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Armenia and US Officially Launch Trump Route

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

YEREVAN (OC-Media.org) — In a video message aired on Armenia's Public TV on November 23, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced the launch of the Trump Route project, which will be "jointly implemented" by the Armenian and US governments. In a separate video message broadcast by the same channel, US President Donald Trump, the project's namesake, called the launch "unbelievably exciting occasion."

The Trump Route, also known as Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), is a planned multi-use infrastructure project intended to connect mainland Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhchivan through Armenian territory. A bilateral document with the US and Armenia described the route as being "expected to generate reciprocal benefits for international and intra-state connectivity for the Republic of Armenia."

Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the US agreed to the project's development after the Washington summit of August 2025, where Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev initialed — but not signed — a peace agreement.

In his address on November 23, Pashinyan called the launch a "truly a historic event in the modern history" of Armenia.

"We are launching work on the largest economic project in Armenia since independence," Pashinyan said.

He also called the route "one of the most important achievements" of the Washington Summit, and ensured that it "will have enormous regional and international significance, giving additional momentum to the Trans-Caspian Trade Route and West-East connectivity."

Aside from the "exceptional importance for the economic advancement" of Armenia, Pashinyan said that the route would also "make a very serious contribution to strengthening the security" of the country.

"Dear compatriots, the ongoing developments are proof of the viability of the Government of the Republic of Armenia's agenda for establishing peace and regional stability, the Crossroads of Peace project, as well as the vision of building a more prosperous and interconnected Armenia," Pashinyan said.

The Crossroads of Peace is a regional transport proposal put forth by Pashinyan in 2023 to re-open transport links connecting Armenia to its neighboring countries.

Following Pashinyan's address, Trump's video message was aired, in which he called the launch an "unbelievably exciting occasion," adding that he was "very proud of that."

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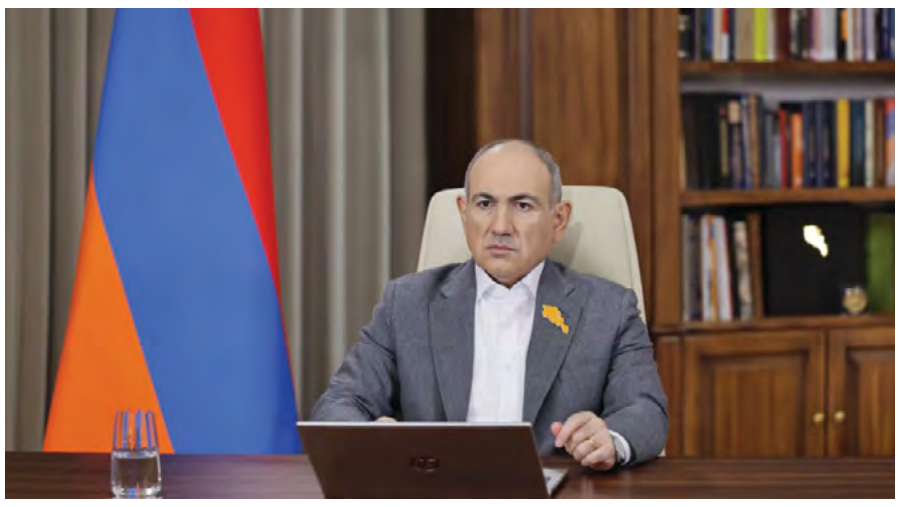
Pashinyan Releases New Draft Constitution for Armenia

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan publicized on Monday, November 23, his government's draft of a new constitution of Armenia rejected by the Armenian opposition but praised by Azerbaijan.

As expected, it makes no reference to a 1990 declaration of independence which cites a 1989 unification act adopted by the legislative bodies of Soviet Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The declaration is referenced in a preamble to the current Armenian constitution enacted in 1995 and repeatedly amended since then.

In a video address to the nation, Pashinyan emphasized the removal of this reference which is Azerbaijan's main declared precondition for signing an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty initiated in Washington last year. He dismissed his critics' assertions that "we are doing this due to external pressures or for the sake of someone else."

The two opposition alliances represented in the Armenian parliament stood by those claims as they reacted to the published draft. One of them, Strong Armenia, charged that Pashinyan is continuing to fulfill Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's demands and is ready to "reject Armenia's independence at the behest of his political patron."



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, November 23, 2026

"It is clear from the draft constitution that beyond being an Aliyev constitution, it is also undemocratic and contains authoritarian tendencies," Tigran Abrahamyan, a senior Strong Armenia lawmaker, told journalists.

Ishkhan Saghatelyan, a leading member of the opposition Hayastan alliance, said that by pressuring Pashinyan to enact it, Aliyev wants to "humiliate the Armenian people and legitimize his actions."

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Wide-ranging APRI Presentations Explore Future Of Armenia at Montreal AGBU General Assembly

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

MONTREAL — The Armenian General Benevolent Union's 94th General Assembly in Montreal included a series of wide-ranging presentations largely on international relations, economics, technology, and reforms under the title "Armenia at the Crossroads: Geopolitics, Connectivity, and the Tech Frontier." The Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia Foundation (APRI Armenia), which was founded with the support of the AGBU in 2022, convened a packed half-day of presentations on Friday, October 16.

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From left, Lara Setrakian, Sergei Melkonian, Hriar Cabayan, Olesya Vartanyan, Hrair Balian (photo Aram Arkun)

Armenia Appoints New Russian Envoy

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Armenia has appointed veteran diplomat Samvel Mkrtchyan as its new ambassador to Russia, replacing Gurgen Arsenyan, a businessman and former parliamentarian, amid continuing tensions between Yerevan and Moscow.

The appointment was announced in a presidential decree issued on Friday, November 20. A separate decree signed by President Vahagn Khachaturyan formally recalled Arsenyan from the post he had held since 2024.



Samvel Mkrtchyan

Mkrtchyan, 67, previously served as Armenia's ambassador to Poland and Lebanon. He has also held various diplomatic positions, including heading the Foreign Ministry's Europe Department and serving as a member of Armenia's negotiating team in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Minsk Group.

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ARMENIA

NEWS *from* ARMENIA

Indictment Contradicts Officials' Account of Azerbaijani Soldier's Attack, Abrahamyan says

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The indictment against an Azerbaijani serviceman who crossed into Armenia and attacked a woman in early October paints a starkly different picture of the incident from the statements made by Armenian government officials, former MP Tigran Abrahamyan has said this week.

The serviceman was detained after entering the country illegally, assaulting Ani Avetisyan at her home in the village of Shaki and shooting her in the leg.

In a Facebook post on November 23, Abrahamyan, a former member of parliament representing the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), said the charges and the case's referral to court had been largely overlooked in recent media coverage.

He recalled that several government officials had sought to downplay the Azerbaijani serviceman's actions.

However, Abrahamyan said the allegations set out in the indictment present a different account.

According to the indictment, Nasimi Musayev threatened Avetisyan's children before firing six shots from an assault rifle.

The indictment further states that, after opening fire, Musayev threw Avetisyan onto a bed and repeatedly struck her.

Avetisyan sustained life-threatening injuries.

Biometric Passports List Azerbaijan as Birthplace of Those Born in Artsakh

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia's new biometric passports issued to citizens originally from Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) list Azerbaijan as their place of birth, a policy that has sparked a backlash among the displaced Armenian population.

Interior Minister Arpine Sargsyan defended the decision, saying it was based on international passport standards, consultations with experts from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the experience of other countries.

"Passports are documents used for international travel and border crossings. We therefore have to take into account international standards,`" Sargsyan told reporters on November 24.

She said ICAO standards allow countries to indicate a person's place of birth by listing a country, city or locality. Armenia, however, opted to identify the country rather than a specific city or settlement.

Sargsyan also cited standards established by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), which maintains an internationally recognized list of geographical names.

Armenia Launches National Center For Robotics and Physical AI

YEREVAN — Armenia is establishing a national center for robotics and physical artificial intelligence (AI) aimed at advancing research, education and technology development in the field, the Advanced Research in Computational Sciences & AI (ARCS-ai) announced on November 20.

The ARPI Center will bring together educational and research capabilities of the American University of Armenia (AUA), Yerevan State University (YSU) and the National Polytechnic University of Armenia, with the goal of strengthening cooperation between universities and developing specialized expertise in physical AI.

The center plans to train 50 engineers specializing in physical AI each academic year. Its educational program has already launched, with 30 students from engineering and mathematics faculties at AUA and YSU enrolled in the first phase. Nine specialized courses have been established at the two universities, covering robot mechanics, control systems, state estimation, digital twins and ethical governance of physical AI.

A master's program in physical AI is expected to launch in 2027.

The center currently involves 14 lecturers, including eight invited from leading universities and research institutions in the United States and Europe, such as the University of Michigan-Dearborn, the University of Southern California, Delft University of Technology and Rutherford Appleton Laboratory.

The ARPI Center's main research platform will be a new robotics laboratory, with an investment of $500,000. It will be equipped with robotic arms, mobile robots, virtual reality equipment and a mechanical workshop.

A dedicated testing area for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) will also be established, allowing their movements to be tracked with high precision.

The laboratory will feature NVIDIA GPUs for training AI models and conducting robot simulations. Researchers and students will also have access to the high-performance computing infrastructure of the Firebird AI initiative, whose GPU cluster is among the five largest in Europe, according to ARCS-ai.

ARCS-ai is discussing cooperation opportunities with German robotics company Agile Robots, US-based FieldAI and Swiss company KM-RoBoTa.

The initiative is also exploring partnerships with international universities, including the University of Michigan-Dearborn, the California Institute of Technology (Caltech), ETH Zurich and EPFL. The center will continue its collaboration with YerevaNN to develop applied AI and robotics projects.

The ARPI Center was officially presented on November 20 at the DigiTec exhibition in Yerevan. The presentation was attended by NVIDIA Vice President of Physical AI Simulation Rev Lebaredian, representatives of partner universities and companies, and included practical demonstrations of robots.

The center is also inviting scientists and specialists based abroad to collaborate, offering opportunities for teaching, joint research and the development of new programs. Cooperation may take the form of short-term scientific visits or long-term professional partnerships.

Interested lecturers and postdoctoral researchers can contact ARCS-ai at admin@arcs-ai.am.

The initiative's office is located at Engineering City in Yerevan.

From Heritage to High Tech: Discovering Gyumri's Digital Future

By Sonya Sarkisian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GYUMRI — When people think of Armenia, majestic mountains, ancient monasteries, rich cultural traditions and exquisite cuisine often come to mind. Yet beyond its celebrated heritage, another exciting story is unfolding: Armenia is emerging as a growing technology and innovation hub, driven by a new generation of software engineers, digital designers and entrepreneurs.

While Yerevan remains the center of Armenia's expanding IT industry, Gyumri, the country's second-largest city, is increasingly contributing to this transformation. Long celebrated for its artistic heritage, Gyumri is bringing creativity and technology together to create new economic opportunities. Institutions such as the Gyumri Technology Center, Gyumri Information Technologies Center and TUMO Center for Creative Technologies are helping equip young Armenians with digital skills and nurture the next generation of technology professionals. For a city still shaped by the devastating 1988 earthquake, this emerging industry offers renewed possibilities for economic growth.



For me, this transformation is deeply personal. My Armenian roots span generations and continents. My father's family, the Sarkisian and Thomasian families, hail from New England, while my mother's family, the Vanoyan and Grigoryan families, have lived in Gyumri since the 19th century. This past summer, I connected my Armenian heritage with my professional aspirations through an internship in Gyumri's growing technology sector.

Thanks to my cousin, Anahit Manukyan, founder of the Gyumri-based technology company WeDoApps, I was introduced to Tigran Barsegyan, founder of Progressive Applications Development Company (PADC). With her help and a grant from Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts (VCUarts), where I study graphic design, I secured a two-month internship as a User Interface/User Experience (UI/UX) designer at PADC.

During my internship, I contributed to the design of PADC's online learning platform and collaborated with talented Armenian software engineers to better understand how digital designs become functional websites and mobile applications.

By the end of my internship, I was thrilled to learn that approximately 60 percent of my designs had been incorporated into improvements to the platform's appearance and usability.

Armenia is not simply the homeland of our ancestors — it is a place where my generation of Armenian Americans can learn, innovate, collaborate and help shape the future.

Armenia and US Officially Launch Trump Route

TRIPP, from page 1

Trump went on to praise his role in resolving the conflict, reiterating that "many tried to find a resolution, but failed" over three decades of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

"This partnership between the US and Armenia will create new trade routes for the flow of goods, energy, and travel throughout the region, and we're committed to ensuring it is a great, great success," Trump said.

He also invited Pashinyan to the White House for the National Prayer Breakfast in February 2027.

"I look forward to being with him. He's an exceptional man and a great friend," he said in an address to Pashinyan, adding that "together, we can have productive conversations on how to advance peace in the region and strengthen our bilateral ties."

Following the two leaders' addresses, the Armenian Public TV aired footage of construction works, accompanied by a statement from Syunik Governor Robert Ghukasyan, who called the project a "historical event." The project will go through the Syunik province.

He added that actual construction would follow preparatory work already underway in several sections, including stone removal and ground-levelling works.

The day before Pashinyan and Trump broadcasted their messages, US Secretary of Homeland Security Markwayne Mullin visited Baku for a meeting with Aliyev in which the Azerbaijani president praised his US counterpart's peace efforts in the region.

The US Secretary of Homeland Security Markwayne Mullin congratulated Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on progress in advancing the peace agenda between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Azerbaijan Presidential Office.

Earlier in November, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the US have announced the launch of trilateral technical planning groups to advance the Trump Route.

October saw some other progress in regards to the Trump Route, including the Armenian Parliament ratifying a framework agreement with the US on strategic cooperation concerning the Trump Route.

ARMENIA

IODA Suggests Government Is Expanding Use of Judiciary to Stifle Dissent

YEREVAN — Armenia's ruling party, Civil Contract, with its near total control of executive and legislative branches, has expanded dramatically its prosecution of the country's leading opposition parties, relying on the abusive enforcement of the country's pretrial detention and asset confiscation laws, said the International Observatory for Democracy in Armenia (IODA). In a new report released on November 20, "Weaponizing the Law: Armenia's Post-Election Escalation Against Political Opponents," IODA urges the government of Armenia to cease weaponizing its laws to target the opposition and calls on relevant international bodies to tie continued support for Armenia to strict compliance with rule-of-law benchmarks.

"The government is punishing its political opponents under the guise of fighting corruption, imprisoning them without any judicial conviction, and stripping their assets without any serious semblance of due process," said Sarah Leah Whitson, IODA Executive Board member. "The way in which the government has targeted its opponents make this look less like an anti-corruption agenda and more like a campaign for political domination."

IODA issued its report following a fact-finding mission to Armenia in September 2026 to examine human rights conditions in the wake of the June 2026 parliamentary election, in which Civil Contract secured 64 out of 105 seats. This was IODA's third mission to the country documenting deteriorating civil and political rights. IODA met with members of opposition parties, some facing criminal charges; members of the clergy, also facing criminal and civil charges; lawyers; representatives of human rights and civil society organizations, and the EU delegation in Armenia. Government authorities declined IODA's requests to meet with the delegation.

IODA focused its investigation on the legal and factual bases of the prosecution and detention of the leadership of the country's three main opposition coalitions, as well as the leadership of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Its investigation found that the ruling party has weaponized its effective control over the judiciary and prosecutorial apparatus to deliberately and selectively target the opposition and clergy, bringing specious charges against them. The government has relied extensively on the country's pretrial detention and asset confiscation laws to imprison its political targets and strip them and their family members of their assets without any verdict or finding of guilt, and without adequate judicial oversight or due-process protections.

