesy AAMA)

Minassian, a past president of the AAMA of Boston, has worked to help healthcare in Armenia and the diaspora.

In his talk, Minassian first acknowledged by name many family members and friends who had come to the banquet. Using slides, he started by posing the question of whether AAMA wanted to be known as a Swiss watchmaker or a passionate gardener. He said that as AAMA grew, it changed from a group of male doctors to incorporate an equal number of women, and to expand by adding physicians' assistants and nurses as members. It helped Armenia through three wars and one earthquake and supported 17 hospitals, clinics and medical institutions there.

He said that for its first 50 years the AAMA was like Patek Philippe: unique, exceptional and exquisite, valuing tradition and heritage but modest and understated. When he took on the reins in 2019, this was the situation, but suddenly everything changed with the 2020 war in Armenia and Artsakh and the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the first six weeks of the war, he said, AAMA was able to collect over hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations and medical equipment and supplies. Minassian gave the example of a hyperbaric oxygen chamber which was installed at Mikayelian Hospital in Yerevan. It was so big that a wall had to be demolished and a separate entry made to get it inside the hospital.

The number of board members was increased and a full-time volunteer manager served as its representative in Armenia. Daily meetings were held with her and weekly meetings with the Armenian Ministry of Health. A robust social media campaign was established by AAMA, Minassian said. Blood drives were held in Boston. They became experts in shipping to Armenia.

Minassian related the story of the creation of the urogynecology fellowship in Armenia, started by Badalian. Despite all the twists and turns, the two of them (with a number of other professionals outside of Armenia), were able to create the program, even with the obstacles created by the Covid pandemic.

Minassian recalled that he was asked by a wise man, who was present in the audience that night, how can we ensure that young Armenian doctors in the diaspora work and coalesce together to preserve our heritage and carry the torch forward. He concluded that for the future, perhaps AAMA wants to be like the passionate gardener and create a path for the young generation that emphasizes a foundation in nursing, medicine and allied health fields, not just through scholarships and humanitarian work, but by enabling them to get the skills that they need to succeed in their lives. His proposal was to do this through creating a leadership program for postgraduate residents and fellows.

Videos from the first graduates of the urogynecology program in Armenia were then screened, praising Minassian's kindness, generosity and dedication, as well as a surprise video from his parents expressing their pride in his achievements.

Ekchian presented Minassian with gifts, including a royal elixir which was a special collaboration between the Matenadaran (the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts) and the Armenian Tree Project, and a painting inspired by ancient Armenian manuscripts. Dr. Gail Guzelian then presented Minassian with a certificate from Dr. Alexander Bazarchyan, dean of the National Institute of Health in Yerevan, which made him an honorary professor of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology there.

Closing Talk

Dr. Shant Parseghian, AAMA treasurer and Gala Chair, gave the closing talk. He reported that AAMA was able to allocate $780,853 over the last five years for health care, including for education, training, increasing health care access in Armenia and donating to refugees from Artsakh. Through partnership with various organizations, AAMA donated close to $280,000 to Artsakh. More than $80,000 was spent on education and scholarships, of which $55,000 went to the New England area or to youth from New England. Through a partnership with the Afeyan Family Foundation, more than $400,000 was donated to help 10 projects, including pediatric, urologic, hypertension management, and geriatric care. The most recent project to be supported will be OHFAR (Oral Health Foundation for Children of Armenia), which will get $75,000 to help buy a second bus.

He thanked many people for their help, and pointed out Al Campbell in particular, the prior Winchester Hospital president who flew from Washington to be present at the gala. Campbell twice welcomed nurses from Armenia for a special training and partnership environment.

Parseghian said, "I promise that every dollar you give us will have a different meaning and will change the life of an Armenian person in Armenia." In particular, he said that whatever funds would be raised that night would go to AAMA scholarships.

The evening included musical performances by pianist Levon Hovsepian, soprano Knarik Nerkararyan and *duduk* performer Martin Haroutunian.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Assembly Summer Interns Session Offered Career Development, Cultural Immersion in Yerevan, Washington

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America's Terjenian-Thomas Internship Program hosted another successful summer session, giving a new cohort of Armenian American college students hands-on experience in advocacy, government, and community engagement across the nation's capital. Over the course of the summer, interns met with members of Congress, senior policy professionals, and community leaders, while also participating in cultural programming designed to deepen their connection to Armenian heritage.

The 2026 class was also the first to work out of the Assembly's permanent National Headquarters. Located just three blocks from the White House, the newly renovated headquarters includes research and collaborative space for the Assembly's and the Armenian National Institute's (ANI) year-round interns and Terjenian-Thomas summer interns, along with space for ANI and its Armenian Genocide library collection, meeting spaces, and office accommodations for staff, visiting members, and guests.

"Every summer the Assembly welcomes a new class of college students to the nation's capital and to Yerevan, and this year marked a milestone as our Terjenian-Thomas interns became the first class to work out of the Assembly's permanent National Headquarters," said Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny. "The Assembly's Internship Programs serve as a foundation that students carry with them as they continue their involvement and activism for the betterment of the Armenian people."



The Assembly's 2026 Class of Terjenian-Thomas Interns on Capitol Hill

Interns engaged directly with lawmakers and congressional staff throughout the summer, advocating for Armenian American priorities, including the Armenian Genocide Education Act and other pro-Armenian bills in circulation. They met with several Members of Congress, including Reps. Jim McGovern (D-MA), Paul Tonko (D-NY), Rob Menendez (D-NJ), Judy Chu (D-CA), Laura Friedman (D-CA), George Latimer (D-NY), and Dina Titus (D-NV), and Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), and attended a constituent event hosted by Sens. Alex Padilla and Adam Schiff (D-CA). Interns also met with Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA) to thank him for introducing the amendment calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Armenian hostages held by Azerbaijan, which the House Foreign Affairs Committee adopted by a bipartisan vote of 44–7.



The Assembly Terjenian-Thomas interns with Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA) thanking him for his leadership in calling for the release of Armenian hostages held in Azerbaijan

Interns also met with congressional staff from the offices of Representatives Sean Casten (D-IL), Jay Obernolte (R-CA), Adam Smith (D-WA), Joseph Morelle (D-NY), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Mike Lawler (R-NY), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Luz Rivas (D-CA), Julia Brownley (D-CA), Nikki Budzinski (D-IL), Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), Thomas Kean Jr. (R-NJ), and Mike Thompson (D-CA), thanking supportive offices and advocating for cosponsorship where needed. A highlight was a meeting and Capitol tour with the Congressional Armenian Staffers Association (CASA), led by staffers Haig Hovsepian and Adam Sherinian, an alumnus of the Armenia internship class of 2024, who spoke on building an Armenian professional network on the Hill.

Interns received in-depth briefings from Assembly leadership, including Co-Chair Oscar Tatosian; Executive Director Bryan Ardouny on outlining the Assembly's mission; Congressional Relations Director Mariam Khaloyan on fundamentals of advocacy; Research and Analysis Director Robert Avetisyan on the history of Artsakh and his experience as Permanent Representative to Nagorno-Karabakh; Armenia Country Director Armen V. Sahakyan on the Assembly's work in Armenia; ANI Director Dr. Rouben Adalian; and Nexus Program Director Sarkis Karabashian.

The cohort engaged deeply with Armenian heritage through lectures, museum visits and community events. Archbishop Levon Zekiyan delivered a lecture at St. Mary Armenian Church on preserving Western Armenian language and culture, and Dr. Khatchig Mouradian led two sessions at the Library of Congress showcasing rare Armenian manuscripts, literature, and artifacts documenting the diaspora. Interns visited St. Mary Armenian Church and the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America, took an Armenian dance class with Hayi Hoki, and toured the newly opened Lincoln Memorial Undercroft Museum. The class also enjoyed a team-bonding outing to the Congressional Baseball Game and an architecture walking tour featuring a presentation by Dr. Caroline Mesrobian Hickman, granddaughter of architect Mihran Mesrobian, followed by a tour of Mesrobian's buildings led by Joe Himali of @bestaddress.

Career and Professional Development

Interns also gained career insight from Armenian American professionals across many business sectors through our Lecture Series, including Professor Aram Gavoor, Esq., Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at the George Washington University Law School, a Board Member of the Armenian Assembly of America, and an alumnus of the Class of 2003; McDonald's Vice President of Government Relations Sam Tatevosyan; World Bank Principal Portfolio Manager and an alumnus of the Class of 2003 Grigor Sargsyan; attorneys John Farah and Olivia Jerjian; Apple Senior Online Safety Counsel and an alumna of the Class of 2008 Lauren Sarkesian; former Public Service Fellow at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) Alena Mikhaelyan; Future of Free Speech Senior Legal Fellow Ashken Kazaryan; Middle East Forum Director of Policy Analysis Michael Rubin, Dr. Margarita Tadevosyan of George Mason University's Center for Peacemaking Practice and an alumna of the Class of 2006; and networking with locals from the internship classes from 2022-2025.

For intern Kyle Pidedjian, from White Plains, New York, the Terjenian-Thomas Internship Program had him "walking away with a much better understanding of how Washington works and how to make your voice heard."

"We were introduced to many leaders in the Armenian-American community who demonstrated how their Armenian identities have inspired them to succeed in their professional lives, so that we may do the same" said Tamar Chavdarian, a rising senior at the University of California, Los Angeles.