"Rather than operating as isolated enforcement operations, the documented arrests, pretrial detention orders, non-conviction-based asset forfeitures, and regulatory interventions demonstrate a coordinated weaponization of the administrative and judicial apparatus," said Jose Maria Aranaz, IODA Executive Board member. "Every Armenian should be concerned about the government's selective application of the law, the erosion of judicial independence, and the shrinking space for political pluralism."

The report's findings include:

Abuse of Pretrial Detention Laws: Prosecutors have abused pretrial detention powers as a default enforcement tool to hold political opponents facing a range of charges in custody for extended periods. Courts routinely adopt prosecutors' generic, copy-paste justifications for seeking pretrial detention without any individualized review of the facts of each case. The government has also abused preventive restraint provisions to issue travel bans against political opposition members and senior clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church — including Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and six bishops— who face politically motivated investigations.

Abuse of Asset Confiscation Laws: State enforcement agencies have systematically deployed non-conviction-based civil forfeiture and "public priority interest" expropriations to strip political opponents and major independent economic actors of their assets. Far from serving as neutral anti-corruption tools, these mechanisms combine retroactive scrutiny dating back to 1991, reversed burdens of proof, and pre-judgment corporate takeovers to inflict immediate financial paralysis. These abuses are reinforced by structural due-process deficits within the Anti-Corruption Court — including direct executive pressure and disciplinary threats against judges, as well as prohibitive ad valorem state duty fees (reaching up to 4%–5% on appeal) that lock defendants with frozen bank accounts out of appellate review.

Erosion of Judicial and Prosecutorial Independence: The executive branch, under the leadership of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, has systematically undermined the independence of the judiciary, prosecution service, and key oversight institutions, turning them into compliant tools for political enforcement. The ruling Civil Contract party has staffed nominally independent bodies with executive loyalists. Subject to targeted disciplinary proceedings, salary penalties, and public threats of dismissal from the Prime Minister, judges are under heavy pressure to rubber-stamp prosecutorial detention requests and pre-judgment asset freezes. Meanwhile, the Prosecutor General's Office and specialized law enforcement agencies routinely launch investigations immediately following executive directives or parliamentary clashes.

IODA urged the Government to use pretrial detention strictly as a measure of last resort, overhaul the 2020 civil asset forfeiture law in consultation with the Venice Commission, and safeguard judicial independence by ending executive pressure and the weaponization of the Supreme Judicial Council.

IODA also urges the international community — including the European Union, the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe — to make financial and political support conditional on compliance with strict rule-of-law benchmarks, establish mandatory quarterly monitoring frameworks with civil society input, deploy urgent UN and EU fact-finding missions, and publicly condemn politically motivated prosecutions.

Yerevan Hosts 4th Obesity International Interdisciplinary Conference

YEREVAN (ICPD) — Physicians and healthcare professionals from Armenia and abroad gathered on November 6–7 at the Sundukyan State Academic Theatre in Yerevan for the 4th Obesity International Interdisciplinary Conference, held in collaboration with the 5th Dr. Raffy Hovanessian International Medical Conference.

Held under the theme "The Treatment of Obesity Goes Beyond the Scope of a Single Specialty," the conference highlighted the growing need for integrated, multidisciplinary approaches to one of today's major global health challenges. It emphasized that effective obesity management extends beyond individual medical interventions and requires coordinated expertise, comprehensive patient care and long-term follow-up.

The international scientific program featured specialists from Armenia, Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States, Qatar, Georgia, Russia and the United Arab Emirates. More than 30 presentations and clinical case studies explored a broad range of subjects, including bariatric and metabolic surgery, GLP-1 therapies, women's health, pediatric obesity and post-bariatric care.

The discussions brought together perspectives from multiple medical disciplines, including surgery, endocrinology, pharmacology, psychology, gastroenterology, pediatrics and gynecology. By fostering dialogue among specialists, the conference provided a platform for exchanging clinical experience, presenting emerging evidence and exploring opportunities for more coordinated and patient-centered obesity care.

The meeting welcomed 120 registered in-person participants on November 6 and 92 on November 7. The program also offered online participation through Zoom, with 40 connections on the first day and 31 on the second, out of 45 approved registrations per day.

Drs. Caroline M. Apovian and Raffi Karagozian, members of the Armenian American Medical Association of Boston, were among those who presented via Zoom. Apovian is Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School and an internationally recognized expert in obesity medicine. Her lecture addressed advances in obesity treatment, pharmacological therapies, including GLP-1 medications, and the management of obesity-related metabolic complications.

Karagozian, Associate Professor of Medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine and gastroenterologist and hepatologist, spoke on the relationship between obesity and liver disease.

The educational program was accredited by the European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (EACCME) for up to 12 European CME credits (ECMECs), with the number of credits awarded to individual participants determined by their actual participation.

The conference was presented by the International Center for Professional Development (ICPD), with the support of the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR). ICPD is dedicated to advancing continuing medical education and professional development in Armenia.



Dr. Levon Grigoryan during Q&A

Pashinyan Releases New Draft Constitution for Armenia

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The new constitution drafted by the Armenian Ministry of Justice earlier this year has to be approved by at least two-thirds of the Armenian parliament's deputies before it can be put on a mandatory referendum. Pashinyan's Civil Contract party fell short of such a majority in disputed parliamentary elections held in June

Both Hayastan and Strong Armenia have vowed to block the referendum. Earlier this month, they as well as about a dozen other opposition groups agreed to form a united front for that purpose.

The parliamentary opposition remained adamant in rejecting "Aliyev's constitution" even after Pashinyan promised to resign if most Armenians vote against it. The premier repeated his offer on Monday.

Pashinyan has also warned that he will initiate snap parliamentary elections if he fails to push the new constitution through the National Assembly. He has implicitly threatened to bar Strong Armenia and Hayastan from such a vote. Artur Khachatryan, another senior Hayastan figure, insisted on Monday that the opposition is undaunted by his threats.

"Negotiating with Pashinyan is out of the question; we don't negotiate with terrorists," Khachatryan said, alluding to the recent arrests of Hayastan's and Strong Armenia's top leaders.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov hailed the release of the draft constitution sought by Pashinyan.

"For us, the only important issue regarding the new constitution is the absence of territorial claims against Azerbaijan," Bayramov said, according to Azerbaijani news agencies. "Judging by the published text, there are currently no such claims in it. We value this very highly."

INTERNATIONAL

More Armenian Ambassadors Sacked

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Seven more Armenian ambassadors serving abroad have been dismissed by their government without any explanation.

The mostly experienced ambassadors based in Canada, Israel, Argentina, the Netherlands, Greece, Bulgaria as well as the NATO headquarters in Brussels were formally recalled late on Monday in presidential decrees initiated by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, on November 24.

Neither Pashinyan's office nor the Armenian Foreign Ministry gave any reasons for the sackings. Nor did they name replacements for the recalled diplomats. T

"Our government sources report that according to Pashinyan, the diplomatic corps is failing to effectively carry out its assigned missions, and so he has decided to replace the diplomatic staff in almost all countries," it wrote. "More diplomats will be recalled soon."

Another Khamenei Aide Warns Yerevan Over 'Trump Route'

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A senior adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei has deplored the Armenian government's plans to open a US-run transit corridor along Armenia's border with the Islamic Republic.

Mohammad Mokhber compared the planned Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) to the Strait of Hormuz just hours after Yerevan and Washington announced on Monday the start of the implementation phase of the project designed to connect Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave as well as Turkey. In a post on X, Mokhber also implied that the transit arrangement amounts to an extraterritorial "Zangezur corridor" demanded by Baku and opposed by Tehran.

"Fake routes will never replace real corridors, whether in the south or the north of Iran, whether it's the southern route via the Strait of Hormuz or the TRIPP (the Zangezur corridor)," he wrote on November 24.

"Iran's geopolitical interests in the region are our red line," added Mokhber.

Another top adviser, former Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, likewise said earlier this month that the TRIPP and Yerevan's broader pro-Western foreign policy open "a new chapter of hostility and tension in the South Caucasus."

The warnings contrast with statements made by Iranian government officials. Visiting Yerevan on October 16, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the Iranians "trust our Armenian brothers" on the TRIPP and believe "they are doing nothing that would compromise Iran's security." Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei reiterated on Monday that Tehran trusts in Yerevan's assurances that there will be no US military or security presence near the Armenian-Iranian border.

APRI Presentations Explore Future of Armenia At Montreal AGBU General Assembly

AGBU, from page 1

APRI Armenia President Lara Setrakian began the afternoon with a recap of APRI's mission and work since it was founded about five years ago. She declared: "We went out and studied the Council on Foreign Relations, the World Economic Forum, Brookings, and all of the world's best. We did our utmost to adapt those models to what we felt Armenia was missing, because we felt that Armenia deserves to have the best as well."

APRI identifies gaps in what Setrakian called the "nation-building blockchain" and attempts to add a piece of the answer through constructive work.

APRI Board Chair Yervant Zorian amplified Setrakian's assessment that Armenia had a gap in research for decades and APRI attempts to fill that gap based on the work of experts not only in national security but also on other issues impacting Armenia's long-term future, from transportation, to power and technology.

APRI Board member Arda Hartunian put an emphasis on APRI's communication of smart ideas. She said, "We provide quality information, and then it's up to the different institutions, government, nonprofits and businesses that use that information as to what they do with it."

Former Amb. Andrew Turner

Setrakian conducted an interview with Andrew Turner, who served as the first ambassador of Canada to the Republic of Armenia from 2023 to 2026. Turner explained that Canada opened its embassy in Armenia as part of the expansion of Canada's diplomatic footprint, and the Caucasus and in general the countries of the former Soviet Union were areas in which it was underrepresented compared to many of its peers.

Secondly, in the wake of the 2020 war, Turner said that Canada felt "it was particularly important…to signal Canada's support for Armenia's sovereignty and territorial integrity." It also realized that it had less visibility on what was happening while operating from a distance through its Moscow embassy.

Thirdly, he said, Canada wanted to be in a position to work with partners in Armenia supporting democracy and continue to build people-to-people ties between the two countries.

Turner evaluated highly the August 2025 Washington agreements between Armenia and Azerbaijan mediated by the US, including the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), which he said could positively change the dynamics between the two countries, if the momentum can be sustained.

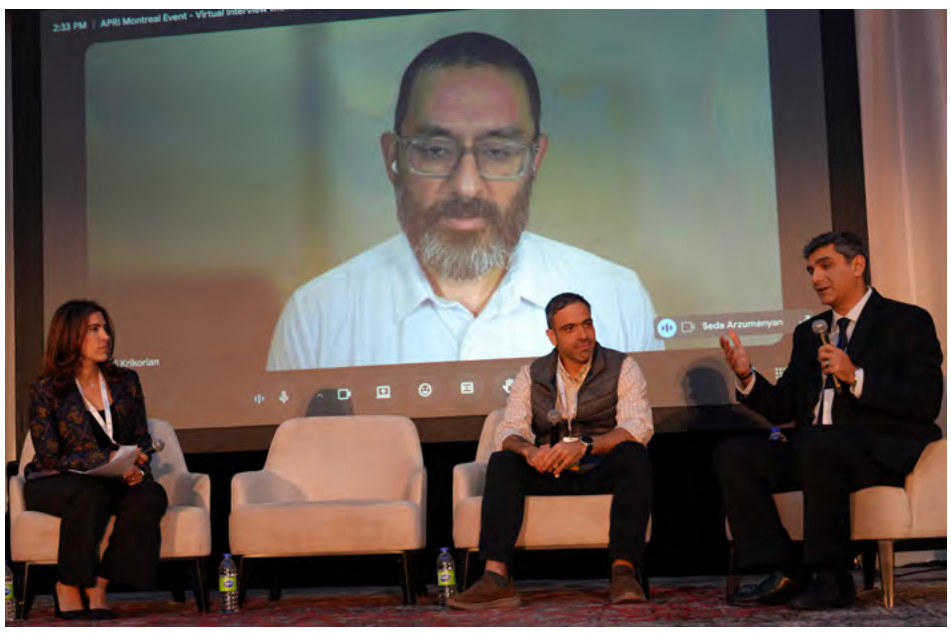


Amb. Andrew Turner and Lara Setrakian (photo Aram Arkun)

As far as Canadian-Armenian relations, Turner found that there was great potential for cooperation in the IT sector, agriculture and mining. Aside from the actual opening of the embassy in Yerevan, Turner said another important step during his tenure was the launch of the Canada-Eurasia Chamber of Trade and Economy, through which businesspeople can join the economies together in practical ways.

Armenak Minasyants on Public Administration Reform

APRI Vice President of Donor Relations Seda Arzumanyan interviewed APRI Senior Research Fellow Armenak Minasyants via Zoom on public administration reform in Armenia. Minasyants said that APRI Armenia's most important achievement is moving from identifying problems and researching them to contributing directly to policy development and reform discussions.



From left, Lara Setrakian, Raffi Krikorian (on screen), Ashot Arzumanyan, and Aleksandr Gevorkyan (photo Aram Arkun)

In a policy report published in May 2025, it identified systemic challenges and proposed concrete and practical solutions. In September of the same year, it submitted 15 recommendations through the government's online portal, and seven were fully or partially reflected in the government's revised management framework. Another important APRI achievement, according to Minasyants, was that APRI was selected to participate in the government's civil society advisory platform. Beyond that, APRI reaches out to international partners like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the German Development Agency.

Minasyan pointed to three main obstacles to turning commitments to reform into practical and sustainable results. There is fragmented coordination and unclear institutional ownership; limited institutional capacity to deliver due to a problem in what Minasyants diplomatically called human capital; and the measurement of success through processes completed rather than actual results of policy.

Minasyants said the role of the diaspora can be to connect international expertise to Armenia in a practical manner. The goal should be, he said, "a transfer of knowledge: the way we can adopt the best practices and strengthen our own institutional capacity."

High-Tech Armenia

Setrakian took the microphone again as moderator, with in-person panelists Dr. Aleksandr Gevorkyan, professor and Henry George Chair in Economics at the Peter J. Tobin College of Business at St. John's University, NYC; Ashot Arzumanyan, partner in SmartGateVC; and online participant Mozilla Chief Technology Officer Raffi Krikorian.

Krikorian said that the US-Armenia memorandum of understanding (MOU) on AI and semiconductors signed in August 2025 created an amazing headstart for Armenia but, he continued, "we need to start figuring out how we're actually going to use that technology to diffuse AI technology throughout Armenia as a country."

This means beyond access to necessary hardware to build a foundational software infrastructure that all Armenian companies, nonprofits and government agencies can use. This would be similar to the Internet as a set of open-source standards used by all kinds of institutions. One example he gave was a single Armenian large language model with a single set of Armenian data sets, on which every company can build its own applications.

In response to Setrakian's question as to whether a small country like Armenia could have its own sovereign ecosystem, Krikorian replied that many other countries have done it, include the much smaller country of Estonia. He said that he thought it was a question of willpower and investment for Armenia to build the necessary infrastructure. One way would be Armenia as a country and government coinvesting in shared infrastructure in the same way that years ago it invested in cellular phone infrastructure.

With Firebird's AI factory in Armenia, Krikorian said "We're pretty much now the envy of a lot of the smaller-sized countries across the entire planet." Armenia has computational infrastructure powered by Armenian power stations and run by Armenian people on its own territory, so it won't need to outsource. Cross-border relationships might lead to losing access abruptly to various AI models.

Gevorkyan pointed out that the IT sector should be considered an extractive sector in Armenia's economy. It contributes to socioeconomic disbalance, with the massive gap between the average wage in the IT sector and the rest of the economy, and its rising share of exports but it can be helpful if it is properly integrated with the rest of the economy. This means not just in the

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public sector, healthcare or education, but on a more advanced level too. Economic transformations of countries like South Korea, Gevorkyan said, provide instructive examples to learn from, including the need for guidance and investment (including from the diaspora).