This year's Terjenian-Thomas 2026 intern class included: Emma Armeghanian attending University of California, Los Angeles, Mclain Arslanian attending the University of Southern California; Arin Arutyunyan attending California State Polytechnic University, Los Angeles; Lea Atabekyan attending Lake Forest College; Ellen Bagramyan attending Glendale Community College; Erik Barsegian attending University of California, San Diego; Joseph Barton attending New York University; Tamar Chavdarian attending University of California, Los Angeles; Romen Der Manuelian attending Washington University in St. Louis; Mariam Grigoryan attending New York University; Clodine Karabulut attending University of California, Irvine; Maria Khachatryan attending the American University of Armenia; Elaine Khachaturyan attending University of California, Los Angeles; Areen Krikorian attending Loyola University Chicago; Mary Manukyan attending The George Washington University; Shushanik Meliksetyan attending the American University of Armenia; Karen Mikayelyan attending Pasadena City College; Mariam Nersesyan attending American University; Kyle Pidedjian attending Tufts University; Patil Chloe Vartanian attending University of Southern California; and Eric Tsaturyan as the Intern Coordinator attending University of California, Irvine.

The eight-week program held from June 15 to August 7. The program began with a June 14 orientation that coincided with a visit by four alumni of the Assembly's Terjenian-Thomas Internship Class of 1986 – Jon Hanessian, Ruth Zeronian Edwards, Lisa A. Kazanjian and Tanya Koshgarian Chakmakian. The alumni traveled to Armenia with their families to mark their class's 40th anniversary and shared career advice with the 2026 interns at the Assembly's Yerevan Office. Kazanjian urged the students to walk away from every project with a real result.

This year's interns came away with results of their own. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (now the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade), Natalie Sabounjian (University of California, Los Angeles) supported the Ministry's

continued on next page

COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

digital diplomacy initiatives, Maria Galstyan (Georgetown University) assisted with research and analysis, and Nare Babakhanian (University of Southern California) gained firsthand insight into Armenia's consular system.

At the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, Sona Taktakyan (Boston College) supported preparations for the upcoming Global Armenian Summit, and at the Center for Truth and Justice she helped document the experiences of Armenians displaced from Artsakh. "Being able to research, write, and record what I learned showed me how important it is to preserve our history and ensure that these experiences are not forgotten," Taktakyan said.

At Helsinki Citizens' Assembly–Vanadzor, Nare Babakhanian's work focused on human rights, legal research, and issues affecting Armenians displaced from Artsakh, while Diana Khachatryan (California State University, Northridge), who also interned with Social Justice NGO, learned how the legal systems of Armenia, the United States, and the European Union operate and compare.

At the Armenia Stock Exchange (AMX), Khachatur Hayrapetyan (University of Washington Bothell) and Nikole Yeganova (University of California, Berkeley) conducted a comparative analysis of exchange-traded fund (ETF) regulatory and listing frameworks. At the History Museum of Armenia, Mariam McClure-Simonyan (The George Washington University) developed a proposal and roadmap for digitizing the museum's catalog and collections, and at Ayo!, the Fund for Armenian Relief's crowdfunding platform, Natalie Veniaminova (University of California, Berkeley) served as the social media marketing intern and visited project sites across the country.



Assembly Terjenian-Thomas interns with Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Rep. David Valadao (R-CA)

Tigran Aghbalyan (University of California, Berkeley) split his summer between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and COPA AI, and Arpi Danielyan (University of California, Berkeley) interned with the Tufenkian Foundation and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

While in Yerevan, the interns met with Armenian officials, U.S. diplomats, civil society leaders, and media representatives. The group toured the National Assembly of Armenia, joined by American fellows interning with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and at the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan, Chargé d'Affaires David Allen met with the interns to hear about their studies, career plans, and how the program could help strengthen U.S.-Armenia ties.

The interns also visited the Government House, the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, Birthright Armenia, the Heritage House, the International Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise Armenia, the United Nations office, and the American University of Armenia's Acopian Center for the Environment, and toured CivilNet with Editor-in-Chief Karen Harutyunyan before taking questions with the outlet's English-language team.

Interns explored Armenia on weekend trips, including overnight stays in Gyumri and in Goris, where the group visited Tatev Monastery, rode the Wings of Tatev aerial tramway, and stopped at a music school in Khndzoresk. They also visited Etchmiadzin, Zvartnots Cathedral, Garni Temple, Geghard Monastery, Lake Sevan, the village of Gosh (where the group was graciously hosted in the home of Assembly Members Hagop and Intern Alumna Tamar Tujian), and Kirants, a village on Armenia's northeastern border. In Yerevan, they toured the Cascade complex, the Aguletsi House Museum, the History Museum of Armenia, the Armenian Genocide Memorial and Museum-Institute, the Matenadaran, and the Marashlian photo studio. They also took part in a quest through the historic Kond neighborhood, and joined the July 4 Tri-Color Run marking the 250th anniversary of American independence. For Mariam McClure-Simonyan, whose research includes khachkars (Armenian cross-stones), the highlight of the Gyumri trip was a khachkar-carving masterclass.

In a pre- and post-program survey, interns most often named research and analysis skills among what they gained, and cited the cultural program, their fellow interns, and living in Armenia as residents rather than visitors as the summer's most impactful elements. "I loved getting to experience everyday life in Armenia while also having the opportunity to see what it is like to work in a professional setting," said Diana Khachatryan.

For many interns, the summer changed how they see Armenia. "Growing up in the diaspora, Armenia often felt like an important part of my identity but also somewhat distant. Living and working here changed that perspective completely," said Natalie Sabounjian. "I no longer see Armenia as a relic of an ancient past, but as a vibrant, developing country with immense potential and a very promising future." The summer also resonated with interns who grew up in Armenia. "Having the opportunity to serve my country, expand my professional network, travel throughout Armenia, and form some of the most meaningful friendships made this one of the most special summers of my life," said Maria Galstyan, who was born and raised in Yerevan.

For some, the summer also shaped plans for the future. "The internship reaffirmed my dream to one day repatriate, and allowed me to begin paving a path towards that future," said Mariam McClure-Simonyan. Sona Taktakyan, who was born in Armenia, said the internship "made me realize that I truly want—and need—to repatriate to Armenia."

This year's Assembly Yerevan 2026 intern class included: Tigran Aghbalyan, Nare Babakhanian, Arpi Danielyan, Maria Galstyan, Khachatur Hayrapetyan, Diana Khachatryan, Mariam McClure-Simonyan, Natalie Sabounjian, Sona Taktakyan, Natalie Veniaminova, and Nikole Yeganova.

Applications can be submitted for summer 2027.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Toufayan Bakeries Marks Centennial With National Tour

TOUFAYAN, from page 1

supermarket. ” They could spin a wheel and win anything from a t-shirt, mugs and coupons to a trip to Armenia. A couple from Texas, who are not Armenian, won the grand prize of tickets to Armenia.

“The other big reveal is getting back to basics in terms of our original recipes, where our grandfather would ferment the dough, getting back to simple ingredients. We also introduced a sour dough pita this year,” Toufayan said.

The original recipe will be manufactured in addition to their regular traditional six-inch, four-inch and mini pitas.

Toufayan Bakeries sells both to consumers through supermarkets as well as to restaurants.

The company produces mostly flat breads, a category which includes naan, pita, Greek style flat bread and different wraps.

“Wraps really lend themselves really well to restaurants, cafes and delis,” Toufayan said.

She added, “Pita bread and lavash have come a long way. The food service industry has really helped educate consumers, as has social media. People are a lot more adventurous, especially when they see these great Mediterranean-style restaurants on social media and are apt to try it. You see these great influencers who are using the lavash and pita, not just Armenian and Lebanese chefs. It really has become mainstream.”

Toufayan Bakeries is still a family business.

Currently heading the company is her dad, Hratch “Harry” Toufayan, “still very much involved in the business,” she said. She added that her brother Gregory runs all the plants and her sister Kristine work alongside her.

Now, Michael Nargizian, her son, has joined the company. “We’re excited the fourth generation has shown some interest,” she said. “There is no pressure from any of us” to join the family business, she added.

The company is headquartered in Ridgefield, NJ, with one factory in Orlando, Fla. and one in Plant City, Fla.

Toufayan sells about 40 individual products. In addition, the family has heavily invested in a sister company, Goody Girl Cookies, that sells gluten-free cookies. They sell to whole Foods, Stop and Shop, etc.

Sales are highest in the northeast and southeast. The same products are offered everywhere. In addition, they sell through Amazon. “It’s become quite a business. It really took off during Covid,” she said. “We had started selling on Amazon just a couple of months before Covid.”

Over the past century, the company has offered products that were popular. For example, in the 1980s, with the popularity of focaccia, the company offered the bread, but it does not now. Another temporary product was bread sticks.



Toufayan Bakeries’ popup shop in St. Petersburg, Fla.


The Toufayan bakery in Orlando, Fla.



“We’ve definitely seen products come and go. Pita is our mainstay,” she said.

Another line was influenced by the Keto diet, which “was very, very popular five years ago and we invested time and money and came up with Keto pita, flatbread and wrap. It did extremely well,” she said. The line still sells well, but not as much. The company also offered a gluten-free line, with a recipe her brother came up with.

And as for her favorite product? “Plain white pita. It’s so good. I love it with a good chicken salad or honestly makes a very, very good grilled cheese sandwich,” she said. Her second favorite is the sour dough pita, which she likes to stuff with raw meat and spices and fry in olive oil. “It’s delicious,” she added.

As for what is to come, “hopefully more of my kids’ generation joining the company and being able to give back to the community. My father taught my brother, sister and I that it was important to give back, not just to the Armenian community but to your local community,” Toufayan said, adding that the company on a weekly basis donates to food banks in New Jersey and to homeless shelters and food banks and shelters in Florida.

In addition, the family are engaged in philanthropic activities in Armenia. There they have partnered with the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR), through which they support a kindergarten, a music school and a nursing school in Vanadzor. They have also bought equipment for farmers to dry fruits.

“There are lots and lots of projects,” Toufayan said.

Asked what her grandfather would say if he could have seen Toufayan Bakeries today, she said, “I think he would be extremely pleased and proud. Honestly he would be over the moon,” she said. “I saw my grandfather going to work with his father in his 80s, 90s. … He used to love when I would come home and sit down and tell him about my day and the customers I called on. I think he would be really excited to see the next generation is showing an interest in baking and the company.”

“We find ourselves very grateful and fortunate to have this opportunity to have been able to work side by side with each other and our father and have been given an opportunity to build a business and take it to the next level and give back to our community. It is very, very important to us,” she said. “We would not be able to do any of that without the success of the Toufayan Bakeries.”

To learn more about the centennial celebration, visit www.toufayan100.com/ and follow @ToufayanBakeries on social media. Those visiting the website can receive a free, downloadable cookbook.

Sourdough Pita Chicken Caesar Pockets

Put a fun twist on a classic favorite! Perfect for an easy lunch or quick weeknight meal, this recipe is a simple and satisfying way to enjoy sourdough pita bread. Warm, soft pita makes the perfect pocket for a delicious, filling meal that comes together with minimal prep and is easy to enjoy at home or on the go.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 Toufayan Sourdough Pitas
- 2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp Italian seasoning
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 cups romaine lettuce, chopped
- 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, shaved or shredded
- 1/4 cup Caesar dressing
- 1/2 cup croutons, lightly crushed
- Lemon wedges, for serving



INSTRUCTIONS

Season the chicken breasts with olive oil, garlic powder, Italian seasoning, salt, and black pepper. Heat a skillet over medium-high heat and cook the chicken for 5–6 minutes per side, depending on thickness, until golden brown and the internal temperature reaches 165°F. Remove from the skillet and let rest for 5 minutes before slicing.

In a medium bowl, toss the chopped romaine lettuce with Caesar dressing and Parmesan cheese. Add the crushed croutons, if desired, for extra crunch.

For extra flavor, warm the Toufayan Sourdough Pitas in a dry skillet over medium heat for about 30 seconds per side. Cut each pita in half and gently open the pockets. Fill each pocket with sliced chicken and the Caesar salad mixture.

Finish with a squeeze of fresh lemon juice and serve immediately.

Arts & Culture

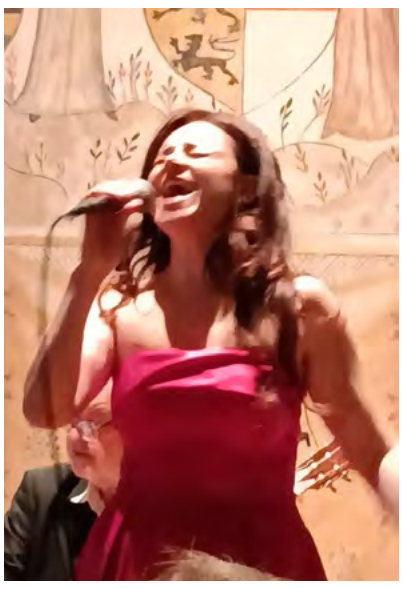
Germans and Armenians Erase Borders Through Music

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

HEPPENHEIM, Germany — If there is one universal language, it is music. Music can communicate ideas and emotions — with or without words — through the elevated medium of melody and rhythm, harmonies and dissonances; unique in form in every language and at the same time universal. Thus, there is no better way to bring together people of different cultural backgrounds than with music.

This was proven once again, with a variety of genres, from classical to jazz, folklore and lyrical, instrumental and vocal, solo and ensemble, at an afternoon concert on November 8 in the German city of Heppenheim, in the State of Hesse. The city lies along the Bergstrasse, an ancient route followed by the Romans, famous for its winegrowing tradition and its rich architecture, with a medieval castle, restored half-timbered houses, and a baroque city hall.

The concert, held in the Great Hall of a historic castle (Kurmainzer Amtshof), was entitled "Grezen Los," literally "Without Borders/Beyond Borders," and was indeed beyond all bounds. Alexander Löffelholz, a



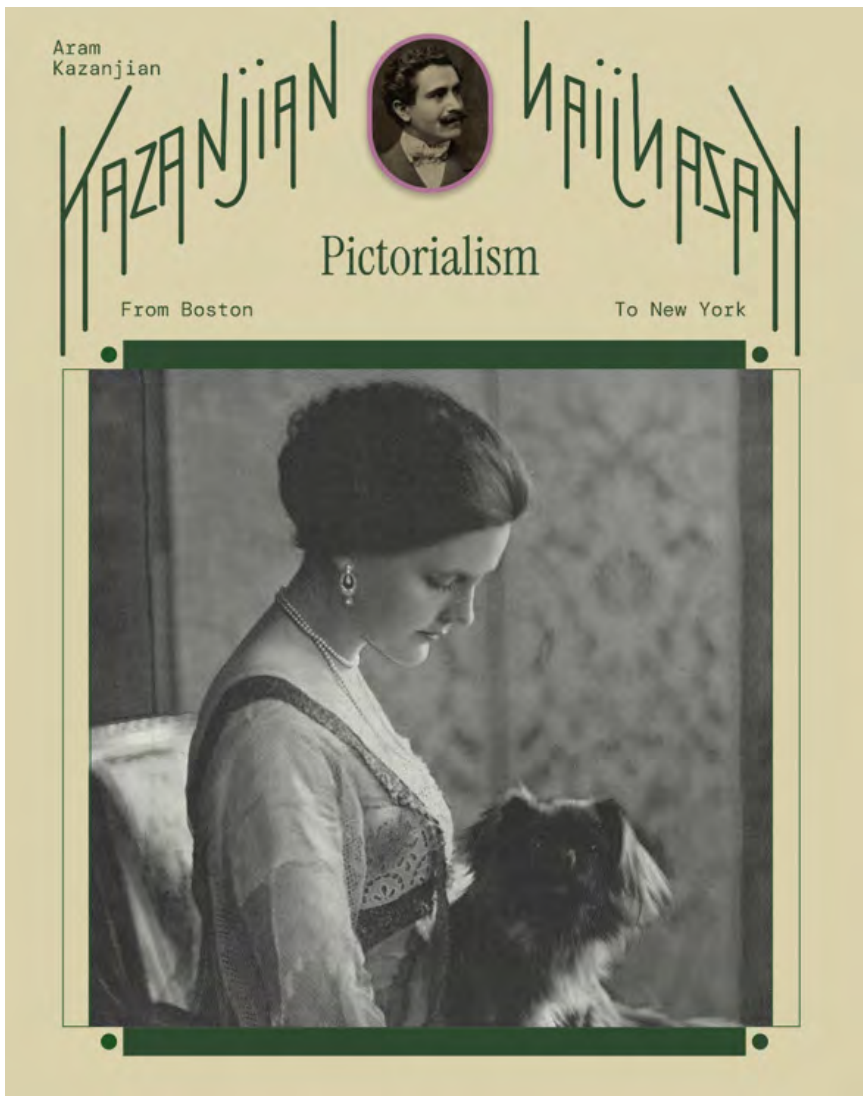
Seda Amir-Karayan (Muriel Mirak-Weissbach photo)

board member of NOAH, the association that organized the event, told the capacity crowd that the idea was to move beyond borders, surmount them and render them invisible.

The ensemble Trio 3D, which started off the concert, is an ensemble composed of three brothers, Matthias (clarinet), Franz-Josef (bassoon), and Addax Dörsam (guitar). They performed instrumental works from various musical cultures, including *Klezmer Feast*, *The Clarinet Miracle* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee*, as well as an original piece, titled *Lilith in Yerevan*. They also performed songs from the Beatles, Rolling Stones and Deep Purple, all with raucous humor and technical virtuosity.

The trio also played Armenian music, accompanying contralto Seda

see BORDERS, page 16



New AIA Exhibit Puts Focus on Photographer on Aram Kazanjian

LOS ANGELES — "Pictorialism from Boston to New York," the first exhibition of the works of renowned photographer, Aram Kazanjian (1878-1966), was launched by the Armenian Film Foundation's Armenian Image Archive (AIA), on October 19.

The AIA was founded in 2022 to support the study of Armenian photography and the unique role Armenian photographers have played in the evolution of modern photography. This new online exhibit is a wide-ranging retrospective of the Armenian-American photographer whose career evolved during the early 20th century in Boston after he emigrated to the United States from Erzincan, Turkey.

The exhibition has been spearheaded and curated by Joseph Malikian, Ph.D., founder of the Malikian Collection, which has thousands of photographs from Armenian photographers, spanning many decades, from 1850s to the 1960s. Many of these photographers were pioneers in the field of Ottoman photography. Like Kazanjian, some established themselves in the United States, creating successful studios and, at the same time, launching photography as an art form in and of itself.

"I am so happy to share Kazanjian's life work with the world," said Malikian. "His images are really striking. Some of his portraits are like works of art. Similar to the renowned Armenian photographer, John Higue Garo, Kazanjian's portraits depict an early genre of photography identified as Pictorialism."

Malikian is also the author of *The Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: An Anthology and a Photo History* (2011) and *The Krikorians of Jaffa Road: Architects of Armenian Photography in Jerusalem* (2024). The Kazanjian online exhibit, created by Malikian and designed by Masato Nakada of the Happening Studio, tells the story of a young man who, as a sixteen-year-old Armenian émigré from Erzincan, Turkey, arrives in the Boston area around 1895.

His parents had been killed in the Hamidian massacres of 1895 and the family home destroyed. Along with his cousin, Varaztad Kazanjian, who later became a renowned oral surgeon and founder of the modern practice of plastic surgery, Kazanjian came to America to seek a new life. His life and legacy are celebrated in this exhibition.