Ashot Arzumanyan mentioned some of the top firms in tech right now in Armenia before declaring that AI is changing the situation in technology completely. He said, "It's something like a wake-up call for Armenia, because AI is coming after many things, but it also is coming after the existing model of tech industry that we know and that existed for the last few decades, based on which all the success happened."

He explained that in the world of start-up firms, the latter must either leverage the distribution so they can have access to markets or leverage the technology part. Armenia, not having a distribution advantage, has always capitalized on its technological talent, which bought it time to figure out distribution. However, this is now getting automated by AI and the next wave of Armenian companies cannot follow the same model.

This is where Firebird AI comes in, he said, because it is infrastructure that provides an ecosystem or highway for Armenia. "Now, are you using that highway or others are using that highway is the question right now in front of Armenia," he posited.

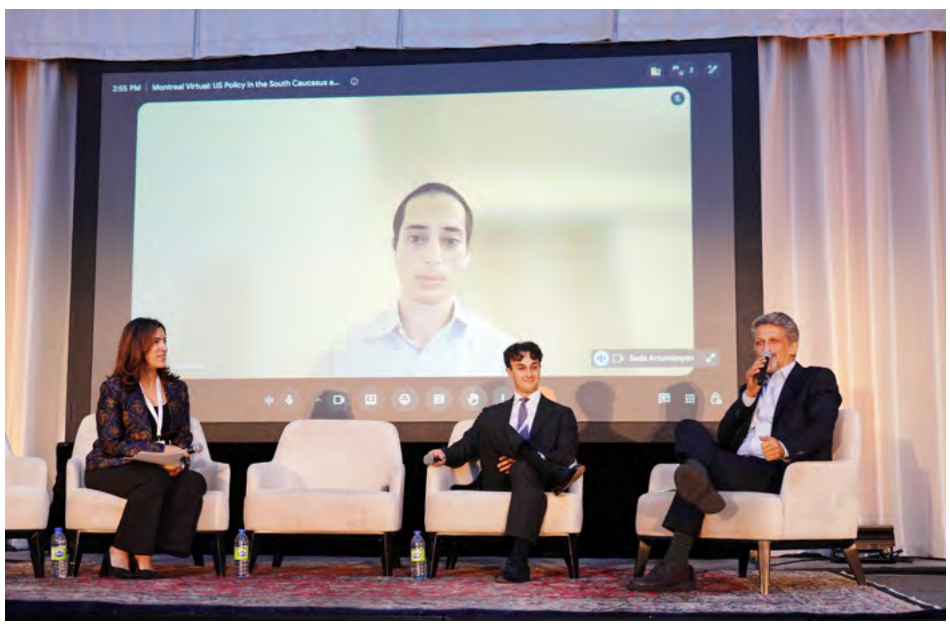
The panelists fielded a number of questions from the audience after their presentations.

Krikorian responded to a query on the environmental impact of the data centers. He was optimistic, declaring that unlike many data centers in the US powered by "dirty" energy sources, in Armenia there is full control over the power grid.

Gevorkyan suggested that while important, the IT sector is barely 5-7 percent of the GDP of the economy, and Armenians must pay attention to the difficult socio-economic reality outside of Yerevan too.



Nazareth Seferian and Lara Setrakian (photo Aram Arkun)



From left, Lara Setrakian, Shant Arzoumanian (on screen), Artin DerSimonian, Garo Paylan (photo Aram Arkun)

US Policy in the South Caucasus and TRIPP

The next panel, moderated again by Setrakian, was on US policy in the South Caucasus and the implementation of TRIPP. Central Bank of Armenia macro-economist Shant Arzoumanian participated remotely, while Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft Research Associate Artin DerSimonian and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace scholar and former Turkish Parliament member Garo Paylan were present in person.

Paylan began by stating that the August 8, 2025, Washington agreements stopped the prospect of renewed war between Armenia and Azerbaijan thanks to US President Donald Trump's intervention. This provides a window of opportunity, but Paylan said, "I don't think we are really benefitting enough of this window of opportunity."

Armenia is becoming the subject of great power rivalry, which is very dangerous, he continued, pointing to Georgia and Ukraine as object lessons of what can go wrong. The Armenia-Azerbaijan-Turkey peace process needs to move much faster, he said, so various governments need to pressure the latter two countries to move forward on it. Without peace with its neighbors, Paylan said fancy data centers in Armenia could be easily destroyed with cheap drones. Armenia also might be forced to again become a Russian satellite, if it grows stronger with a settlement of the Ukraine war.

Setrakian asked why Turkey is not opening up its border with Armenia. Paylan responded that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan does nothing for charity. Opening the border is a card to be used by Erdogan, whose economy is in bad shape, while there are many problems in the region. US President Joe Biden did not want to engage with Erdogan, Paylan said, and though Trump wants to, the Israel lobby opposes it due to current tensions between Israel and Turkey. Meanwhile Azerbaijan, which has huge economic leverage due to its investments in Turkey, also is obstructing it.

Paylan said that hopefully after the Israeli elections, things will settle down between Israel and Turkey and it will be easier for Trump to call Erdogan and ask for opening the Armenian border simply as a favor. This normalization will provide Armenia a lifeline, Paylan said. The goal should be for Azerbaijan and Turkey to become difficult neighbors, as opposed to enemies, he concluded.

Arzoumanian declared that the biggest economic gain from TRIPP is an immediate reduction in the risk of renewed Azerbaijani aggression, at least while Trump remains in office. After the August 2025 Washington declarations and announcement of TRIPP, the yield the Armenian government has to pay on its Euro bonds fell by half a percentage point, and it continues to decline, as a sign of increased investor confidence. While there is some limited bilateral trade it is largely performative and easily reversible.

TRIPP does not help, however, in enhancing Armenian connectivity with any other country, Arzoumanian said, as getting to its location in Syunik from other parts of Armenia is very difficult. If it will be followed up with the opening of Armenia's borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan, this would give Armenia direct rail access to Iran, which means access to India and South and East Asian countries as well as through Turkey to the EU and North Africa.

APRI estimated that TRIPP alone would generate close to $300 million, Arzoumanian said, but if all of Armenia's borders are unblocked, that goes up to about 1 ½ billion dollars a year. The yield of Armenian bonds would fall even more, easing the cost of financing for the Armenian government and for Armenian companies. Multilateral tourism would increase too, he said.

DerSimonian said that TRIPP originally was formulated in November 2020 as a Russian-backed project, which the US took over. The Trump administration, he said, consists of multiple cohorts with different interests, but the dominant thinking concerns China as a threat. China is one of a number of actors competing over multiple routes, rail, technology, and infrastructure including in Central Asia and the south Caucasus.

Paylan interjected that all the Central Asian countries are in favor of TRIPP because they no longer fully can trust the Georgian line of transportation/communication (and the US does not trust it). They want diversification in relations and transportation. However, he said that TRIPP without opening up other connections for Armenia would leave Armenia merely a landlocked transit country with few benefits where consequently people do not want to live.

US-Iran Tensions and the Future of the South Caucasus

The final panel concerned the US-Iran war. Moderated by Setrakian, its panelists were independent writer and practitioner Dr. Hrair Balian, Lawrence Livermore Laboratory Visiting Scientist Dr. Hriar Cabayan, APRI Armenia Research Fellow Sergei Melkonian, and George Mason University researcher Olesya Vartanyan.

Cabayan declared that the US-Iran war is not going positively for the US. The big concern, he said, is if the US withdraws from the region, which will neither be good for the region nor for Armenia.

Melkonian said that in Tehran, his contacts have different views on the outcome, with some saying that Iran should not just allow the Americans to walk away but should exact a price, while another group finds that there is no victory or defeat, so a deal should be negotiated. However, all seem to agree that it will not be possible to avoid another round of escalation.

Balian declared "from a conflict resolution negotiation point of view that negotiations, US negotiations with Iran, are not like negotiations on the 35th floor of the Trump Tower in New York City. Unfortunately, the US is approaching negotiations with Iran from that perspective and not from a geostrategic military political perspective. So I agree with that the prospects for ending this war are very slim, and we are likely to see an increase of hostilities after the November midterm elections in the US."

The risks for Armenia are many, he continued, including to TRIPP. Iran does not want to see its area in southern Armenia used as a front against it by the US or Israel. Armenia, Balian said, could reassure Iran by full transparency on TRIPP contracts and arrangements, as well as making sure Iran too could benefit from the TRIPP infrastructure. It could have a connection through it to Georgia and the Black Sea.

Balian also pointed out that one of the shortcomings of TRIPP is complete EU absence. Its involvement could have alleviated Iran's concerns about TRIPP being used as a US instrument against it and Russia.

Vartanyan agreed about the transparency and the need to look into the contracts and possible corruption. She also noted that the idea of having an international presence originated in discussions with the European Union, and having more actors involved is not a bad idea. However, Vartanyan agreed that the August 2025 White House deal did bring more stability to the region.

Closing Remarks

Setrakian introduced Chief Executive Officer of Impact Hub Yerevan Nazareth Seferian. Seferian spoke about Impact Hub's VIA Fund, which is the first impact investment fund for social enterprises in Armenia. The EU helped Impact Hub set up this fund, which then collected donations from individuals in Armenia and the diaspora.

Seferian said that it supports businesses which have a social mission, including Artsakh Armenians who are starting businesses in the Republic of Armenia.

One example is a laundry and ironing business called Ardook started by Shogher Atanesyan. Customers have someone pick up their clothes, which are sent to women who are able to do the work in their own homes, and then the clothing is picked up and delivered back to the customers. This allows women with children with disabilities who cannot go outside to work and do not have IT or online skills to still earn an income. Seferian gave several more examples of supported businesses.

At the close of the session, Setrakian and Seda Arzumanyan provided some more information about APRI's work, forthcoming activities, and how to become a member (https://apri.institute/how-to-donate/#membership).

INTERNATIONAL

Armenia to Link Power Network with Azerbaijan and Turkey for AI Energy

By Symela Touchtidou

YEREVAN (Euronews.com) — Just three years ago, Armenia and Azerbaijan were in the shadow of yet another bloody conflict. Today they are planning an electricity interconnection, with Turkey also in the picture.

Armenia has arrived on the global artificial intelligence (AI) map. And to keep its place, it needs electricity, partnerships and open borders.

Speaking at DigiTec 2026 in Yerevan, Armenia's prime minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that the country plans to connect its power grid with those of its two neighbors, Azerbaijan and Turkey.

He made the statement during a public discussion with Rev Lebaredian, vice president of Nvidia responsible for physical AI simulation.

"We will connect our grids with the electricity grids of Turkey and Azerbaijan. We are already connected with Iran and Georgia, and we are investing to make energy transmission more efficient," Pashinyan said.

He went on to announce that on Sunday, 22 November, the official launch will take place of TRIPP, the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" project, stressing that "a very important part of this initiative is energy and the transit of electricity."

"This is truly a very significant and incredible transformation," Pashinyan said. "The 'Crossroads of Peace' project is becoming reality."

The rapid growth of AI factories is sharply increasing Armenia's demand for electricity; Firebird alone plans infrastructure with a capacity of 300 megawatts by the end of 2027.

At DigiTec, Pashinyan revealed that eight months ago the country had surplus electricity capacity, whereas now the expansion of data centers is creating the need to look for import suppliers.

Nvidia vice president Rev Lebaredian also underlined the need for more energy: "How do we use our advantage now so that we can move from hundreds of megawatts to many gigawatts?" he asked the prime minister.

He noted that the country's current lead will not last forever; securing energy from more sources is critical if it is to make the most of it before other countries develop similar capabilities, he warned.

Lebaredian also linked energy interconnections to the prospect of lasting peace: by buying energy and providing AI services to its neighbors, Armenia can create mutual interests.

"We become important to each other and that will increase the chances of having peace that will last for a long time," he argued.

Pashinyan outlined a mix of measures: developing renewable sources, particularly solar, creating storage and improving energy efficiency in buildings and businesses.

He also reiterated the intention to build a new nuclear power plant. The international interconnections form part of this broader effort at diversification.

According to Armenian news agency ARKA, Armenia and Turkey have already discussed restoring and activating the existing but inactive Gyumri-Kars power line.

Armenia's determination to secure more computing power comes at a time when, in the US and in Europe, the expansion of data centers is provoking resistance over electricity supply, water use and the impact on local communities.

In an interview with Euronews, Lebaredian argued that much of this backlash reflects broader fears about AI and the way it is presented in public debate.

"I believe it is essentially a failure of leadership to describe in a positive way the future that AI will bring," he said.

In his view, the data center becomes a target because it is "the physical manifestation of AI."

"When people are told that this will take their jobs or will kill them, of course they will not want it," he said.

When the infrastructure is in their area, he added, they can go to the local government and say "I don't want it."

Asked about resource requirements, he acknowledged the need for more energy: "The more energy you have, the more AI you can produce."

He backed further development of sustainable sources, adding that "there is also nuclear energy, which we should be using much more."

On water use, he pointed to the option of closed-loop cooling systems, acknowledging that different technologies involve trade-offs between water consumption, energy use and cost.

"You can use different cooling systems, but the cost may go up because you need more energy for cooling. Evaporative cooling can be more energy-efficient," he explained. "In some places there is a surplus of water. It all depends on local conditions."

On noise, he noted that data centers can be located in sparsely populated areas. "The facility is here, in Hrazdan. No one complains about noise and such issues," he said, referring to Firebird's AI factory.

At the same time, he warned that delaying the development of infrastructure could create new dependencies for Western economies:

"If the US and Europe do not develop their own supply, they will simply have to import AI from the places that are developing it," he stressed.

Armenia Appoints New Russian Envoy

ENVOY, from page 1

His other assignments included serving as Armenia's chargé d'affaires in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia, deputy head of the country's mission to the OSCE, and deputy permanent representative to the United Nations offices in Vienna, the UN Industrial Development Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Arsenyan's departure follows months of speculation about his future in the post. Armenian media reported earlier this year that the authorities intended to replace him amid suggestions that he might have differences with the government over its pro-Western foreign policy. Arsenyan dismissed such reports in August, describing them as rumors.

On November 3, the Russian Foreign Ministry awarded Arsenyan its "For Cooperation" badge of honor for "his contribution to the development and strengthening of Russian-Armenian relations."

The new ambassador's appointment comes amid increasingly strained Armenian-Russian relations. Armenia's traditionally close ties with Russia have deteriorated in recent years as Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government has sought closer relations with the European Union and other Western partners. Moscow has repeatedly criticized Yerevan's foreign policy shift. Tensions have also been compounded by Russian trade restrictions affecting Armenian exports.

Pashinyan confirmed on November 19 that he plans to visit Moscow on December 3 for a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The two leaders are expected to discuss Russia's repeated calls for Armenia to choose between seeking to join the EU and remaining in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union.

Armenia Treats 3 Palestinian Children from Gaza

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

YEREVAN (OC-Media.org) — Three Palestinian children from Gaza arrived in Armenia this week to receive urgent specialist medical care. While this is the first time Palestinian children have come to Armenia to receive healthcare, the World Health Organization (WHO) has said that Armenia might offer treatment for more Palestinian children in the future.

Earlier in August, the Armenian government allocated 16.7 million drams ($43,000) to cover the transport and treatment costs of the three children, who have serious health conditions.



An Armenian doctor with a child from Gaza upon their arrival in Armenia for urgent medical care (photo via the World Health Organization)

While it is the first time that Gazan children have been flown to Armenia for care, Armenia has previously sent aid to Gaza. In March 2024, Armenia sent around 30 tons of humanitarian aid, and in June of the same year formally recognized the State of Palestine.

In a statement shared on November 20, the WHO's office in Armenia noted that Armenia welcomed the three children, who travelled with guardians, "for much-needed specialized medical care."