Kazanjian was influenced by the Pictorial aesthetic movement that created photographic images rather than simply recording them. From portraits to documentary photographs, his work reflected a blend of varied photographic styles that evolved around the turn of the 20th century. Boston became a hub for Pictorialism which promoted photography as fine art. Amongst the influx of Armenian immigrants in this rapidly growing diasporan community, those who were entrepreneurial, artistically creative, and trained to practice photography established successful commercial portrait studios. Armenians were widely known to have mastered photography throughout the Ottoman Empire; this reputation not only made assimilation easier into American society, but it also facilitated their efforts to open studios in the major diaspora hubs of Boston and New York.

see KAZANJIAN, page 15

Karen Torosyan Named Chef of The Year

BRUSSELS (The Brussels Times) — Gault&Millau has named Karen Torosyan of Bozar Restaurant in Brussels as the 2026 Chef of the Year. In a recent interview, Torosyan described the accolade as "a dream come true."

Bozar received a score of 17.5 out of 20 in the new guide. Torosyan, who already holds two Michelin stars, can now add the title of Chef of the Year to his list of achievements.

At the award ceremony held at Brussels Expo on Monday, he cited several chefs present in the room as sources of inspiration. During the event, he also invited his wife, daughter and entire team on stage, emphasizing that the award belonged to all of them.

"This chef of Armenian descent, who fell in love with Belgium, commands respect," said Gault&Millau. "From dishwasher to top chef, every step in his career testifies to his enormous determination."



Chef of restaurant 'Bozar' in Brussels, Karen Torosyan, pictured during the presentation of the 2025 edition of the Gault&Millau restaurant and hotel guide for the Benelux region, Monday 04 November 2024 in Brussels. Credit: Belga/Dirk Waem

"The evolution of his scores and awards in this guide speaks for itself," the organization added. "At Bozar, which is gradually achieving cult status, he elevates classics with precision, demonstrating his technical expertise. His cuisine speaks of hard work, passion, and love for the product."

Bozar Restaurant is located in Brussels' Palais des Beaux-Arts, or Center for Fine Arts. The center was designed by renowned Belgian architect Victor Horta in the Art Deco style although Horta was more famous for pioneering the Art Nouveau style, which became a national movement in Belgium in the late 19th century. The Palais des Beaux-Arts was Horta's last project. The interior honors the original style, making it an especially beautiful and significant backdrop for one of Brussels' premier dining experiences.

Once referred to as a brasserie, Bozar now bears the title of restaurant, but its food stays true to its elevated yet humble roots. The menu is refined but unpretentious, the food is

see CHEF, page 14

ARTS & CULTURE

Second Khachaturian International Youth Competition Concludes at China National Opera House

BEIJING — The Second Khachaturian International Youth Competition concluded on November 11, 2026, with a gala concert and award ceremony at the China National Opera House. The competition was led by its artistic director, conductor Sergey Smbatyan, founder, artistic director and principal conductor of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra. Following international preliminary rounds and the final round held in Beijing, the winners and laureates of the competition were announced.

The competition brought together talented young musicians from different countries around the world, creating an international platform for showcasing professional skills, exchanging creative experiences, and fostering cultural dialogue through classical music. At its heart was the promotion of Aram Khachaturian's compositional legacy among young performers from around the world who gathered in China.

This year's competition was distinguished by its broad geographical reach. The international preliminary round, held from July to September, was followed by regional rounds across Europe, Asia, Armenia and various regions of China. The competition featured five categories: piano, violin, viola, cello, and chamber ensemble. It was also accessible to an international online audience, which had the opportunity to follow the participants' performances.

The winners in the four main instrumental categories of the competition are Zhao Yuyu (viola), Niu Zhenghao (cello), Guo Fening (violin), and Elena Bataye (piano).

In the final round, the participants performed with the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Sergey Smbatyan. Performing with the orchestra on an international stage was a valuable professional experience for the young musicians, providing them with an opportunity to demonstrate their artistic excellence and showcase their creative potential.



Sergey Smbatyan with one of the contestants

The competition aims to discover and support young musical talents, foster international creative collaboration, and celebrate the legacy of the great Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian, whose music continues to inspire musicians and audiences of different generations around the world.

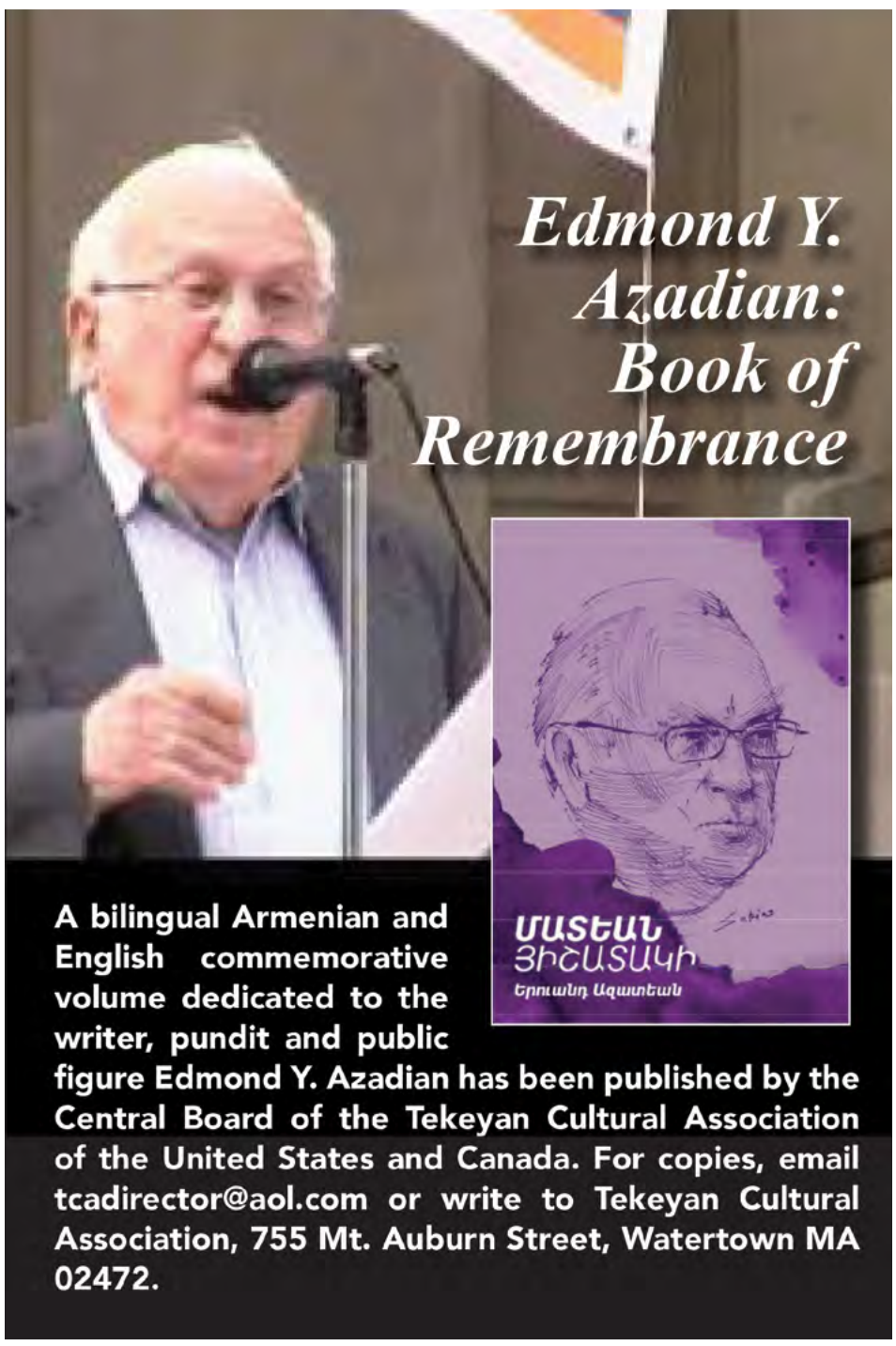
Khachaturian competitions have been held in China since 2023, while the First Khachaturian International Youth Competition took place in 2024.

Alongside the competition, the Khachaturian International Youth Music Week was also held, featuring masterclasses, educational programs, and concerts.

The Khachaturian International Youth Competition is organized by the Aram Khachaturian Cultural Foundation and JINGSE International Education Technology Company.



Sergey Smbatyan with one of the contestants



Karen Torosyan Named Chef of the Year

CHEF, from page 13

comforting, the portions are generous, and the price is reasonable for a Michelin-starred establishment. (Bozar Restaurant also scored a 17 out of 20 in the prestigious French Gault&Millau restaurant guide.)

Bozar has several different prix fixe menus to choose from. The first centers on its classic dishes like the salmon koulibiac (a preparation that utilizes the en croute technique) and Normandy beef filet with truffles and foie gras. The classics preparations come with two starters, must be reserved 48 hours in advance, and cost 175 euros per person. Diners can also order the three-course lunch menu for 75 euros per person (plus 35 euros for wine), the four-course "Ravenstein" menu for 115 euros per person (plus 55 euros for wine), or six-course "Horta" menu for 155 euros per person (plus 75 euros for wine). There's also a modest a la carte menu for those interested in a simpler meal.

Bozar is closed on Sunday and Monday, open for dinner between 7 PM and 10 PM on Tuesday through Saturday, and has an additional lunch service from 12 PM to 2 PM on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

Where: Rue Baron Horta 3, 1000 Bruxelles, Belgium

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



Mom's Dinner Bell's Armenian Yogurt Soup – Tutmaj (Madzoon Abour or Tanabour)

"I'm a Michigan mom sharing the Armenian recipes I grew up with, plus the quick dinners and restaurant copycats my family asks for every week. Every recipe is tested in my own kitchen, so you can get dinner on the table without the guesswork." - Lindsay Lehrer



Lindsay Lehrer and her beloved grandmother Mary

"Mom's Dinner Bell is your go-to site for healthy, family-friendly recipes that make mealtime stress-free and enjoyable. Whether you're looking for quick weeknight meals, meal prep ideas, or protein-packed snacks, our recipes are crafted to fit into a busy family's routine while keeping taste and nutrition in mind, perfect for busy nights. Explore cherished Armenian family recipes, passed down through generations. From Kesab to Smyrna, some recipes are over 100 years old. These recipes are full of beautiful memories, time, and love," Lehrer says.

"If you've been searching for an Armenian yogurt soup recipe, you've found the real one," says Lindsay. "This is Tutmaj Abour (տուտմաջ ապուր), a creamy, tangy, deeply comforting Armenian yogurt soup made with small shell pasta, sautéed onions, and mint. It is one of the oldest dishes in the Armenian culinary tradition, and it has been passed down in my family for generations. My grandmother made this soup every Tuesday. Our family would gather at my grandparents' home for an intimate luncheon; close family only, unhurried, the kind of meal where the table was already set when you walked through the door. Tutmaj Abour was always served first, as an appetizer before the main meal. And she always made too much soup. On purpose, I'm sure. She learned this recipe from her mother-in-law, who was Armenian and from Smyrna, the ancient port city now called Izmir, Turkey, one of the great Armenian communities of the world before the 1915 Armenian Genocide and the 1922 Great Fire. That lineage makes this soup more than a recipe. It is a piece of our living history."

"I have yet to meet a single person who doesn't ask for seconds of this soup. My grandmother would start every meal with this soup, ladled into bowls and placed in front of you before anything else arrived. It was the thing that told your whole body: slow down. You're home. You're safe. She never measured anything."

"My grandmother's parents immigrated to the United States and survived the Armenian Genocide. My grandmother lived through the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. She had a husband who jumped out of airplanes during the war (he was a paratrooper). She was a working woman that managed a dental office for many years. She was in an adult choir with a beautiful voice. My grandfather and her loved winters in Sanibel, Florida and summers in Caseville, Michigan. I learn from each of the experiences she shares with me. She has seen and experienced much more than I can ever imagine experiencing in my lifetime. I joke with her that she is getting old, but the reality is she is very wise. There is so much we can all learn from this generation. She has told me about how her mother was a midwife/nurse who went to the University of Beirut. I have learned about Kesab and the origin of its name. She talks about our ancestry and I learn much more about our family. The majority of the Armenian recipes I make were passed down from her. She taught me just about anything can be made with less fat and less sugar."

"If you've searched for this Armenian yogurt soup before, you may have come across it under several different names — Madzoon Abour, Tanabour, Spas, or Tutmaj Abour. They are all rooted in the same ancient tradition, and the name your family uses tells you exactly where they came from."

INGREDIENTS:

Olive oil for sautéing
1 medium to large onion, finely chopped
1 tablespoon dried mint or fresh
10 cups water
2 tablespoons salt, to taste
2 cups small shell pasta
1 large container 32 oz. plain yogurt, full-fat or low-fat*
2 eggs

PREPARATION:

Heat olive oil in a large soup pot over medium heat. Add finely chopped onion and cook, stirring often, until completely soft and translucent — about 8 to 10 minutes.

Add the mint to the softened onions and stir for 1 minute until fragrant.

Pour in 10 cups of water and 2 tablespoons of salt. Bring to a rolling boil over high heat.

While water heats, add the full container of yogurt and both eggs to a blender. Blend until completely smooth. Set aside.

Once boiling, add 2 cups of shell pasta. Cook 10 to 12 minutes until fully tender.

Reduce heat to medium. Slowly pour the yogurt-egg mixture into the soup in a thin, steady stream while stirring rapidly and constantly. Never stop stirring.

The moment you see the very first bubble rise, turn off the burner. Keep stirring 1 to 2 more minutes. Serve hot immediately.

* Plain yogurt - full-fat or low-fat, your choice. Lindsay makes this recipe with both and they both work beautifully. "The brand doesn't matter. This is the madzoon — the heart of the soup. In Armenian, madzoon (□□□□□□) literally means 'that which condenses.' It is what makes this soup Armenian. Reheat by microwave or over low to medium-low heat only, stirring frequently. Never boil after the yogurt has been added — it will curdle. Low and slow is the only way."

For this recipe, go to: https://momsdinnerbell.com/tutmaj-soup-recipe/

AIA Exhibit on Photographer on Aram Kazanjian

KAZANJIAN, from page 13

Kazanjian's aviation photos have themselves become part of the historical record. During his years in Boston, Kazanjian stepped out of the studio to visually document the inaugural Harvard-Boston Aero Meet which took place from September 3-13, 1910. These documentary-style photographs captured a sequence of images that chronicled, as some newspapers called it, "the greatest meet of its kind in America which drew over 60,000 paid spectators."

The photographs, signed as "Aram," gave him name recognition in the field of commercial and documentary photography. Kazanjian produced and commercially distributed postcards that documented the events from the aviation meet of 1910. His photographs, taken over the course of ten days, not only supplemented his income and produced collectible postcards that were highly valued around the turn of the 20th century, but also served as memorabilia of a captivating event in the history of American aviation.

Kazanjian's daughter, Arlene Francis (born Arline Frances Kazanjian), October 20, 1907 – May 31, 2001, was an American game show panelist, actress, and radio and television talk show host. She was a pioneer for women in television, and is best known for her long-running role as a panelist on the television game show "What's My Line?" on which she appeared regularly from 1950 to 1975.

"Pictorialism from Boston to New York," is viewable online at the Armenian Image Archive's website, on the following link: armenianimage.org

Also: https://www.armenianimage.org/wp-content/exhibit/kazanjian/

For more information about the Kazanjian exhibition, please contact: joseph.malikian@gmail.com

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.

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

CALIFORNIA

DECEMBER 12 — Teach For Armenia launches new umbrella organization, Armenia Education Initiative (AEI) at a forum hosted by the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies. This day-long Forum will feature discussions with leaders in the education space: Larisa Hovannisian, Founder and CEO, Teach for Armenia; Sylva Simonian, Co-Founder, TUMO; Dr. Christina Christie, Dean of the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies; Dr. Georgia Lazo, University Partnership Schools at UCLA; Dr. Li Cai, professor of education and psychology at the UCLA School of Education & Information Studies and Alice Petrossian, Armenian Education Initiative Governing Board Member. 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Breakfast, lunch and wine reception will be included. Free parking available

MASSACHUSETTS

NOVEMBER 21 — Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church Food Festival. 11 a.m. – 6. p.m., 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. Eat-in or Take-out. The Food Festival menu includes lamb, chicken, and losh kebab dinners, and a vegetarian platter, a country store with a variety of Armenian specialties and deserts. The festival also features a jewelry table, an antique treasures boutique, gift items from Armenia as well as a backgammon tournament and narrated tours of the church's sanctuary. For further information, call the church office at 978-256-7234.

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.

NOVEMBER 25 — Annual Armenian Student Association Thanksgiving Dance. Daron Folk Ensemble will provide free dance lessons from 7 to 8 p.m. and the Yerakouyn Band and a DJ will be featured at the Sheraton Commander Hotel in Cambridge, MA on the night before Thanksgiving. Sponsored jointly by the Armenian Students Association Inc. and a Community Leader. Light appetizers will be served to college students and young professionals. Complimentary admission with RSVP to Missy at 401-487-1515.

DECEMBER 5 — The Armenian Cultural and Educational Center will hold its annual Christmas Market, Saturday. Breakfast starts at 10 .m. with imported Knafeh. 47 Nichols Ave., Watertown.

DECEMBER 6 — Join Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church for an evening of sacred music and a Christmas pageant on Sunday at 6 p.m. at 200 Lexington St., Belmont. Featuring Fr. Ghazar Bedrossian, Angeline Nazarian and Maria Emma Lyons, with pianist Marina Margarian and violinist Armenuhi Hovakimian. Refreshments will follow in Nishan & Margrit Atinizian Hall. Tickets: $25, available through Venmo @HCACCMA or at the entrance. Everyone is welcome! Email:holycrossbostonma@gmail.com

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

DECEMBER 7 — Monday Night, St. James Monthly Dinner &Gathering, Father-Son Night, with guest speaker Ara Narian, at just 22 years old, Ara is the head coach of the Arlington Catholic High School boys' soccer team. He is one of the youngest varsity head coaches in state of Massachusetts history. Mezza 6;15, Dinner 7;00pm Losh Kebab& Kheyma , $25per person, all are welcome. 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, 617 -923-8860

DECEMBER 10 — Fifth Annual Members Reception and Christmas Stroll on Thursday at 6-9 p.m. at the Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown. For Armenian Museum members only, enjoy festive refreshments, wine, and hors d'oeuvres while strolling through our galleries and exploring the Museum's exhibitions. For more information and to RSVP, please visit: www.armenianmuseum.org/events/christmas-gallery-stroll To become a member, please visit www.armenianmuseum.org.

NEW YORK

NOVEMBER 25 — Singer Lilit Pipoyan to perform live at the National Opera Center's Scorca Hall. 7:20 p.m. on Wednesday, 330 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY. Tickets: Available now at ItsMySeat.

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.

Germans and Armenians Erase Borders Through Music

BORDERS, from page 13

Amir-Karayan, who is best-known for her repertoire of German Lieder (Art Songs), especially those of Franz Schubert. Here she delivered beautiful renderings of Armenian pieces, including *Khio Khane*, but also went beyond her borders to sing jazz classics, *All of Me*, *Summertime* and *Fly Me to the Moon*.

Trio 3D has taken an interest in Armenian music. The group traveled to Armenia, with Ernst-Ludwig Drayss, the founder and president of NOAH. They have performed with contralto Amir-Karayan frequently. In addition, clarinetist Matthias Dörsam has learned to play the *duduk*.

Mery Levonyan, an Armenian singer and dancer with a masterful stage presence, took to the stage next. Her rendering of Armenian folk songs delighted the audience. Again, the collaboration of ensemble and soloist reiterated the message of the concert: where there is music, there are no limits, no boundaries, no contrasts, but rather dialogue and counterpoint.