According to the WHO, two of the children "underwent successful surgery at a cardiac clinic," while the third was flown to Armenia to receive "specialist post-transplant care at a medical center." The child had previously undergone kidney and liver transplants.

"Once all the children are discharged, Armenia plans to review the mission's outcomes and explore continuing the initiative to save more children in need," the WHO said.

The organization also noted that their arrival is an outcome of the collaboration of Armenian Health and Foreign Ministries, along with the WHO, "with the support of partner countries."



Three Armenian ambulances arrives at the airport to collect children from Gaza who have travelled to Armenia for urgent medical care. Photo via the World Health Organization

Community News

Richmond Marks 70 Years of Faith And Service

RICHMOND, Va. — St. James Church of Richmond enjoyed a gorgeous November weekend as parishioners marked the 70th anniversary of its founding. Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan was guest of honor for the weekend of celebrations.

Seventy years of faith, friendship, fellowship and community-building are no small thing to commemorate. The weekend festivities began on Saturday, November 14, when Bishop Mesrop met with parish children and ACYOA Juniors and Seniors for an afternoon of casual conversation and a Q-and-A session.

In a special ceremony in the church sanctuary, young Gor Hakobyan was ordained as a *tbir*, and will now join his father in serving on the altar. Following the ceremony, the children participated in a special craft project, in which they made their own hand-



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan with Fr. Samuel Rith-Najarian

printed pomegranate ornaments, and carved *khatchkars* in clay. Parishioner homes will be decorated with these personalized treasures this Christmas. Helena and Mihran Ozbalik planned the afternoon and its activities.

On Sunday, November 15, Bishop Mesrop celebrated the Divine Liturgy, assisted by parish pastor Fr. Samuel Rith-Najarian. During *badarak* he ordained three subdeacons: Aram Hakobyan, Hayk Hekimyan and Puzant Balozian. The Primate encouraged the new subdeacons and *tbir* to love and serve the church with humility and grace. Following the ordination ceremony, he conferred a special blessing on the choir members and scripture readers, to whom he also gave the gift of new Bibles.

In his sermon on the church's current season of the Holy Cross, Bishop Mesrop reflected on how the cross was ultimately transformed from a symbol of pain and death into a symbol of everlasting life, faith, and love through Jesus Christ.

A sold-out banquet followed the church services. The afternoon featured Armenian food prepared by the parish's 70th anniversary committee members, with St. James' "Minister of Music" Devon Shiflett providing

see RICHMOND, page 8



Gasia Mikaelian, KTVU Channel 2 News Anchor and longtime friend of the St. Vartan community, served as emcee for the celebration

Oakland's St. Vartan Armenian Church Celebrates Centennial

By Kim Bardakian

OAKLAND, Calif. — It was an unforgettable evening filled with love, laughter, nostalgia and cherished memories as 225 parishioners, family and friends gathered on Sunday, November 15, to celebrate the centennial of St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church in Oakland.

The evening began with an unexpected and moving tribute as six members of the St. Vartan community surprised guests by standing up from different parts of the room to share personal memories and stories of their families' connections to the church across generations. Their heartfelt reflections set the tone for a very special night.



Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese, traveled to Northern California to deliver reflections and remarks at St. Vartan Armenian Church's Centennial celebration

Hundreds of historical photographs rotated on screens throughout the evening, while photo displays around the room brought decades of memories to life. During cocktail hour, "Hye Jazz: The Sons of St. Vartan," featuring parishioners Armen Boyd, Paul Rustigian, Jim Taylor and Mark Toomajian, set the mood. Entertainment included Barry Barsamian's spirited rendition of *Get Happy* and violinist Heghine Boloyan's beautiful performance of *The Dance of the Girls* from Aram Khachaturian's "Gayaneh," both accompanied by pianist Araks Aghazarian. St. Vartan's Dance Ensemble, featuring young girls and women under the direction of Hasmig Gregorian, delighted guests with traditional Armenian dances.

KTVU Channel 2 anchor Gasia Mikaelian served as the evening's emcee. In one particularly memorable moment, she read a long list of St. Vartan milestones and experiences,

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Guests held lit candles during a moment of silence honoring the St. Vartan Armenian Church members who are no longer with us, but whose legacy continues to inspire generations

HYEMINDS Raises Funds to Support AMAA's Avedisian School in Yerevan

By Christopher Abidian

WELLESLEY, MA —The Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) Boston Child Care Committee gathered friends and supporters November 13, at Wellesley Country Club for HYEMINDS, benefiting AMAA's Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan, Armenia. The evening reflected Greater Boston's Armenian community's commitment to providing children in the Homeland with the education and opportunities they deserve.

Since opening in 1998, the Avedisian School has grown from a small kindergarten into one of Armenia's leading educational institutions, providing tuition-free K–12 education to approximately 900 students annually. Its environmentally sustainable campus, made possible through the generosity of Edward and Pamela Avedisian, became Armenia's first building to earn LEED certification, an internationally recognized distinction for energy efficiency and environmentally responsible design.

This year's guest was Melanya Geghamyan, the school's founding principal, whose leadership has helped shape its academic excellence, nurture students, and preserve its Armenian cultural identity.



Melanya Geghamyan, Founding Principal of Avedisian School

The evening also featured Armenian-Canadian singer-songwriter Manet-Miriam Baghdassarian, whose appearances on "La Voix" (The Voice Canada) and "X Factor Armenia" introduced her voice to international audiences. Raised between Quebec and Armenia, she brought a performance rooted in both cultures to the HYEMINDS stage.

Susan Adamian Covo, Boston Child Care Committee co-chair, and Grace Bottomley, HYEMINDS event co-chair, welcomed guests. Prayers were offered by Very Rev. Father Hrant Tahanian of St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church in Watertown, Pastor Sevag Melkonian of First Armenian Church in Belmont, Rev. Dr. Ara Heghinian of Armenian Evangelical Church in Cranston, RI, Rev. Dr. Avedis Boynerian of

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Richmond Marks 70 Years of Faith And Service

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music on the piano. ACYOA members Anahit Hekimyan, Serly Sivakjian, and Sona Hekimyan performed a special dance, "Dzaghkeh Poonch" in honor of the occasion, and Serly Sivakjian and Knar Ayvazian read a poem, Vahan Tekeyan's "The Armenian Church," in Armenian and English, respectively.

Three special awards were presented to members who have attained distinctive status in our parish. John Barnonian was presented with the "Cornerstone Award" in recognition of his near century of service and dedication to St. James of Richmond. Linda Sharigian was honored with the "Legacy Award" for her years of service on the parish council, Women's Guild, and AVAKs group. Longtime deacon Koko Garabedian received the "Eternity Award" for his decades of service on the altar, and his assistance in training countless deacons.



Linda Sharigian honored with the "Legacy Award" for her years of service



John Baronian was presented with the "Cornerstone Award," after which Fr. Rith-Najarian hugged him

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary, St. James' fellowship hall was officially dedicated as "Magarian Hall" in honor of church benefactors and brothers, Robert and Henry Magarian.

Bishop Mesrop concluded the gathering by expressing thanks to pastor Fr. Samuel Rith-Najarian and Yn. Danielle, the parish council, the anniversary dinner organizers, and the entire community for their hospitality and dedication to serving the Armenian faithful in Richmond.

HYEMINDS Raises Funds to Support AMAA's Avedisian School in Yerevan

HYEMINDS, from page 7
Armenian Church of the Martyrs in Worcester, and Pastor Aram Bedrossian of Armenian Memorial Church in Watertown.

Committee Co-Chair Phyllis Dohanian introduced the program, recognizing guests, AMAA leadership, and committee members whose efforts made the gathering possible. She emphasized the evening's purpose: helping students build brighter futures through education. "Our first graduates are working in their jobs now. These are our next leaders," she proudly shared. A video produced by the AMAA team in Yerevan offered guests a look at the school's history and impact. Scenes of children learning and thriving accompanied Principal Geghamyan's reflections on her aspirations for every student. "More than anything, I want our students to graduate not only with knowledge, but with humanity — the qualities that make them human," she said.

The video concluded with reflections from Ani Martirosyan, an Avedisian School graduate and valedictorian, illustrating the lives shaped by the school's mission.

Serge D. Buchakjian, AMAA CEO and executive director, addressed the gathering, reaffirming the organization's commitment to Armenia's children. "What makes AMAA different from thousands of other charitable organizations? We care for the whole person," he explained. "Humanitarianism meets a need. Education opens a door. And evangelism brings faith, hope, and prayers."

Buchakjian then welcomed Geghamyan to the stage amid enthusiastic applause. Geghamyan shared the school's story, recalling her first meeting with Edward and Pamela Avedisian, whom she called "a truly noble couple." She recalled how it all began with a simple birthday wish. Asked what she wanted for her 90th birthday, Edward's mother Shooshanig Avedisian dreamed of establishing an orphanage for children in Armenia. With the support of her family, Rev. Dr. Movses Janbazian, former AMAA Executive Director, and the AMAA, that dream became a modest school in 1998. The couple's generosity helped it grow into today's institution, welcoming children from Armenia and the Diaspora, including those with special educational needs.



AMAA's Boston Child Care Committee members with Serge D. Buchakjian



Melanya Geghamyan presents a Special gift to the school benefactor Pamela Avedisian

In one of the evening's most touching moments, Geghamyan recalled Pamela's words at a graduation following Edward's passing: "I have now stepped into Ed's shoes, and I will do my utmost to ensure that the Avedisian School continues his work." Reflecting on her relationship with the couple, she added, "Whenever I look at the children at our school, my first thought is always of Edward Avedisian. I thank God that our paths crossed and that I had the privilege of knowing two people who loved Armenia so deeply."

She also shared a passage from the Bible, Micah 6:8, calling upon us to "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God." She reflected on how Edward embodied these principles throughout his life. In a fitting conclusion to her tribute, she presented Pamela with a special gift commemorating the school's journey from 1998 to 2026.

Following her remarks, Jeanmarie Papelian, Esq., HYEMINDS event co-chair, shared another reason to celebrate: Geghamyan had twice been named Principal of the Year in Armenia, a testament to her exceptional leadership and dedication.

Papelian then led the evening's "Let's Make a Difference" appeal, emphasizing the importance of continued generosity in sustaining the school's tuition-free mission.

Guests enjoyed dinner, musical entertainment, and a lively auction.

Dohanian delivered closing remarks, reinforcing the shared purpose uniting HYEMINDS supporters. The evening's success reflected the dedication of the Boston Child Care Committee, event co-chairs, committee members, benefactors, and families whose generosity sustains this work. Every contribution helps children pursue their dreams, develop their talents, and prepare to contribute to Armenia's future.

COMMUNITY NEWS

St. Sarkis Gala Esperanza Raises $200,000 for New Hall

SAN DIEGO — St. Sarkis Armenian Church hosted its Annual Bridge to the Future Gala — the Gala Esperanza — on Saturday, October 24at the Cape Rey Hilton in Carlsbad. The event raised $200,000 to build the Armenian Community Center, which broke ground this fall with the oversight of the St. Sarkis Trust Fund and Building Committees.

The Gala Mistress of Ceremonies, musician and composer Anna Grigorian, led the entertaining evening which featured professional flamenco dancers with live guitarist David De Alva, the lively Armenian DJ Lu Meli (Luiza Melikyan), a successful live auction led by Christopher Aslanian, and a video by Erik Amirkhanian about the latest updates on the new hall. Co-chairs Viviane and Lara Hagopian, as well as Parish Priest the Very Rev. Pakrad Dz. V. Berjekian, shared remarks for the audience of more than 150 patrons attending from across California.

The Gala Committee Berjekian, Chair Viviane Hagopian, Co-Chair Lara Hagopian, Arpy Adourian, Nora Balikian, Thalia Hagopian, Anahid Koumriqian, Kathy Kassardjian, Lisa Kradjian, Harry Krikorian, Sonia Serpekian. Youth volunteers included Milena Darbinyan, Artem Gulyan, Melinda Jasmine, Armain Mardirosian, Chris Koumriqian, Mari Kradjian, Jayaditya Sinha, Daron Tokatlian, Lucine Tokatlian and Alexandra Yacoubian.

Over the past 14 years, the galas have raised more than $2.5 million for the Bridge to the Future Campaign for the campus.



The members of the organizing committee

OBITUARY

Raphael Onnik Broukian

Dedicated to Family, Church

WATERTOWN — Raphael Onnik Broukian, a longtime resident of Watertown, passed away unexpectedly following a brief illness on November 14, 2026, at the age of 86.

He was born in Beirut on November 2, 1940, to the late Onnik and Sirazarte (Tavlouian) Broukian.

Raphael began serving the Armenian Church at the age of 6 as an acolyte at St. Nishan Cathedral. He later joined the choir, where he sang until his move to America.

He graduated from AGBU Hovagimian-Manougian Secondary School for Boys and went on to work as a draftsman for an Armenian-American-owned company in Beirut. During this time, he also pursued his passion for photography, working part-time for his brother-in-law at Photo Ani.

Just prior to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War, Raphael followed his family to America in search of a better life. Upon arriving in Watertown in 1974, Raphael made it his permanent home. In 1983, he met and married his cherished wife, Astgik (Atiniz) Broukian. He worked as a draftsman until his retirement in 2003.

From the moment he arrived, Raphael immersed himself in the Armenian community. He joined the AGBU Youth Group, where he was active until 1976, before becoming involved with the Tekeyan Cultural Association as one of its earliest members. He later joined the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party, serving as its treasurer and assisting with the financial affairs of numerous Armenian organizations, a responsibility entrusted to him because of the confidence and respect he earned within the community. Raphael also served on numerous cultural committees and, in the 1990s, became one of the founding members of the Armenian Cultural Committee of Greater Boston. He was a man of principle, determined and steadfast in his beliefs, particularly when it came to Armenian community and cultural matters.



Raphael was also a devoted member of St. James Armenian Church in Watertown from the time of his arrival in America. He sang weekly in the church choir and was a member of Hayr Oshagan's Erevan Choral Society for many years. He was a dedicated weekly volunteer at St. James Tuesday Night Bingo. As his health declined and he was no longer able to sing in the choir, he could be found sitting in the pews each week alongside his dear wife, Astgik. His faith was central to his life, and he passed that devotion on to his son, Shant, who went on to serve the church and was ordained a deacon. St. James was truly Raphael's spiritual home, where he found comfort, peace, and a sense of belonging. Even when his health no longer permitted him to attend services, the church remained ever present in his thoughts and in his heart.

Raphael treasured his family. He was the husband of 43 years to Astgik and the father of Dr. Shant Onnik Broukian and his wife, Erica, of Marshfield. He was the grandfather of Narek and Nazeli Broukian. He was the brother of the late Mary Heghinian and Meguerdich Broukian. He is also survived by his sister-in-law, Rita Broukian, of California, and brother-in-law, Krikor Heghinian, of Belmont, as well as two generations of loving nieces, nephews, extended family members, and dear friends.

The funeral took place on Monday, November 23, at St. James Armenian Church, with Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Diocesan Primate, officiating and Archbishop Vicken Aykazian. Internment followed at Ridgelawn Cemetery, Watertown.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to: St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472.

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Antranik (Anton) Sarkis Aghdamlian

WATERTOWN — Antranik (Anton) Sarkis Aghdamlian of Watertown, MA, passed peacefully on November 14, 2026 at the age of 87.

Born on September 12, 1939, in Beirut, Lebanon, he was the son of the late Sarkis Aghdamlian and Azniv (Kupelian) Aghdamlian, and brother to Toros and Haigouhie.

Antranik married his wife Lucie Kazanjian in June 1971 and a few years later immigrated with her to the United States, settling in Watertown. Here they built a happy life together, which culminated in over 55 years of marriage.

Antranik was a jeweler by profession. His work demanded precision, patience, and creativity, qualities that extended beyond his profession into his outlook on life and his relationships with others. Just as he appreciated the elegance of fine details in his craft, he recognized the unique qualities and worth of every individual. He approached people with kindness, thoughtfulness, and genuine interest, taking the time to listen, understand, and appreciate their viewpoints. His attention to detail was reflected not only in the beauty of his creations, but also in the care and consideration he showed to those around him, leaving a lasting impression of warmth, respect, and generosity.

Beyond his professional life, Antranik enjoyed the opera, yoga, reading, and especially spending time with friends and



family. He was a devoted member of Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge, and maintained a meaningful connection to his Armenian heritage and faith throughout his life.

Antranik was a former chairman of the Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter.

He is survived by his beloved wife Lucie Aghdamlian, his sister-in-law Silva Aghdamlian, his nephews and nieces Sarkis Aghdamlian, Naira Aghdamlian Simon, Annie Aghdamlian Pugeat, Maral Ounjian, Vazken Eskijian, and grandnephews.

His funeral service took place at Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge, on Thursday, November 19, and interment was at Mount Pleasant Cemetery, Arlington.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Resilience: Nearly 50 Years After 'The Proud Armenians,' a Legacy of Identity and Pride Continues

By Joyce Naltchayan Boghosian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WASHINGTON — In the June 1978 issue of *National Geographic* magazine, Armenians were featured for the first time in a story titled "The Proud Armenians." My father, Harry Naltchayan, an award-winning photographer for the *Washington Post*, initiated the story with the support of the Armenian General Benevolent Union and philanthropist Alex Manoogian.

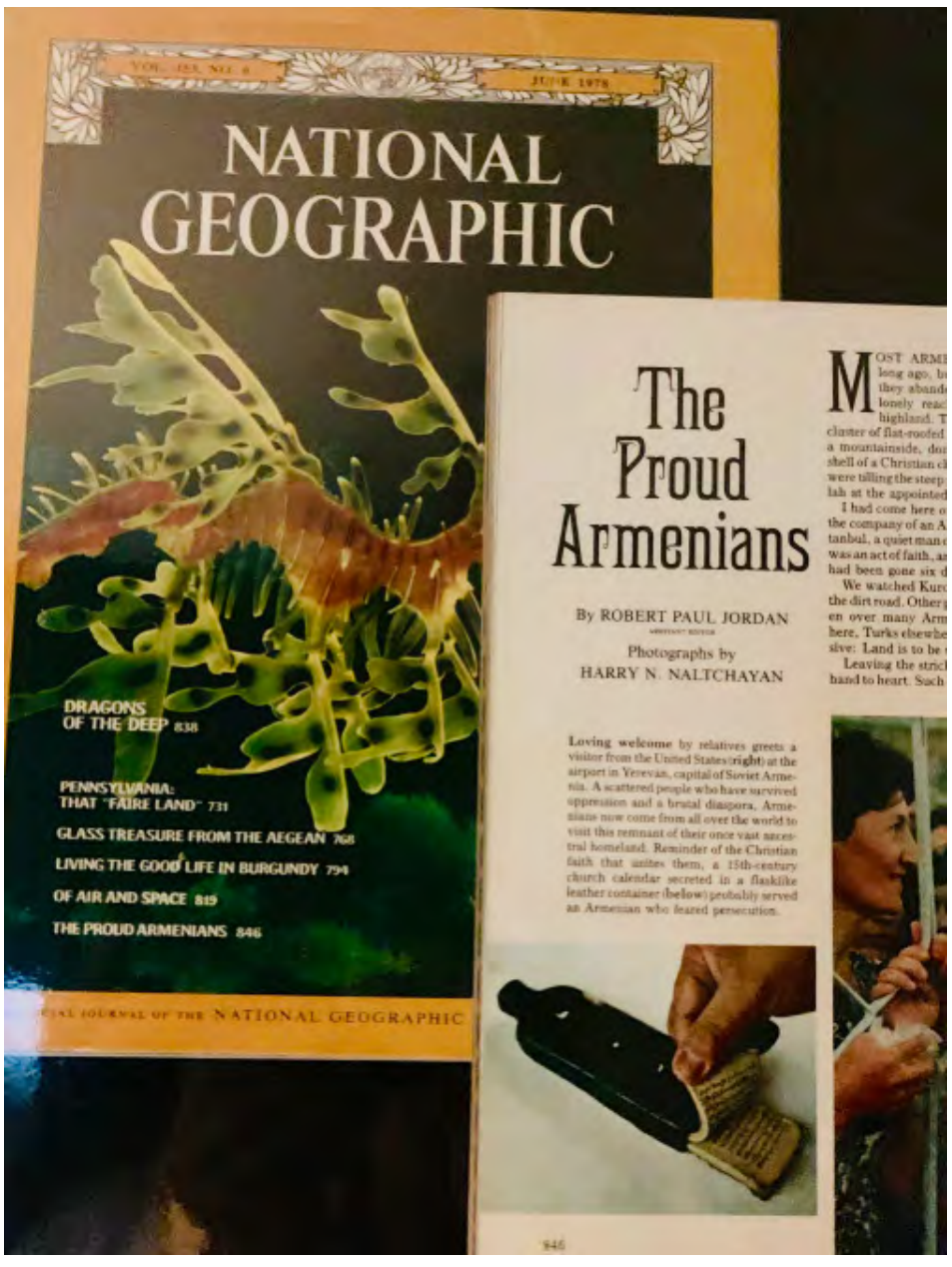
My father traveled with writer Robert Jordan to Soviet Armenia, Lebanon, the Armenian monastery on the island of San Lazzaro in Venice, and throughout the United States, highlighting the resilience and success of Armenians in their homeland and throughout the diaspora.

This particular issue sold out completely and found its way into almost every Armenian household. In fact, I still meet people today who proudly tell me they have kept their June 1978 issue, its pages perhaps dusty with age, but still treasured in their libraries. The story was a phenomenon. Until then, very few people were familiar with Armenians. The publication generated such great excitement that my parents, my brother and I went on the road with my father's storytelling slideshow, visiting Armenian church parishes throughout the United States.

Today, at 58, I find myself looking back at that story as I reflect on our past and present with a new perspective, one shaped by a deeper appreciation of how far we have come.

What was once defined by survival has, in so many ways, become a story of endurance, renewal and flourishing. I cannot help but celebrate in my heart the extraordinary strength of our Armenian identity and the cultural legacy we continue to carry forward, nearly 50 years later, as proud Armenian Americans.

As I reflect on 2025–2026, more than a century after the Armenian Genocide, I am struck by how deeply Armenian identity continues to resonate across generations and borders. Throughout this period, I have experienced moments that stirred a familiar sense of pride, nostalgia and belonging. I listened to Siberian-born Armenian violinist and author Nuné Melikian perform Arno Babadjanian's Violin Concerto with the Albemarle Symphony Orchestra in Charlottesville, Virginia. In Boston, I watched the Armenian Lacrosse Team, a group of Armenian American women from across the United States, win its first game at the 2025 Heritage Lacrosse Cup, with the dream of one day representing Armenia at the Olympic Games.





Administrator and co-director Ayk Haddeciyan of Marmara newspaper holds a newly printed copy as the daily paper is printed on Saturday, March 7, 2026, in Istanbul, Turkey. The Armenian-language daily newspaper is published since 1940. (Photo by Joyce Naltchayan Boghosian)

In Istanbul, Turkey, I felt a sense of home walking through the Three Horan Armenian Church with Fr. Harutyun Damadyan. Later, I stood in awe at the offices of the Armenian newspaper *Marmara*, founded in 1940, watching that day's edition roll off the printing presses. In Washington, D.C., I felt a profound sense of representation when I saw the Armenian flag outside the West Wing of the White House and watched Armenia's prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, on the global stage. And finally, last September, I witnessed Armenian bishops representing the Diocese, Prelacy, Catholic and Evangelical churches pray the *Hayr Mer* in the Armenian language in the Oval Office with the president of the United States.

A more personal experience has inspired me to revisit "The Proud Armenians," nearly 50 years later. In August 2025, my 23-year-old son, Nareg, enlisted in the US Air Force as an Airman First Class. He moved from the greater Washington, D.C., area to Scott Air Force Base in the St. Louis metropolitan area of Illinois, also known as the Gateway to the West. We packed his car and drove halfway across the country for his permanent change of station, taking him to a new home where he knew no one.



Airman First Class Nareg Boghosian graduates from basic training on Thursday, October 23, 2025 at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas (Photo by Joyce Naltchayan Boghosian)

Two hours into our journey, I cold-called a parish council member, Paul Nersessian, who lives in Belleville, Illinois. I had received his contact information from an acquaintance.

Paul insisted that I notify him as soon as we arrived in the area. Ten minutes after reaching our destination, we were already sitting with him in person, immediately feeling a sense of belonging. That single connection became our

continued on next page



President Donald Trump meets with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia in the Oval Office, Friday, August 8, 2025 (Official White House Photo by Joyce N. Boghosian)



President Donald J. Trump meets with Armenian faith leaders alongside White House Faith Office Advisor Paula White-Cain in the Oval Office, September 16, 2026 (Official White House Photo by Joyce N. Boghosian)

COMMUNITY NEWS



The Armenia Women's National Lacrosse Team wins its first game at the 2025 Heritage Cup on Saturday, May 24, 2025, in Weston, Massachusetts (Photo by Joyce Naltchayan Boghosian)



Diocesan Primate Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan ordains Nareg Boghosian as rank of an acolyte on Sunday, August 16, 2026 at Holy Virgin Mary & Shoghagat Armenian Church in Belleville, Illinois, on the Feast of the Assumption (Photo by Joyce Naltchayan Boghosian)

from previous page

gateway to a new Armenian family at Holy Virgin Mary and Shoghagat Church, a parish whose roots reach back to one of the earliest Armenian settlements in America, dating to the mid-1890s.

A second wave of Armenian immigrants arrived in the greater St. Louis area in the early 1900s, including around 1907, driven from their homes by Ottoman persecution and massacres. Having lived on the East Coast and traveled frequently to the West Coast throughout my life, I was well aware of the vibrant Armenian communities on both sides of the United States. But I had never stopped to wonder about the approximately 400 families who make up the thriving Armenian community in the heartland of America.

Made up of multigenerational Armenian Americans, along with families whose roots trace back to Baku, Bulgaria and throughout the Middle East, this Armenian community is radiant. What once drew Armenian immigrants to the region in search of blue-collar work has evolved into a diverse community of lawyers, engineers, computer scientists, government contractors, physicians, musicians, educators, business owners and military servicemembers, including a veteran who received a Purple Heart.

It has now been a year since Nareg began living at Scott Air Force Base, just 15 minutes from Holy Virgin Mary and Shoghagat Church. During this time, the church has been anticipating the arrival of its incoming priest and his family from Armenia. In the meantime, longtime parishioner and Deacon George Marifian has faithfully led the community in prayer and worship.

Deacon Marifian has also become a strong influence in Nareg's life, facilitating his ordination as an acolyte by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan on the Feast of the Assumption of the Holy Mother of God this past August.

What began as a cross-country drive to an unfamiliar place became something much more meaningful. We discovered that even far from home, there was a place where Nareg could feel connected to his heritage, his church and a new Armenian family.



Siberian-born Armenian violinist and author Nuné Melikian performs Arno Babadjanian's Violin Concerto with the Albemarle Symphony Orchestra, Saturday, March 28, 2026, in Charlottesville, Virginia (Photo by Joyce Naltchayan Boghosian)

Nearly 50 years later, I realize that the story my father helped tell in "The Proud Armenians" is still unfolding today in communities both familiar and unexpected, in the lives of our children, and in all of us who continue to carry it forward as proud Armenians.

Joyce Naltchayan Boghosian has photographed seven sitting presidents throughout her career. Mentored by her father, award-winning Washington Post Photographer Harry Naltchayan, she currently serves as an Official White House Photographer documenting the presidency for historical record. The views expressed in this article are her own and do not represent those of the White House or the US government.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Oakland's St. Vartan Church Celebrates Centennial

CENTENNIAL, from page 7

inviting guests to stand and remain standing as each applied to them, from being baptized or married at the church to attending Sunday School, playing on church sports teams, singing in the choir and much more. As the list continued, more and more guests rose to their feet until the entire room was standing, a powerful and emotional reminder of the many connections shared across generations.

Guests heard remarks from parish priest Fr. Krikor Zakaryan, Parish Council Chairperson Nazar Jindoian and inspiring words from Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, who traveled from Los Angeles to be present. Former parish priest Fr. Hovel Ohanyan, visiting from Armenia, was in attendance, as were all Bay Area Armenian priests.

Adding some humor and nostalgia, Dn. Steve Donikian, joined by Wartkes Hagopian, led a playful time capsule skit, presenting memorable items from St. Vartan's past for consideration in the 2126 time capsule.

A touching tribute video, narrated by renowned sports broadcaster Matt Vasgerdsian, took guests through 100 years of St. Vartan history, featuring rare footage of the church's consecration, treasured memories and heartfelt messages from the parish's youngest Sunday School children, reminding everyone that the future of St. Vartan is in good hands.



Northern California clergy gathered with Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese, and special surprise guest Fr. Hovel Ohanyan, former St. Vartan parish priest, who traveled from Armenia for the Centennial celebration



Hye Jazz: The Sons of St. Vartan, comprised of longtime church members, entertained guests during the cocktail reception

As the evening drew to a close, the room dimmed as guests held glowing candles for a moment of silence, remembering the loved ones, clergy and generations of parishioners whose dedication helped build the St. Vartan we know today. Following this moving tribute, the St. Vartan Choir, led by Artin Der Minassians, brought everyone together in singing *Yerevan-Erebuni*. In a beautiful and fitting finale, the choir and entire audience stood together, candles in hand, to sing the *Hayr Mer* (The Lord's Prayer), filling the room with a powerful sense of faith, unity and love.

The memorable celebration was the result of months of tireless planning and dedication by the Centennial Committee, led by Annette Kevranian under the direction of Fr. Krikor Zakaryan.

More than a centennial celebration, the evening was a beautiful reminder that St. Vartan is not simply a church, but a family, a community and a legacy of faith, friendship and love spanning generations.



The St. Vartan Dance Ensemble celebrated Armenian heritage with a performance of traditional Armenian dances during the Centennial celebration



Deacon Steven Donikian and Wartkes Avakian entertained guests with a lighthearted skit featuring a time capsule during St. Vartan's Centennial celebration



Members of the St. Vartan Armenian Church Centennial Committee, who helped organize the celebration honoring 100 years of faith, family and community

Arts & Culture

City of Smile USA Raises More than $70,000 at 'Mystical Illusions' Fundraiser to Support Children Battling Cancer

WATERTOWN — City of Smile USA announced this week that its fundraising event on November 12, "Mystical Illusions," at Oakley Country Club, raised more than $70,000 to support children battling cancer in Armenia.

The evening brought together community members, philanthropists and supporters united by a shared commitment to advancing access to essential cancer treatment and care for children and their families during some of life's most challenging moments.

Guests enjoyed an evening featuring magician Joel Acevedo of Boston's Four-Handed Illusions, whose combination of comedy and skills captivated the audience with magic, wonder, and excitement.

The event also featured cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, and both silent and live auctions, creating an engaging atmosphere where long-time supporters reconnected and new supporters learned more about City of Smile.

Beyond the entertainment, Mystical Illusions demonstrated the generosity of a community committed to making a lasting difference.

The funds raised represents an important contribution toward City of Smile's ongoing mission to support children facing cancer in Armenia. We're excited that even more children will ring their own victory bells in 2027.

Through its initiatives, City of Smile works to improve access to essential medical treatment, professional development of practitioners, access to prosthetics, and psychosocial support, among others.