This concert was one of many musical encounters that Drayss has organized. His unique organization, NOAH, was founded in 2004 and its history is fascinating. As Chairman of the Board of German Asset Management, Drayss has been travelling to Armenia regularly since 1994, in his professional capacity as advisor to the central bank. In his travels, he became enthralled with Armenian history, its literature, music, art and architecture, and began organizing cultural exchanges with Germany. First, on the suggestion of the UNESCO commission, in 2001, he sealed a partnership as President (and founder) of the Curatorium for the Lorsch Monastery World Heritage Site with the Geghard Monastery. During that visit, he heard the Geghard choir sing the Sunday service for the first time. He was so overwhelmed by them that he proposed inviting them to Germany. One thing led to another, and NOAH was born, as a non-profit association dedicated to promotion of cultural relations between Armenia and Germany. There followed a tour of the Geghard choir, an agreement with the Armenian Cultural and Educational Organization LUYS in 2004, and so on and so forth.

His efforts were recognized during the concert. District Administrator Christian Engelhardt invited Drayss to come on stage to receive the Golden Honorary Pin of the Bergstrasse District. In honoring Drayss, Engelhardt described his work as, "The world as our guest, Bergstrasse in our hearts," and added, "Whether in sports, education, culture, or international understanding, Ernst-Ludwig Drayss has accomplished an incredible amount for our region and far beyond, for decades."

As a postscript it should be added that before the concert and during the intermission, concert guests were invited to have a glass of wine or champagne produced by the Aroma Aura winery. Owned and run by Garnik Harunyan, Aroma Aura combines the Armenian wine tradition with the Frankish (Franconian) wine culture. No borders.



Ernst-Ludwig Drayss (left) receives award from Christian Enhgelhardt (Muriel Mirak-Weissbach photo)

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR
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COMMENTARY

Armenia at the Center of Geopolitical Competition: The TRIPP Factor

By Suren Sargsyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectatowr

Armenia continues to navigate the rather complex and challenging landscape of international relations. Developments are unfolding extremely rapidly, while tensions across the international arena remain at their highest levels. A great deal has happened concerning Armenia in just the past few days.

In Europe, Armenia's prime minister announced that the country could officially apply for European Union membership within the next two years. On the very same day, it became known that Russian President Vladimir Putin was convening a summit of the leaders of the member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in Moscow.



Following the meeting, at which Armenia was represented at the level of deputy prime minister, Armenia was deprived of its voting rights but remained a member state.

It is well known that Armenia has issues with this organization. However, it has no intention of voluntarily withdrawing from the CSTO and is instead waiting for the organization to make an appropriate decision regarding Armenia.

Even before the meeting with Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had already outlined Russia's position, which was precisely as I had described in one of my previous articles. According to Lavrov, the CSTO member states discussed Armenia's failure to meet its financial obligations regarding membership contributions. He stated that Yerevan had not transferred funds to the organization's budget since 2024. "We were forced to discuss Armenia's failure to fulfill its obligations under the CSTO Charter with regard to annual contributions to the budget of our common organization," the Russian foreign minister stated.

At the same time, Lavrov emphasized that even if a decision on this were adopted, Armenia would retain its right to collective security within the framework of the organization. The minister also stated that the CSTO member states had not received an official application from Armenia to withdraw from the organization. Russia has no intention of "expelling" Yerevan from the organization, Lavrov said.

Developments surrounding Iran are also unfolding rapidly. Iran has been quite active on the foreign policy front. As the country prepares for a possible military escalation, Iranian diplomacy has also become increasingly active. On the same day, Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received a delegation led by Seyed Hamid Pourmohammadi, vice president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, while Vladimir Putin received Mohsen Rezaei, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council. Days later, the Armenian prime minister met with the Iranian president. I have no doubt that the main subject of their discussions was the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) project.

As for the United States, just days ago, Armenia, the United States and Azerbaijan issued a joint statement announcing the launch of trilateral technical planning groups to advance the TRIPP project. Immediately after the agreement was signed, the Armenian prime minister and the Azerbaijani president met in Dublin and discussed TRIPP. Notably, prior to this meeting, Armenia's prime minister had also met with the president of Turkey and discussed TRIPP, a project that is of strategic interest to Turkey.

As we can see Armenia has found itself, against its will, at the center of major geopolitical realignments and competition, one of the main reasons for which is the TRIPP project. In this situation, the impression is that Armenia is unable to find ways to accommodate the desires and interests of all sides and establish some kind of mechanism that would satisfy everyone's interests. Armenia is forced to take everyone's interests into account because these are the interests of global players, and failing to accommodate them could have very serious consequences for Armenia.

This indicates that international pressure on Armenia will continue to come from all sides. Russia will continue to exert pressure on Armenia to prevent it from moving out of its orbit. The European Union will continue to pressure Armenia to pursue efforts to move away from Russian influence, while the US exerting pressure to ensure the implementation of the TRIPP project. Azerbaijan will put pressure on Armenia to make it meet all of Azerbaijan's demands, including constitutional amendments. Iran, in turn, will exert pressure on Armenia to ensure that the TRIPP project is either not implemented at all or implemented in a different form.

(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.)

Correction

A press release published last week from the Armenian Assembly incorrectly noted that Armenian Caucus Co-Chair David Valadao (R) was "certified a winner." In fact, he lost to Democrat Randy Villegas.

COMMENTARY

Does TRIPP Set a Trap for Armenian Sovereignty?



By Philippe Raffi Kalfayan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Each passing day in Armenia brings surprises or misunderstandings regarding its governance: base remarks and authoritarian drifts, amid general confusion about the new state of affairs. Is there any Armenian State conforming to its constitutional provisions? Its leader Nikol Pashinyan made the controversial remark during a press briefing on August 28, 2025: "I am the Government. No one in the Government can have an opinion that contradicts mine. If such people exist, let them submit their resignations right now and leave. If not, I will dismiss them myself." In addition, his political party controls the legislative and judiciary powers. In other words, almost paraphrasing Louis XIV, who said, "The State is me!".

Official statements contradict each other on sensitive subjects, notably concerning national security, economic and political blocs, as well as relations with Azerbaijan, Turkey and Iran. What is the value of the Armenian state's word under these circumstances? Obviously, our neighbors do not value it much, as public versus private declarations and promises seem to be at odds.

Regarding relations with non-regional states, the official rhetoric is equally shifting, pointing to a dazzling array of international alliances.

Map 1. Rail and Road Connections in the South Caucasus



The latest episodes are telling. Pashinyan, who had criticized the Biden Administration, hastened — in the wake of Trump's electoral debacle — to assert that he was targeting only one individual in particular. The ratification by the Armenian parliament of accession to the so-called Board of Peace established by Trump and his small club of autocrats, aimed at weakening the United Nations and international law, is inconsistent with the announcement that Armenia would submit its application for EU membership sometime in 2028. Is it necessary to remind that the European Union defends the UN and international law?

Remarkably, Armenia is announcing an unsolicited candidacy to EU while simultaneously declaring its intention to remain within the Eurasian Economic Union treaty. Finally, let us recall that Armenia signed multiple bilateral and multilateral strategic agreements in 2026 (the US, France, United Kingdom, European Union) in addition to the TRIPP Framework Agreement (Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity). Is there any strategic coherence and unsuspected resources to implement all these agreements?

The Armenian government lives for the rhythm of flashy announcements and international shows (European Political Community, EU-Armenia Summit, COP17, Francophonie, etc.). Beyond the pomp and ceremony of these events, has Armenia's sovereignty been consolidated as the Pashinyan government maintains? This is probably what the 700,000 voters who voted for his party think. To convince themselves and others, the Armenian government has only one word on its lips: TRIPP. One cannot deny, failing a better alternative, that it holds some interest in its philosophy. Besides, the main opposition party in the Armenian parliament, Strong Armenia, although labelled a "Russian agent" during the electoral campaign, voted for the ratification of the Armenian-American Framework Agreement.

The questions raised regarding this project are twofold: For whom is it strategic? And does it guarantee Armenia's sovereignty as the government, and more bizarrely certain "experts," hastily claim?

To prove that Trump's defeat will not thwart TRIPP's realization, the US State Department has just declared the establishment of trilateral planning groups to advance it.

TRIPP: Geopolitical Architecture and Sovereign Asymmetries

Let us first recall that TRIPP has the stated objective of contributing to peace, stability, prosperity and regional integration. This is an entirely achievable goal if relations with neighboring countries are based on trust and if the determining factors for success are met.

I – Success factors of the TRIPP project

The Framework Agreement recalls the factors needed for the success of the project: the signing of the treaty, the delimitation and demarcation of borders with Azerbaijan, the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, the sustained engagement of the United States and regional cooperation and stability.

Azerbaijan, despite the re-election of Nikol Pashinyan, has still not signed the peace treaty after the Karabakh war. Neither President Ilham Aliyev nor the Republic of Azerbaijan sent him an official congratulatory message upon his re-election, while Azerbaijan continues to issue official or indirect conditions.

Their first condition is the adoption of a new Constitution stripped of its founding preamble, namely the Declaration of Independence, which mentions both the will to attach Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia and the international recognition of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Pashinyan has confirmed that this will be the case. During the last legislative elections, his party did not obtain the constitutional majority. Such a majority would allow him to call a referendum based on the new Constitution draft, the only known modification of which to date is the elimination of the reference to the Declaration of Independence. It is difficult to imagine that Parliament would adopt such a constitutional amendment without going through a referendum, when the founding principles of independence expressing the will of the people are eliminated.

The second condition is one regularly reiterated: Azerbaijan will be able to use the southern Armenia corridor and the Trump route *unhindered*. The Armenian government does not offer explanations for these enigmatic statements and maintains that Armenia will retain control over the strip of land constituting the transit corridor and that it will derive economic benefits through transit fees on its territory.

While TRIPP fixes the issue of territorial control by Armenia, a major distinction is maintained by Baku. Azerbaijan argues that goods circulating exclusively between Azerbaijan's main territory and the Nakhchivan exclave should benefit from streamlined and simplified procedures, without burdensome import or export duties, while accepting the application of standard transit or usage fees. For international transit along the corridor (for example, goods from Central Asia or China headed to Europe via Turkey), standard international transit tariffs and customs regulations would apply. Azerbaijan's fluctuating and circumstantial discourse is therefore a source of uncertainty. In addition, nothing is said about reciprocal agreements for the transit of Armenian freight through Azerbaijan.

A major concession that goes unnoticed clarifies President Aliyev's remarks when he asserts that Azerbaijanis will never mingle with Armenians during their transit. Article 8.2 of the Armenian-American Agreement indicates that Armenia has accepted the principle of using private operators at the border checkpoints of the strip of territory conceded to TRIPP. Even though the article stipulates that the choice of these operators will be made on the basis of mutual consent between Armenia and the TRIPP Development Company (TDC), Armenia is indeed dispossessed of effective control over its borders: a loss of sovereignty in terms of security and for the calculation of transit rights and customs fees since they will not control the source of the goods.

The third condition is the right of return of Azerbaijanis to Armenia, which some Azerbaijani leaders call "Western Azerbaijan." President Aliyev regularly intervenes in international forums and conventions on this subject.

Delimitation and Demarcation of Borders

The delimitation and demarcation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan remains in a nascent stage. The number of kilometers delimited and demarcated to date is approximately 12.7 to 13. However, the total border between the two countries is estimated at around 1,000 kilometers.

The first concrete breakthrough was achieved in the Armenian region of Tavush and the Azerbaijani district of Gazakh. On this 12.7 km portion, more than 80 geodetic border markers were installed. This first agreement led Armenia to transfer under the sovereign control of Azerbaijan four non-enclaved border villages it had controlled since the 1990s (Baganis Ayrim, Ashagi Eskipara, Kheyrimli, and Gizilhajili). The two delimitation commissions ratified a joint regulation establishing the working methodology.

The process legally relies on the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration, using Soviet-era maps as an administrative reference base. But obstacles are numerous for the rest of the route. Several obstacles persist: the status of Soviet enclaves on both sides, and the occupation by Azerbaijani forces of portions of sovereign Armenian territory (estimated at over 200 sq. km) seized during the 2021-2022 incursions.

It should be recalled that under the Declarative Act of State Independence, which constitutes the preamble and foundation of the 1995 Azerbaijani Constitution, Azerbaijan declared itself the direct legal successor of the Azerbaijan Republic of 1918–1920 (Article 2) and not of the Azerbaijan SSR. By rejecting the heritage of the Soviet Union (Article 3), the state does not recognize the Alma-Ata.

It seems rash to endorse a peace agreement without resolving the border issue, creating a process for the release of Armenian prisoners in Baku or the right to return of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Normalization of Armenian-Turkish Relations

The normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey is seeing symbolic progress. It remains dependent on the global peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Diplomatic dialogue, while active at first, appears to have slowed down. Holders of diplomatic, special or service passports benefit from free and simplified acquisition of electronic visas (e-visas) but not freedom to cross the land borders. Those are not open to the general public or general trade either despite the July 2022 agreement and border infrastructure work (notably at the Margara checkpoint) carried out by the Armenian government. The effective implementation of the agreement depends on the continuation of bilateral and global geopolitical discussions.

A joint protocol for the restoration of the historic Ani bridge (on the Akhourian River) was signed to physically connect the two countries at a major heritage site.

As for the Kars–Gyumri railway line, only a technical assessment of the Gyumri–Margara–Akhurik portion has been initiated. Finally, the reconstruction of the Yeraskh railway section aimed at extending the network from Turkey through Armenia to the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan is integrated into the Armenian government's 2026-2031 program.

Official positions and statements are asymmetrical. The Armenian side advocates for normalization "without preconditions," insists on the immediate reopening of borders and the restoration of diplomatic relations, which it insists would lead to economic gains.

On the Turkish side, they claim to want peace, but align their policy with Baku despite current disagreements between Turkish and Azerbaijani leaders. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has explicitly recalled that complete normalization with Armenia advances in tandem with the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process. Turkey is therefore awaiting the definitive settlement and the adoption of the new Armenian constitution to take the ultimate step of total commercial reopening.

United States Engagement

Do the framework agreement and the strategic partnership charter signed between Armenia and the United

continued on next page

COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Armenia's Enemies Will Never Be Satisfied; They Will Keep Demanding More Concessions

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is under the mistaken impression that by making concessions to Azerbaijan and Turkey, he will be able to secure friendship and peace.

Pashinyan does not understand that by yielding to a bully, he is encouraging the bully to demand more concessions.

If Pashinyan had any common sense, he would have said no to the ever-increasing Azeri and Turkish demands from day one.

A recent article by Turkish analyst Selenay Erva Yalcin, published by the "Center for Eurasian Studies," shows that no matter how much Pashinyan tries to accommodate Armenia's enemies, they will continue to criticize him for not being submissive enough.

Yalcin wrote: "The relations Armenia has cultivated with states that base their policies on anti-Turkish rhetoric are open to criticism within the context of the normalization process. The deepening defense cooperation and arms procurement with India, alongside high-level dialog and agreements on investment and cooperation in the defense sector with Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, confirm that…Armenia's engagement with an 'anti-Turkish front' remains very much active. The long-standing normalization process and the moderate tone adopted by officials regarding relations with Turkey have not fostered any sensitivity in Armenia's approach toward countries that maintain an anti-Turkish stance. This raises doubts regarding the development of a relationship built on trust."

Yalcin compiled a comprehensive list of Armenia's interactions with countries she described as hostile to Turkey:

1) Since May 2025, there have been 20 high-level and diplomatic engagements between Armenia and India on topics such as "defense industry, military training, procurement of ammunition, trade, healthcare, education, culture, high technology, and regional security."

2) During 2025-26, "approximately 10 meetings have taken place between Armenia and Greece. These included high-level official visits, as well as engagements involving ministers, military officials, and diplomatic representatives. Significant steps were taken to strengthen relations, particularly in the areas of defense, military training, culture, education, science, and technology…. On October 23, 2025, a defense cooperation program for the year 2026 was signed between the two countries. Subsequently, on April 22, 2026, trilateral defense consultations were held between Armenia, Greece, and the Republic of Cyprus, and an annual trilateral defense cooperation program was signed."

3) "Numerous contacts have taken place between Armenia and the Republic of Cyprus in the diplomatic, economic, and military spheres since May 2025…. On May 4, 2026, President Christodoulides of the Republic of Cyprus visited Yerevan in the context of the European Political Community Summit and met with Prime Minister Pashinyan. The meeting addressed the enhancement of bilateral relations, economic cooperation, regional stability, and the TRIPP project. Of particular note are the trilateral defense consultations held between Armenia, Greece, and the Republic of Cyprus on April 22, 2026. As a result of these discussions, a trilateral defense cooperation program was signed among the three nations. The meeting covered regional and international security issues, developments in the defense sector, and future opportunities for military cooperation. It is evident that Armenia's military relations with Greece and the Republic of Cyprus have extended beyond mere bilateral contacts, taking on an institutional character through trilateral and annual programs."

It is surprising that Yalcin forgot about Armenia's purchase of $300 million worth of French armored vehicles and other military equipment.

Despite all of Pashinyan's efforts to establish good relations with Turkey, including three visits to that country in the last four years and a meeting with Pres. Erdogan at the Turkish Mission in New York City during the U.N. General Assembly, the Turkish side remains dissatisfied.

These visits do not include the six meetings Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan had with his Turkish counterpart or his several visits to Turkey. Furthermore, Ruben Rubinyan, as Deputy Speaker of the Armenian Parliament, had been meeting with Turkey's special envoy Serdar Kilic since 2022 for the purpose of opening the border, which remains closed. Even though the two sides agreed in 2022 to allow citizens of third countries to cross the border, they still cannot do so.

The Turkish government keeps insisting that it will not open the border until the negotiated peace agreement is signed by Armenia and Azerbaijan. Pres. Aliyev refuses to sign it unless Armenia changes its Constitution. However, Pashinyan is unable to accommodate that request because his political party does not have the required two-thirds majority in Parliament to call a referendum on adopting a new constitution.

Meanwhile, Pashinyan continues to make concessions to Turkey by suppressing any mention of Mount Ararat or any calls for recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

In addition to changing Armenia's Constitution, Aliyev demands that 300,000 Azeris be settled in Armenia, that previously Azeri-inhabited enclaves within Armenia be returned to Azerbaijan, and that billions of dollars be paid in compensation for the "occupation" of Artsakh. These demands are being made even as Azerbaijan's military continues to occupy territory in the eastern part of the Republic of Armenia, illegally holds at least 19 Armenian political prisoners in Baku, and rejects the right of Artsakh Armenians to return to their historic homeland.

It is clear that appeasement does not produce peace when the other side interprets every concession as an opportunity to impose even more demands.

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States — including agreements relating to the TRIPP corridor project or to defense cooperation — constitute a binding legal security guarantee (of the NATO or military alliance treaty type)?

The texts signed are economic in nature, not mutual military assistance treaties. There is no collective defense clause, and nothing stipulates that the United States will intervene militarily if Armenia is attacked. Only an alliance ratified in the form of a treaty by two-thirds of the US Senate could offer such an obligation. The agreements are purely operational ("executive agreements"), and therefore revocable by any successive US administration.

American engagement in the TRIPP project, if implemented, would at best constitute a deterrent with a patrimonial dominance. The creation of the TDC — majority-owned at 74% by the United States — is likely to involve direct American investments in the construction and operation of roads in the Syunik region.