"I'm sincerely grateful for the support our community has shown for City of Smile and its mission. Our friends and supporters turned out on a rainy evening to send a message to children in need that they are not alone in their battle.", stated Katrina Menzigian, Co-Chair, City of Smile USA.

"The kids we save today are the future of Armenia tomorrow," added Cynthia Kazanjian, Board Director, City of Smile USA.

The success of the evening was made possible through the dedication of the City of Smile USA Board, event organizers, sponsors, volunteers, donors, and attendees.

City of Smile USA is the U.S.-based fundraising and philanthropic partner of City of Smile Armenia. Through fundraising, donor engagement, and strategic partnerships, City of Smile USA supports comprehensive cancer care programs for children and young adults in Armenia. City of Smile USA is a 501(c)3 organization. To learn more, visit www.cityofsmile.org.



Hovhannes Davtyan (photo Aram Arkun)

Yerevan Comedian Davtyan Brings Nostalgia And Laughs to Boston

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

BELMONT, Mass. — Belmont High School briefly turned into an outpost of Armenia, as hundreds of Armenians crowded into the school auditorium to hear comedian Hovhannes Davtyan, hosted by the Hye Cultural Alliance (HCA). The entire show was in Eastern Armenian, and though Armenians from the Republic of Armenia seemed to be the majority of the audience, there were all types of Armenians present.

An introduction by Raya Gevorgyan of the HCA encouraged donations to the Lousé Foundation, a nonprofit rehabilitation and family support center in Yerevan which helps children with disabilities and various developmental needs through special education and rehabilitation programs. A part of the proceeds from the evening event will be donated to this foundation and a short video about the foundation was screened.

Davtyan began by asking whether anyone in the audience would like to speak with him. He asked the responders their names, who they came with and their professions, and made light-hearted comments during these exchanges. Many

see COMEDY, page 15



A group of the Boston organizers of the show with Hovhannes Davtyan (photo courtesy HCA)

Composer Mary Kouyoumdjian's *Paper Pianos* Nominated for Grammy Award

NEW YORK— Mary Kouyoumdjian's *Paper Pianos*, performed by Alarm Will Sound under conductor Alan Pierson, has been nominated for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance. The nomination, announced on November 16, recognizes the ensemble's recording of Kouyoumdjian's composition, a contemporary classical work inspired by the experiences of refugees who fled war, persecution and political violence.

The piece is rooted in support for those displaced and forced to seek a better life. In fact, she has a website which amplifies the stories of survivors, as well as organizations that offer help.

The piece was a 2024 Pulitzer Prize finalist. That year, the Pulitzer Prize Committee described it as: "A socially urgent multi-media work that boldly melds music and audio documentary with first-person stories of refugees, exploring how music



Mary Kouyoumdjian

serves as solace and inspiration under conditions of displacement."

Her composition *Keep Your Eyes Open* had its world premiere with the Tampere Philharmonic last month, on September 29th, and has US performances this spring with the Naples Philharmonic and Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra.

Her opera "Adoration," adapted from Atom Egoyan's 2008 film, was commissioned, developed, produced, and premiered by Beth Morrison Projects in New York City before receiving its West Coast premiere at LA Opera to rave reviews. The world premiere recording was released on Bright Shiny Things in August 2025 and was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording, making history as the first opera by an Armenian composer in the category.

She is a first-generation Armenian-American, and almost all of her works are social commentary. She draws on a sonic palette rooted in her heritage, including family directly affected by the Lebanese Civil War and

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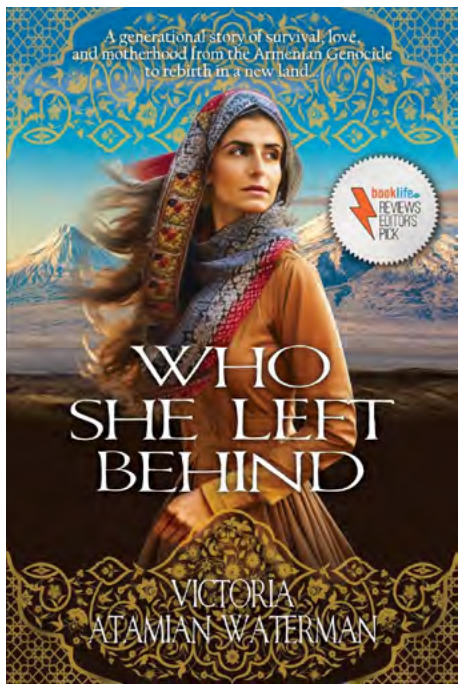
ARTS & CULTURE

Two Armenian Authors Earn Top Honors in 2026 Indie Author Project Annual Contest

Two Armenian literary works have earned national recognition in the 2026 Indie Author Project (IAP) Annual Contest, with *Who She Left Behind* by Victoria Atamian Waterman named the Historical Fiction category winner and *Mule Cart* by Arpie Cherchian Cort and David Louis Cort named runner-up in Children's Picture Books.

The prestigious annual competition recognizes outstanding independently published books from authors across North America. Both works stood out among this year's entries, recognizing their authors and celebrating the power of storytelling across generations and genres. This year's contest was open to submissions across the U.S. and Canada and received a remarkable response of almost 4,000 submissions, almost 1,000 more than last year's total. Each category was reviewed by librarian-led panels, who carefully and discerningly evaluated submissions, elevating books that demonstrate outstanding craft, original voice, and reader appeal.

As the category winner, Waterman will receive a $2,500 cash prize for *Who She Left Behind*. Cherchian Cort and Cort will receive a $500 cash prize for their runner-up recognition for *Mule Cart*. Both books will also receive inclusion in *Library Journal*'s December Best of Books issue, recognition at the Indie Author Project Awards Reception, opportunities for promotion through public libraries and eligibility for inclusion in IAP Select Commercial Collections.



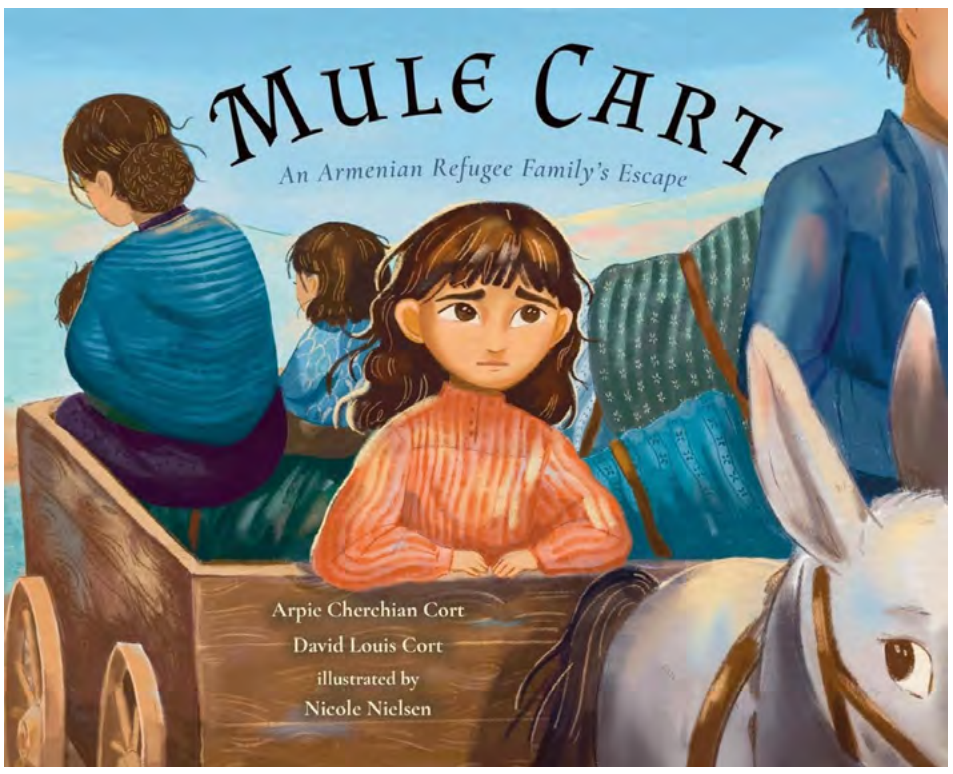
Who She Left Behind is a work of historical fiction inspired by Waterman's Armenian family history and the experiences of her ancestors who survived the 1915 Armenian Genocide and rebuilt their lives in America. Spanning generations and continents, the novel gives voice to the resilience, courage and enduring legacy of Armenian women. Waterman is an Armenian-American author, speaker and retired nonprofit executive. Waterman also developed a complimentary Educators' Guide to help middle and high school teachers incorporate the novel into classroom discussions about genocide, history, and the importance of preserving personal narratives.

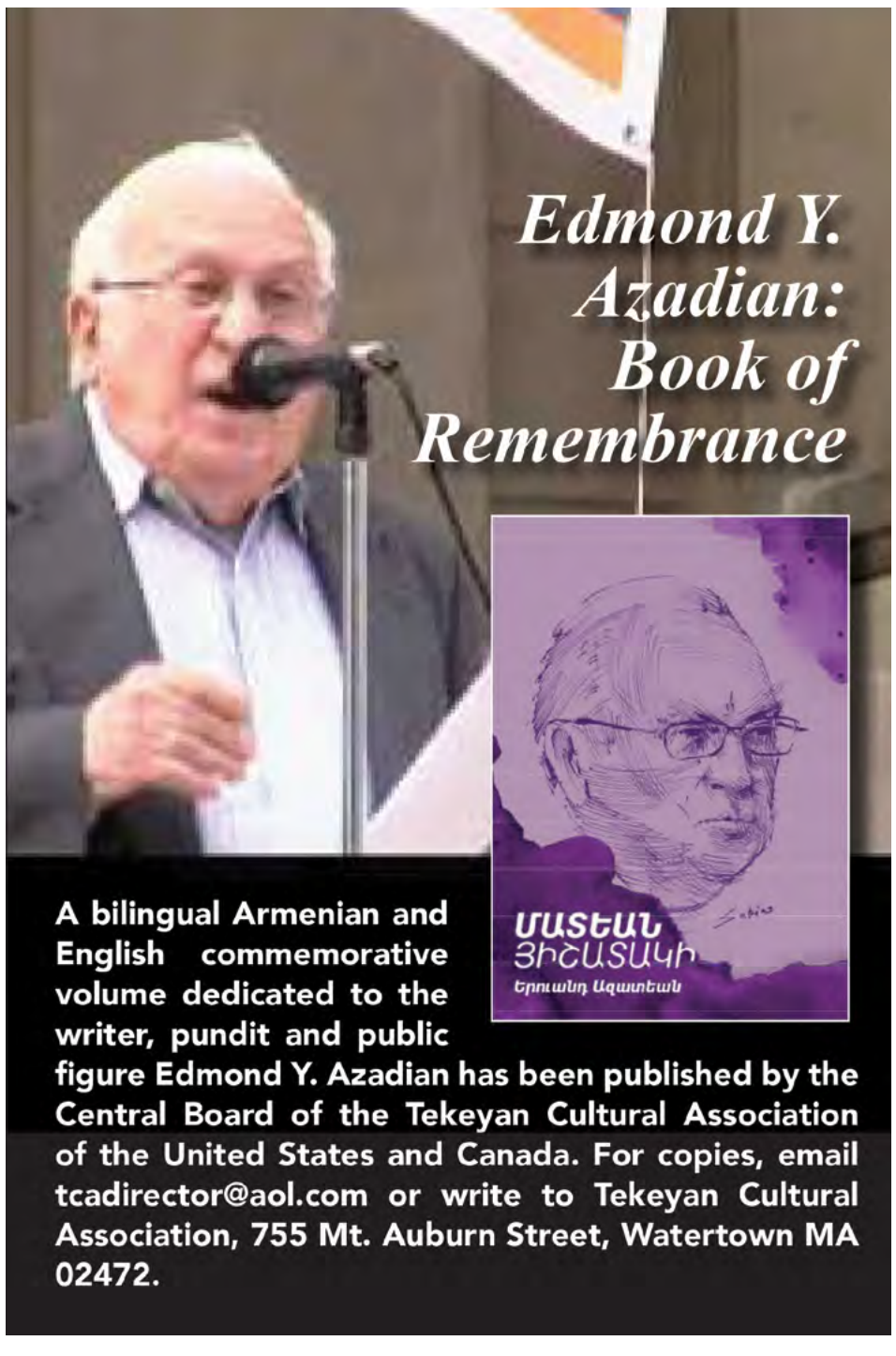
Mule Cart by Arpie Cherchian Cort and David Louis Cort brings Armenian storytelling to young readers through a children's picture book. The recognition highlights the importance of sharing stories and cultural heritage with the next generation. The story is based on true stories from Arpie's family about how they had to flee Aintab, Turkey for Aleppo, Syria. Through this realistic fiction picture book for elementary-aged readers, they share a story of courage, resilience, and hope. Cherchian Cort and Cort are teachers and authors with a passion for writing Armenian stories, especially for children.

The Indie Author Project Annual Contest celebrates excellence in independently published ebooks across nine categories: Mystery/Thrillers, Romance, Science Fiction, Fantasy, Historical Fiction, General/Contemporary Fiction, Memoir, Young Adult, and Children's Picture Books. Through its partnership with libraries and the publishing community, the program helps exceptional independent authors reach new readers and gain broader recognition.

Who She Left Behind and Mule Cart are available on Amazon and at indie bookstores including Armenian Museum of America, NAASR, Abril Books, Armenian Prelacy Bookstore, and Bookshop.org

For more information about the Indie Author Project, visit IndieAuthorProject.com.





Composer Mary Kouyoumdjian's *Paper Pianos* Nominated for Grammy Award

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the Armenian Genocide. Combining her interest in music as documentary with a background in experimental composition, she progressively blends the old with the new. A strong believer in freedom of speech and in the arts as an amplifier of expression, she often integrates recorded testimonies of resilient individuals with field recordings of place, inviting empathy by humanizing complex experiences of social and political conflict.

Kouyoumdjian is currently at work on a new viola piece for Hank Dutt, a former violist of the Kronos Quartet, as well as several large-scale works. Kouyoumdjian has received commissions for such organizations as the New York Philharmonic, Kronos Quartet, Carnegie Hall, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Beth Morrison Projects/OPERA America, Alarm Will Sound, Bang on a Can, International Contemporary Ensemble, Brooklyn Youth Chorus, the Houston Symphony, American Composers Forum, Roomful of Teeth, WQXR, REDSHIFT, Experiments in Opera, Helen Simoneau Danse, the Nouveau Classical Project, Music of Remembrance, Friction Quartet, Ensemble Oktoplus, and the Los Angeles New Music Ensemble, among others.

She is on faculty at The New School and is based in Brooklyn, NY.

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.

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian



Ghapama

"Fall = pumpkin season, this we know. While for so many that may be synonymous with Halloween, or pumpkin spice everything and anything, for many Armenians, it's usually a reminder to make ghapama. You know, the stuffed pumpkin that has an entire song dedicated to it? I didn't grow up eating this dish, but had the pleasure of trying it in Armenia for the first time. I was immediately drawn to its beauty as a centerpiece, and watching it being cut open is truly delightful sight," says Lena Tashjian. "Ghapama (Armenian: ղափամա) is a traditional Armenian stuffed pumpkin dish typically prepared as a festive centerpiece during the autumn harvest, New Year and Armenian Christmas on January 6th."



Lena Tashjian

Lena is a writer and recipe developer based in Canada. As a diasporan Armenian who has lived in and traveled throughout Armenia, she is very enthusiastic about sharing plant-based recipes and stories from both Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora.