Meanwhile, it should be recalled that other corridors are operational. First and foremost is the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor). It is currently undergoing a massive expansion because it is subject to a bottleneck. It connects China and Central Asia to Turkey and Europe via the ports of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan on the Caspian Sea, then through Azerbaijan and Georgia. It constitutes the main alternative route bypassing Russia. It benefits from significant support from "Global Gateway," an initiative of the European Union, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the governments of the region. TRIPP positions itself as a logical extension of the Trans-Caspian Corridor. Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries have dispatched technical teams to study the modalities for directly integrating their rail freight into TRIPP.

The International North–South Transport Corridor is operational, but improvement work is underway. It connects Central Asia (Turkmenistan/Uzbekistan) to Iran toward Turkey/Southern Europe. It offers a land alternative that bypasses the Caspian Sea. The Northern Corridor is a Eurasian land bridge connecting China/Central Asia to the European Union (Poland/Germany) via Russia and Belarus. Historically, this is the fastest and most efficient overland rail connection. However, EU sanctions and geopolitical tensions have led Europeans to divert a significant portion of the flows of these two routes toward trans-Caspian paths.

In summary, these Armenian-American agreements will only become a deterrent the day American economic assets are engaged in the construction of TRIPP infrastructure and in the mining sector. From a legal standpoint, Armenia does not benefit from any contractual American security umbrella. From a political standpoint, the implementation of these projects heavily depends on Trump's team of advisors and negotiators, the maintenance of the Abraham Accords, and the outcome of the wars against Iran and between Russia and Ukraine. The cessation of conflicts would imply the re-exploitation of existing corridors and could potentially weaken American interest in TRIPP.

In any case, Azerbaijan claims the position of strategic pivot in the region and in the Central Asia-Europe relationship. And it seems they are not the only claimants of it.

Regional Cooperation and Stability

It is well known that economic and political projects in the Caucasus are directly controlled and managed by President Trump's close team, namely his chief negotiator Steve Witkoff, the latter's personal advisor Aryeh Lightstone, and the Russian-American investor Konstantin Sokolov. The latter was appointed chairman of the TRIPP Fund by the US State Department. This fund is endowed with $200 million. He is already the chairman of the Transcaspian Transport Corridor Fund.

Lightstone's background deserves mention. He is an American diplomat and senior advisor within the US Office of Peace Missions and played a driving role in negotiating the TRIPP agreements. In addition to his work on regional connectivity in the South Caucasus, he acts as a senior advisor for peace issues (Board of Peace). Appointed in 2020 as Special Envoy for the Abraham Accords, he helped supervise the "Peace to Prosperity" economic initiatives, led the Abraham Fund, and piloted the first Abraham Accords Business Summit. This involvement demonstrates how much American-Israeli foreign policy influences regional agreements in the South Caucasus, through the TRIPP Agreement but also through the project of integrating several Caucasus and Central Asia states — notably Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Armenia — into the Abraham Accords. The central role of this multilateral and economic integration into an expanded "Abrahamic" framework is given to Azerbaijan and involves multiple parties — Israel, the United Arab Emirates, the United States and Eurasian transit corridors.

This is where the Armenia-Iran relationship and trade route projects between the two countries are threatened. The Armenian government's timid assurances will change nothing. Iranian authorities, despite diplomatic lip service, regularly raise the issue and still have not obtained an Armenian guarantee that the corridor will not host an American military base or other infrastructure capable of harming Iran's security. While the TRIPP Agreement stipulates in its preamble that control of the territory strip conceded to TRIPP and the borders remain under Armenia's sovereignty and jurisdiction, numerous articles undermine jurisdictional sovereignty over the projects implemented on this territory as well as the choice of operators for these projects. The Agreement expressly requires that the Armenian government ensure these territories are free of any encumbrances or rights belonging to third parties (Article 6.1) and bear all financial costs related to these procedures. In other words, this means families or businesses shall be expropriated at the Armenian government's expense.

II – Jurisdictions associated with TRIPP limit sovereignty to the land property

It should be noted that the June 2026 Agreement provides for two categories of projects within the strip of

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COMMENTARY

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land conceded. “TRIPP projects” concern transport and flow infrastructure: rail, road, oil and gas pipelines, fiber optics and electricity. But Article 6 of the Agreement also provides for “non-TRIPP projects”, which any legal entity, individual or corporate (company or State), can propose. These are “Special Purpose Vehicles” (SPVs). The SPVs will be subsidiaries of TDC for the purpose of implementing a specific TRIPP modality. This article exposes Armenia to several risks: any third-party state, directly or more likely indirectly, could develop and finance projects dangerous for Armenia’s neighbors or for environmental protection through private companies.

Even if Armenia were to oppose it, its share in the TRIPP company does not give it the ability to block the project in case of disagreement. For example, will the American partner, influenced by its regional ally Israel, allow Armenia to build the Iran-Armenia railway? In the context of the current war between the US/Israel and Iran — recalling that the Abraham Accords are managed by the very people who designed the TRIPP agreement — we can reasonably doubt it.

An example corroborates this doubt. The Board of Peace established primarily to cease the war and to reconstruct Gaza, fails to impose an end to Israeli aggressions on Gaza. The first decision of this Council does not concern the reconstruction of Gaza — housing, hospitals, schools, water or electricity networks — but rather focuses on the construction of a military base intended to host 150 Moroccan soldiers of the international force.

The legal and institutional design of the TRIPP Framework Agreement fundamentally transforms the landscape of Armenia’s sovereign governance. Although presented as a transit corridor promoting peace, its functional architecture introduces deep structural asymmetries from a jurisdictional and economic standpoint. Let us look more closely at several aspects of this agreement.

Legal concessions

The Framework Agreement is dependent on two other contractual documents that are not yet public: the Shareholders’ Agreement (the shareholders of the TRIPP Development Company—TDC—are TDC US and the Armenian State) and the TDC Charter.

The Shareholders’ Agreement is a private American commercial contract governed by US law, specifically that of the State of New York. Its purpose is to govern certain rights and obligations of TDC’s shareholders, as well as matters relating to the management of TDC. TDC grants a 74% majority stake to an American entity (TDC-US) registered as a subsidiary of the United States International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), an American federal agency headquartered in Delaware, a US tax haven.

Only the TDC Charter will be governed by Armenian law. This Charter will notably manage rights relating to the TRIPP Implementation Area, meaning the strip of territory conceded to the TDC company for 49 years, namely exclusive rights of development, land use and exploitation. This concession could be extended up to 99 years. As a reminder, the Armenian State holds only 26% of the shares in this company.

Despite all the rhetorical assurances of the Armenian government, there is a loss of control over legal sovereignty. Article 5(3) stipulates that the Framework Agreement prevails over Armenian domestic law in the event of a conflict. This primacy assumes that the Framework Agreement is elevated to the rank of an international treaty ratified by both Armenia and the US Congress for it to be constitutional. Private law disputes relating to companies involved in the project are submitted to the law of the State of New York.

The Armenian National Assembly ratified the TRIPP framework agreement. Furthermore, the Armenian government convened an extraordinary parliamentary session to adopt the necessary amendments to the Law on Joint-Stock Companies, the Civil Code, and regulations relating to public-private partnerships, specifically to allow the formal registration and legal establishment of the entity (Article 3.6 of the Framework Agreement). These legislative amendments bypass existing Armenian legislation and grant privileges to investors and companies involved in TRIPP projects. The modifications will be included in the Shareholders’ Agreement and the TDC Charter.

The United States Congress has not ratified the agreement. Furthermore, the TDC joint-stock company itself is still in the process of being created and is not operational.

Economic and Financial Concessions

Economic and financial concessions are numerous, and their sum raises questions regarding benefits for Armenia.

Armenia agrees (Article 4.3 of the Framework Agreement) that TDC is authorized to select third parties to assist in each TRIPP project implemented by the ad hoc companies (SPVs), including third parties acting as concessionaires, developers, operators, contractors or EPC (engineering, procurement, and construction) providers for such a TRIPP project.

TRIPP offers very few tax resources, so extensive is the list of exemptions.

Article 9 includes the following concessions:

TDC US (i.e., 74% of TDC’s revenues) will be exempt from all taxes. (9.1)

Dividends paid to TDC by subcontractors (SPVs) will also be non-taxable. (9.2)

Capital gains and transfers of shares of TDC and its subsidiaries (SPVs) will be exempt from any taxation. (9.3)

Finally, TDC and its subsidiaries will pay no tax on the transfer or assignment of conceded rights, whether from the Armenian government to TDC or from TDC to its subsidiaries. (9.4)

Off-budget financial vehicles — such as the $402 million “TRIPP+ Trans-Caspian Enterprise Fund” backed by the United States — completely bypass state accounts to target investments in private enterprises in the region.

TRIPP functions more like an “offshore” concession zone than a source of tax revenue. This absence of fiscal and financial benefits reveals not only a loss of economic sovereignty, but calls into question Armenia’s interest in this project.

In conclusion, we observe a totally asymmetrical agreement with a loss of jurisdictional and fiscal sovereignty over the activities and investments that will be operated in the conceded territory strip. Azerbaijan considers that freight transiting between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan must not be subject to the same transit fees as freight originating from other entities. However, control at the checkpoints will be subcontracted to a private operator.

This unbalanced agreement adds to the threats of commercial sanctions from both the Russia/EEU bloc (due to the rapprochement with the European Union) and the United States (due to trade with Iran) despite the desire to diversify export markets; and to an already high public debt for a country exposed to structural imbalances economically and socially. These Armenian-American agreements — whose durability is unknown and whose legal design and the men who conceived them threaten to transform the TRIPP El Dorado into long-term systemic dependency and a manifest loss of sovereignty that goes unmentioned. It may be difficult to erase the Agreement if it becomes an international treaty.

(Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, based in Paris, is a lawyer, lecturer in international law and a former secretary general of FIDH (International Federation of Human Rights), who has earned a Ph.D. in international law. He is a regular columnist for the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.)



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