As Liana Aghajanian writes in Dining in Diaspora:

"A memoir published in the 1960s about the many centuries old Armenian neighborhoods of Evereg and Fenesse (often referred to as Evereg-Fenesse) in the Kayseri region of central Turkey references the ghapama, this time made with meat and cooked with eggplant and a little water in a *tonir*, a traditional clay oven used in Armenian cooking. Similarly, the Soviet Armenian Encyclopedia, 'Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran' published in the 1970s includes an entry for ghapama, which it defines as an 'Armenian dish of lamb, onion and basil stuffed inside of cored onions or in the stomach of the lamb and cooked for around five hours, covered in a lid made with dough.' There's also mention of the version we know today: a pumpkin, stuffed with boiled rice, raisins, oil, honey and spices. It is so very Armenian that Harout Pamboukjian, an Armenian-American pop singer who is such a transnational treasure that we would enshrine him in gold and cast his profile on coins if we could, has an entire song dedicated to the dish called 'Hey Jan Ghapama.' The song is wholly about this gourd of wonder, detailing bringing a ripe pumpkin home, chopping up ingredients and putting it in the oven and having 100 people, including various relatives and sisters-in-law and cousins show up to eat it (because that's how good it is)."

"While ghapama is certainly a treat for eyes, the medley of flavors makes it a treat for the taste buds as well," says Lena.

INGREDIENTS:

1 medium pumpkin
3 tablespoons coconut oil or vegan butter (for coating pumpkin and for rice)
2 cups long-grain white rice, cooked
1⁄3 cup dried apricots, chopped
1⁄3 cup dried plums, chopped, or cranberries
1⁄3 cup raisins or currants
1⁄3 cup walnuts, crushed
1⁄4 to 1⁄3 cup simple syrup (or maple syrup)
1 1⁄2 tablespoons cinnamon
1⁄2 tablespoon ginger powder (optional)
1 teaspoon drive cloves (optional)
1⁄2 cup fresh pomegranate arils (optional)
5 tablespoons boiling water
Salt, to taste

PREPARATION:

Preheat oven to 450°F.

Cut "lid" off pumpkin and remove pulp, setting the seeds aside. Using your hands, coat pumpkin in 1 to 1 and 1⁄2 tablespoons of coconut oil or vegan butter. Add a few pinches of salt.

Mix remaining coconut oil (or vegan butter) into the warm rice and stir so it melts. Add the spices and stir. Add the dried fruits and walnuts and stir. Finally, drizzle in the simple syrup and stir.

Stuff pumpkin with the mixture and add the hot water. Cover pumpkin with its "lid," trimming the stem if necessary, and place it on a tray in the oven.

Bake for approximately 1 hour, piercing with a knife before removing, to check if it's ready. (It will be very soft when ready.)

Cut the pumpkin in thick wedges, topping each wedge with fresh pomegranate arils (optional).

Note: Both butter and honey are used in this otherwise vegan dish, which have been substituted with coconut oil and simple syrup.

This recipe is featured in The Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook, which you can learn more about at: https://embroideredrecipes.com/product/vegan-armenian-kitchen-cookbook/

For blog and recipes, see: https://embroideredrecipes.com/blog/

The Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook (published in 2020) can be ordered on The Vegan Armenian Kitchen website, where recipes, videos, and more will be shared. While the majority of recipes found in the cookbook are naturally plant-based or Lenten, Lena Tashjian has veganized a few Armenian classics, including khash. This cookbook showcases that it is possible to reduce or eliminate animal product consumption while still enjoying many classic Armenian dishes and recipes. It is an updated collection of plant-based recipes and stories from Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora. It is a self-published collaborative project between Lena, the author and recipe developer, and Siroon Parseghian, the photographer and food stylist. The 265-page book contains 119 recipes, and covers a range of items, including herbs, pastes, syrups, drinks, breakfast, salads, soups and stews, bread, main dishes like various types of dolma (tolma) and bean dishes, accompaniments (especially various rice, bulgur and potato dishes) and desserts. Information is provided on folk practices like reading coffee grounds or toasting customs. The photographs make the various food items seem tantalizingly close and appealing.



Go to: https://veganarmeniankitchen.com/product/vegan-armenian-kitchen-cookbook/.

"We continue to donate all proceeds from our signature tote bags to initiatives and organizations supporting the people of Artsakh, and donate a portion of proceeds from the cookbook to Centaur Animal-Assisted Therapy & Rescue Center in Ushi, Armenia," adds Lena. On June 16, 2021, it was announced that The Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook was shortlisted for the Taste Canada Awards. The Taste Canada Awards 'annually honors superior writing and publishing throughout Canada's culinary community, in English and French.'"

Yerevan Comedian Davtyan Brings Nostalgia and Laughs to Boston

COMEDY, from page 13

audience members who were immigrants from Armenia took advantage of this opportunity to thank him for creating an opportunity to feel connected again with their homeland, for which they were nostalgic.

After about a quarter-hour of direct interactions, he then began riffing on various topics of everyday life in a humorous manner, such as the different approaches of men and women to shopping or how lives have changed over time (did *babig*s and *dadig*s have "personal space"?).

For example, he pointed out how Armenians use "bribery" as a technique throughout their lives. Children are bribed to be quiet through cartoons or presents and as they grow older to study hard and do well in school. Their teachers are given "presents" to ensure good treatment in school. Adults give money to secure good treatment at restaurants or parking for their cars. Davtyan asked the audience members to raise their hands if they have given bribes. About half the audience did so, and Davtyan then exclaimed that must mean that the other half are the people who receive the bribes.

Aside from relating humorous anecdotes, Davtyan on several occasions, especially at the close of the program, called for Armenians to behave harmoniously and respect, trust and love one another, and expressed his belief that people in general are good in nature. He even touched upon the role of AI, how it has changed life already, and his opinion that it needs to be used only in a judicious manner.

Sponsors of the evening included the Russian School of Mathematics (RSM) and RG Pro Laser & Skin Care. For more information on the Hye Cultural Alliance, see www.hayculturalalliance.com.

Nemanja Dragaš

'We Are Like Seeds of the Same Pomegranate'

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/BELGRADE — Striking in appearance, tall and stately, amiable and friendly Nemanja Dragaš (born in Belgrade in 1992) is an award-winning Serbian poet, theatre artist, fashion designer and creative director. He is among the most acclaimed poets of his generation.

He completed his primary and secondary education in Pljevlja, Montenegro. In 2012, he became the youngest member of the Association of Writers of Serbia. He graduated from the Academy of Arts in Belgrade, where he received the Academy's Vidovdan Award as the top student of his graduating class. He later completed postgraduate studies in the Theory of Dramatic Arts and Media at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade.

Dragaš has published seven books of poetry, including *Promised Universe*, *Chained by Hours*, *Morphium*, *Antibodies*, and *Ego-Makete*. In 2016, *Promised Universe* earned him the Branko Marčeta Literary Award, and in 2020, he was named a laureate of the Milutin Bojić Award. His poetry has been translated into several languages. Alongside his literary work, Dragaš has also been active in theatre and film production.

Dear Nemanja, your versatile activities encompass both the arts and science. How do you find a balance between the two?

At the heart of both lies a love for all that is alive — for growth, as well as the spirit and the body. Balance is precisely at the crossroads where art and science meet, exchanging their knowledge and understanding of what it means to be human. I am fascinated by this intersection because it raises so many questions while offering so many answers. I enjoy being part of that exchange, contributing something of my own while sharing and building upon everything that has already been created and accumulated before me.

When did you first become acquainted with Armenians and Armenian culture?

Almost a decade ago. It is one of those rare kinds of love that also becomes a lesson in humanity, roots and blossoming. Wonderful friendships with Armenians in the diaspora, along with stories of the extraordinary city of Yerevan, eventually brought me here. I could never have imagined that I would find such a profound sense of home – or that I would keep returning to it as one returns to a mother's embrace. That is the kind of love Armenia offers: unconditional, poetic, dignified and steadfast. Like Ararat.



It is often said that Armenians and Serbs have many similarities. Do you agree with this, and if so, what similarities do you see?

It is true. By nature, both peoples are warm and deeply respectful of guests, friends, and family. The importance of others is always held close to the heart. The beauty of the food, culture, and art on the one hand, and the weight of history, unhealed wounds, and living memories on the other, create another profound bond between us. There are also our faith, our struggles and our hopes. We are like seeds of the same pomegranate — separated, but never truly distant. The same color, the same flavor. And despite everything, life continues to emerge from us like a song.

We first met in 2022, when you participated in the Junior Eurovision Song Contest. Since then, you have visited Armenia several times. What was your connection to the contest, and what has brought you back to Armenia since then?

My story with Armenia is a remarkable one. In 2022, a member of my extended family represented Serbia at the Junior Eurovision Song Contest in Yerevan, and together we learned songs in Armenian. When I arrived in Yerevan, I fell in love with both the city and the *taraz* (national costumes). I knew I had to return. And I did. The following year, I came back as a Culture Moves Europe grant recipient and spent several weeks at the Teryan Cultural Centre, learning about Armenian tradition, folklore, ornaments, garment-making techniques and the ways in which the past continues to shape contemporary Armenian fashion. I later returned as a guest of Taraz Fest, and this year as a designer, presenting my own brand at *The Future of the Past* festival in Victory Park.

How would you describe and assess the high-fashion scene in Armenia?

The Armenian fashion scene is a genuine source of inspiration. From traditional *taraz* to contemporary clothing, there is an extraordinary interplay of creative approaches that open up a dialogue with the past, explore the freedom of the moving body and offer poetic interpretations of fabric and form. Alongside more conventional formats that follow global trends, what I notice in Yerevan is a particularly strong connection to folklore and cultural heritage. That contrast is a source of great beauty.

Several Serbian writers have written about Armenia and Armenians. Do you think you might one day write something specifically connected to Armenia?

Absolutely. Spending time in Armenia is like picking fresh fruit from the tree of creation. Somehow, there is always a new recipe for a delicious compote. And everyone knows how much I adore compote in Yerevan. For me, it is also a connection to childhood. Poets always write about beauty, even when they use other words to describe it. Because beauty is a source of love — just as this city has become the source of so many beautiful moments in my life.

Do you have any artistic projects or collaborations with Armenia in the works?

Of course. Armenia has already become part of my creative journey. I launched my brand after spending time here, and my very first fashion show took place in Yerevan. While I prefer not to announce new projects before they take their final shape, I am certain that Dragaš-jan will return to this city many more times — and continue to enjoy his favorite view from the top of the Cascade. From December, a direct Belgrade–Yerevan flight will bring us even closer, giving us even more reasons to look forward to new encounters.



To Our Readers:

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* is the first English-language Armenian weekly, published in the US from 1932. Readers can learn of the most important developments in Armenia, as well as international politics, art and culture throughout the world in a convenient and concise format.

The *Mirror-Spectator* has covered the violence and political uncertainty affecting Armenia and Artsakh, supported efforts at humanitarian fundraising, and continued to provide periodic video reports online. Send us your email if you wish to receive our weekly updates.

We continue with our annual tradition of publishing your Christmas and New Year's wishes, and greetings to relatives and friends in the final issue of the year. In case you wish to give gift subscriptions of the *Mirror-Spectator* for Christmas, for your convenience, we are placing a gift subscription form in the newspaper as well as one below. Your support is what keeps us going and we always enjoy hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Alin K. Gregorian
Editor

Aram Arkun
Managing Editor

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Please make checks payable to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* and mail this voucher in the enclosed envelope. The deadline for receiving the messages is Dec. 18, 2026. For gift subscriptions fill out the credit card information above, OR send a check, for: __ $100 US __ $150 Canada __$230 International and write: _ _ Yes, I/We would like to gift a subscription to: NAME _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

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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

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 —St. James Men's Club Monthly Dinner & Gathering. Father-Son Night with guest speaker Ara Naroian. Ara is the head coach of the Arlington Catholic High School boys' soccer team, and one of the youngest varsity coaches in state history. Mezza 6:15pm, Losh Kebab & Kheyma Dinner 7 pm. $25 per person, all are welcome. St. James Church Charles Mosesian Cultural & Youth Center, Keljik Hall. 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.

DECEMBER 31 — St. James Armenian Church Presents a Great Gatsby New Year's Eve. Featuring live Jazz, International, and Armenian music by Armen Asayan & Band with DJ Emosh. Lavish Mezze Buffet & Stations, Dessert, Champagne Toast at midnight. Roaring 20s attire encouraged. Charles Mosesian Cultural & Youth Center – Keljik Hall. Table reservations available for 8-10 people. Tickets - $150 for Adults and Youth ages 13+. $75 for Children ages 5-12. Visit www.tiny.cc/nye2027 to reserve tickets.

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.

Meráki Greek Grill Opens 10th Restaurant with New Location

LAS VEGAS — Meráki Greek Grill opened its 10th restaurant on July 24, marking a new milestone for the Las Vegas-founded brand. The Henderson location is its seventh in the Las Vegas Valley, with three additional restaurants in Utah.

Located at 1685 E. Cactus Ave., the 3,500-square-foot restaurant accommodates 122 guests across its dining room and outdoor patio. The space features the brand's bright, modern design inspired by the warmth and spirit of Greece.

"Opening our 10th restaurant is an incredible milestone and a testament to the support we've received from our guests and the dedication of our team," said Joe Djavairian, franchise partner. "As we celebrate this achievement, we're excited to continue growing in the Las Vegas community and introduce even more guests to the fresh flavors and genuine hospitality that define the Meráki experience."



Girair "Jerry" Goumroian



Founded in 2017 by Girair "Jerry" Goumroian, Meráki Greek Grill brings a chef-driven approach to fast-casual dining, pairing traditional Greek flavors with fresh ingredients and warm hospitality.

The menu features signature bowls, gyros, salads, wraps, sandwiches, mezze plates and spreads, along with avgolemono soup. Additional highlights include Greek kalamakia, marinated skewers flame-grilled and finished with lemon, olive oil and oregano, and Taverna Cheese, lightly fried and served with hot honey.

Desserts include baklava, Mama's Rice Pudding, Greek donuts topped with Nutella and frozen Greek yogurt.

"The word Meráki in Greek captures the essence of doing something with love, passion, and soul. At Meráki Greek Grill, we strive to infuse this spirit into everything we do, ensuring that every guest feels a deep connection to the food, the culture, and the experience," said Goumroian.

The Henderson restaurant is open Sunday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.

For updates, menu offerings and store information, follow Meráki Greek Grill on Instagram at @MerakiGreekGrillor Facebook at facebook.com/MerakiGreekGrill.

Contributed by Christine Vartanian Datian.

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR
SINCE 1932

An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE UNITED STATES

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COMMENTARY

The Baku Prisoners Are Armenia's Prisoners

By Sergio Nahabetian

Azerbaijan has convicted Artsakh's leadership of terrorism and of financing terrorism. Yet for years it was the Armenian state that paid Artsakh's salaries, pensions, schools, hospitals and even its army. If those leaders are "terrorists," the charge is really aimed at Yerevan. That is why Armenia should not sign a peace deal without first demanding their release.

On February 5 of this year, Baku's Military Court sentenced Artsakh's last president, Arayik Harutyunyan, and four other senior leaders to life in prison. Former presidents Arkadi Ghukasyan and Bako Sahakyan each received 20 years. Days later, former State Minister Ruben Vardanyan was also sentenced to 20 years. The Court of Appeals later upheld every sentence.

Several organizations, including Amnesty International, called the proceedings a sham. Civilians were tried by a military court, and the hearings were open only to state media. None of the defendants pleaded guilty.

Among the dozens of charges, two deserve particular attention: terrorism and financing terrorism. Not because they are credible, but because of what they imply.

Who Paid the Bills?

Artsakh was never able to support itself with its own resources, and nobody pretended otherwise. In 2019, the last year before the war, its budget came to 117.9 billion drams, and almost half of it came from Armenia.

After the 2020 war, the dependence became almost total. In 2021, Artsakh's budget took in 174 billion drams, and 128 billion of that came from Yerevan: 73% of the total, more than $250 million.

In 2022, the Armenian government had planned to transfer 144 billion drams and ended up sending 176 billion, about $400 million. For 2023 it again budgeted 144 billion, more than 5% of all Armenian state spending, and approved additional funds even during the blockade of the Lachin corridor.

What was that money used for? I'm not the one saying it. Nikol Pashinyan himself said it in Parliament in June 2022, when he was accused of abandoning Artsakh. Those funds paid the salaries of every public employee, pensions, social benefits, health care and education. Pashinyan presented it at the time as a point of pride: Armenia had never helped Artsakh so much.

The money was transferred as an "interstate loan" at a token interest rate of 0.001% a year. And when Azerbaijan seized Artsakh by force in September 2023, the Armenian state did not walk away from those accounts either. That December, the government decided to take on the debts Artsakh owed to Armenian banks: about 315 billion drams, roughly $780 million. In other words, the Republic of Armenia formally assumed those obligations as its own.

The Army Too

If Armenian funds paid the salaries of every public agency in Artsakh, as Pashinyan acknowledged, that included the Ministry of Defense and the Artsakh Defense Army, whose command is now imprisoned in Baku. Artsakh's military spending was never made public; it was discussed behind closed doors. But the math is simple. If almost three-quarters of the budget came from Yerevan, there was no way to sustain an army without that money.

The military link was even more direct. For two decades, thousands of young men from Armenia did their compulsory military service in Artsakh. In the 2020 war, units of the Armed Forces of Armenia fought alongside the Defense Army. Only in mid-2022 did Yerevan announce it would stop sending conscripts.

Artsakh was not an adventure by a handful of leaders. It was state policy of the Republic of Armenia for thirty years, sustained with its budget, its soldiers and its weapons.

Baku's Trap

The reasoning is simple. If governing Artsakh was terrorism, and if the one who paid for that administration for years was Armenia, the conclusion follows on its own: the financier of terrorism would be the Republic of Armenia.

This is not speculation. The indictment presented at trial already speaks of systematic support from Armenian state bodies, its military leadership and diaspora networks. The trial of Artsakh's leaders was, in effect, a trial in absentia of Armenia.

That is the real danger. Baku has put on record, in a final judgment, a narrative it can use whenever it suits it. With names, figures and alleged evidence in a case file, nothing stops it from formally accusing the Republic of Armenia of sponsoring terrorism tomorrow. It could do so to demand reparations, to set conditions in negotiations or to pressure Armenia in international forums. And the peace agreement, which has yet to be signed, contains no safeguard today to prevent it.

The diaspora is not left out either. If the indictment mentions "diaspora networks," every fundraiser, every solidarity campaign and every contribution our communities sent over decades to build roads, schools or homes in Artsakh could one day fall under the same label.

An Obligation, not a Favor

Demanding the release of the prisoners in Baku is not just a humanitarian gesture. It is an obligation that Armenia should not subordinate to the convenience of the negotiating table.

Those men governed a territory with money the Armenian state sent them. They led an army that Armenia funded and manned with its own soldiers. They carried out a policy that Yerevan sustained under every one of its governments, Pashinyan's included. If they are serving life sentences today, it is for having done on the ground what the Republic of Armenia decided and paid for. Abandoning them would be admitting that the Armenian state uses its people and then washes its hands of them.

Peace should not be signed while they remain in prison

The time to demand it is now. The comprehensive peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan was initialed in Washington in August 2025, but it has not yet been signed. The Armenian government keeps saying it is ready to sign as soon as possible, even before the end of the year.

DEMANDING THE RELEASE OF THE PRISONERS IN BAKU IS NOT JUST A HUMANITARIAN GESTURE. IT IS AN OBLIGATION THAT ARMENIA SHOULD NOT SUBORDINATE TO THE CONVENIENCE OF THE NEGOTIATING TABLE.

Baku, by contrast, is in no hurry and sets conditions: it will not sign until Armenia amends its Constitution. Azerbaijan makes peace conditional on its interests; Armenia makes it conditional on nothing. And meanwhile it keeps giving ground: the Armenian Parliament has just ratified the framework agreement for the so-called Trump Route through Syunik.

If Baku sets conditions, Yerevan can and should do the same. The release of all Armenian prisoners, starting with Artsakh's leaders, must be an inseparable part of signing the comprehensive peace agreement. Not as a goodwill request for later, but as a precondition. Signing while they are behind bars would mean accepting a peace built on a ruling that accuses Armenia of terrorism, and leaving those men as a permanent bargaining chip in Azerbaijan's hands.

And yet the same Pashinyan who in 2022 proudly pointed to every dram sent to Artsakh is now silent in the face of a ruling that criminalizes his own state. Yerevan has chosen not to confront Baku in the name of the "peace agenda," just as it does with the repeated territorial claims of "Western Azerbaijan" on Armenia itself. But staying silent about this accusation does not neutralize it: it validates it. And no peace deserves the name if it leaves one's own prisoners in the other side's jails.

The leaders imprisoned in Baku are not there because they are terrorists. They are there because they governed and defended Artsakh on behalf of the whole Armenian nation, with the money and soldiers that Yerevan gave them and now prefers not to mention. Demanding their release before signing the peace is paying a debt Armenia owes them. And it is also, even if Yerevan refuses to see it, defending Armenia itself against an accusation that already hangs over it.

(Sergio Nahabetian is the director of Diario Sardarabad (www.sardarabad.com.ar) and president of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Buenos Aires. As a member of the Buenos Aires Provincial Legislature, he authored Law 13,478 recognizing the Armenian Genocide, which the provincial legislature passed in 2006. The above article was first published at Sardarabad.com.ar on November 14, 2026.)

COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Pashinyan Shouldn't Resign and Go Home: He Must Face Life in Prison

After eight years of watching Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's anti-Armenian hysterical statements, accompanied by erratic gestures and screams, I think Armenians are left with no other choice but to have him arrested, tried, and sentenced to life in prison.

Pashinyan should not be allowed to simply resign and go home. He must pay a heavy personal price for collaborating with Armenia's enemies by:

— Surrendering the Republic of Artsakh to Azerbaijan, causing the deaths of several thousand young Armenian soldiers and leaving thousands more wounded;

— Allowing Azerbaijan to occupy parts of the Republic of Armenia's territory since 2021-2022;

— Denigrating Armenia's sacred national symbols;

— Violating Armenia's Constitution and hundreds of laws; and

— Abandoning Armenia's legitimate historical demands against both Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Out of desperation, having found no other way to secure parliamentary approval for a referendum on the Constitution dictated by President Aliyev, Pashinyan came up with a new ploy last week. He cunningly announced that he would resign if Armenia's citizens reject the proposed Constitution in a referendum, provided that Parliament first approves holding such a vote. He then added that he would resign by 2031, if the public approved the Constitution.

Fortunately, both parliamentary opposition parties have already rejected his deceitful offers, which he foolishly claimed they "cannot refuse."

Pashinyan is making these empty promises for the following reasons:

First, his party does not have the required two-thirds of the seats in Parliament to approve a referendum, despite his warnings prior to the June 2026 elections that there would be war in September unless his party won two-thirds of the seats. President Aliyev has insisted that unless Armenia amends its Constitution and removes the reference to Artsakh from its preamble, he will not sign the negotiated peace treaty.

Pashinyan's political career hangs on Aliyev's approval of that treaty, because the Prime Minister has repeatedly deceived the Armenian public by suggesting that their sons will no longer die in a war with Azerbaijan if the peace agreement he claims to have secured, or is about to secure, is approved.

So far, Pashinyan has only been able to get the draft of that peace treaty initialed, not signed, by both sides, despite the fact that Aliyev had dictated all 17 articles of the text. Even the initialing of the treaty took place under heavy pressure exerted on Aliyev by President Trump, who desperately wanted to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Trump had prematurely announced, on the eve of the August 8, 2025, White House meeting with Pashinyan and Aliyev, that they were coming to Washington to sign the peace treaty.

Aliyev has no reason to rush to sign such a treaty, because he still has a long list of demands for Pashinyan. In addition to pressuring Armenia to change its Constitution, Aliyev is demanding that:

— 300,000 Azeris who fled Armenia during the first Artsakh War be allowed to return;

— The border between Armenia and Azerbaijan be adjusted by ceding additional territories to Azerbaijan;

— The formerly Azeri-populated enclaves inside Armenia be returned to Azerbaijan; and

— Armenia pay tens of billions of dollars in compensation for damages resulting from the "occupation" of Artsakh.

Second, no one in their right mind will believe any promises Pashinyan makes. Over the last eight years, he has lied to the public hundreds of times. What he announces in the morning, he reverses by the same night. When Pashinyan is confronted with his many contradictory statements, he tries to deny that he ever made them. Even after journalists replay the recordings of his earlier statements and post videos of his contradictory remarks on Facebook, he either says he does not remember saying them or comes up with a nonsensical explanation. The most notorious example of Pashinyan's reversals is his statement on August 5, 2019, before thousands of Artsakh Armenians gathered in Stepanakert, Artsakh, that "Artsakh is Armenia. Period." Several years later, after relinquishing Artsakh to Azerbaijan, he reversed himself and declared that "Artsakh is part of Azerbaijan."

Furthermore, as Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Pashinyan had no right to concede Artsakh to Azerbaijan. Before doing so, he had acknowledged that Armenia's citizens had chosen him Prime Minister of Armenia, not of Artsakh. Therefore, his recognition of Artsakh as part of Azerbaijan and his signature on the November 9, 2020, ceasefire agreement with Aliyev and Putin, which ceded the territories surrounding Artsakh to Azerbaijan, constitute grave violations of Armenia's Constitution.

Nevertheless, Pashinyan keeps looking for a way out. He first announced that he would call "snap" parliamentary elections, vainly hoping that his party would thereby gain the required two-thirds majority. However, when his colleagues warned him that snap elections could produce the opposite result, the loss of his existing majority in Parliament, he quickly abandoned that ploy.

Pashinyan then resorted to threatening his political opponents with all sorts of illegal measures, including false accusations, arrests, and imprisonment, in order to coerce them into providing the six additional votes his party needs to approve the referendum.

Next, he announced that he would urge the public to pressure the parliamentary opposition to vote for the referendum. This is another desperate move. I seriously doubt that his followers will respond to his calls to surround Parliament and force the opposition members to vote for the referendum.

Despite these maneuvers, Pashinyan has been unable to find a way to change the Constitution in order to please Aliyev. I have a better suggestion. Rather than allowing Pashinyan to resign after the referendum, Armenians should have him arrested immediately, tried, and sentenced to life in prison.

A Senate Endorsement Won't Stop an Arms Sale

By Diana Grigoryan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Armenian Americans just helped elect an ally. The real test is a 1992 law that Washington keeps waiving.

Abdul El-Sayed just won a Senate seat in Michigan. Weeks earlier, he noted a taboo subject that most candidates avoid; he condemned U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan and called the Trump administration's blank check a violation of international law.

I lead the Armenian Students' Association at UMass Amherst, so this comment piqued my interest. Armenian Americans rarely hear a Senate candidate say "Azerbaijan" and "international law" in the same sentence.

I choose not to celebrate early because various candidates have a record of populism without fulfillment. A campaign statement is a promise, and Washington has a long habit of making Armenia's friends feel heard while doing the opposite.

This is the opposite. In 1992, Congress passed Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which bars direct U.S. aid to Azerbaijan's government. Congress wrote the ban in the middle of the first war over Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), when Azerbaijan was blockading Armenia. The message was simple: no American aid until Baku stops.

Congress also let presidents waive it, and presidents of both parties since have. That includes Joe Biden, so this is not a one-party failure.

Donald Trump extended the waiver in August 2025. This June, Azerbaijan's president posted a framed copy of the order that Trump had given him.

Why is it so hard to waive 907? The president only has to certify one of two things. Either the waiver helps counter terrorism, or it won't undermine peace efforts or be used offensively against Armenia. That is a low bar, and a signature clears it.

Supporters of the waiver say Azerbaijan is a useful partner and that arming Baku is part of keeping a new peace. But historian Michael Rubin asked the obvious question: if the peace is real, why does Baku want American weapons?

Armenia is also being asked to take the risk first. Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Yerevan on May 26 to discuss a Trump-backed route that would connect two parts of Azerbaijan through southern Armenia. Armenia opens its border while Baku collects waived weapons and still holds Armenian land.

Meanwhile, Armenian POWs are still being held in Azerbaijan in inhumane conditions. In June, they passed 1,000 days of detention. It is hard to call that a peace that needs more weapons.

Sixteen Armenian detainees were sentenced, including former political and military leaders of Artsakh, to terms of 15 years to life. The European Parliament condemned the trials as a miscarriage of justice. The 2020 ceasefire statement required Baku to release all prisoners, however nearly six years later, none of that has happened.

Although emotional phrasing and appealing speech may entice, Armenians have learned over time that campaign promises are superficial. A senator can condemn an arms sale in October and still be powerless to stop it in March, because the law hands the decision to one person. The fix is to take the waiver power away.

In 2008, Barack Obama pledged that as president he would recognize the Armenian Genocide. In eight years in office, he never used the word, and PolitiFact rated the promise broken. Donald Trump, running against Kamala Harris, promised to protect persecuted Christians and stop ethnic cleansing in Artsakh. Whatever you think of his peace push, signing a weapons waiver for Baku sits awkwardly beside that pledge. Watching this pattern, I realized how much Armenia must depend on a system of broken promises.

This isn't only an Armenian problem. Every ally and adversary watches what Washington does when its own conditions are broken. A warning that can be ignored for free makes the next warning cheaper.

The fix has a clear path. A bipartisan bill backed by Rep. Frank Pallone would bar presidents from waiving 907 unless Baku takes concrete steps toward lasting peace. Pressure is building the other way too. Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, a Trump ally, introduced a bill in December to repeal 907 entirely. Congress is about to decide which direction to go.

Armenian American voters have shown they can shape that decision. The ANCA announced all seven of its endorsed Senate candidates won this month. Organizations may tend to endorse those more likely to win, but it shows that a community this small can make candidates say its name out loud.

Now it has to turn words into votes. Here is what I'm asking of Senator-elect El-Sayed, and of every Democrat who mentioned Armenia this fall. Co-sponsor a bill that ends the blanket waiver. Put your name on it before the first vote, not after the next arms sale.

To readers who have never heard of Section 907, call your senators and ask where they stand. It takes five minutes. Armenia is a small country, and small countries survive on rules, not power. Section 907 is one of the few rules America ever wrote on its behalf, and right now it's being signed away.

Is justice only righteous when convenient?

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COMMENTARY

Was the Meeting Between Trump, Putin, and Xi a 'Yalta 2'?

By Suren Sargsyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectatowr

The meeting in China between presidents Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, and Donald Trump was significant given current global affairs. Summits among superpowers typically foster stability, help resolve conflicts, and manage geopolitical rivalries. Moreover, the changing world order means that the bipolar superpower dynamic of the Cold War no longer applies. There are now three global superpowers, each facing its own difficult challenges, both internal and external. Some experts have dubbed this meeting "Yalta 2," referencing the 1945 Yalta Conference between the victorious powers over Nazi Germany: the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

This comparison appears exaggerated. First, this was not a meeting of victors. The situations facing Russia and the United States are not comparable. Trump attended the summit amid an unresolved conflict with Iran and, since the midterms, has faced domestic challenges in addition to foreign policy issues, including disagreements with China over AI, technology, and trade tariffs.

Putin remains entangled in Ukraine, with no resolution in sight. Furthermore, Trump does not represent the entire West, as the United States and the United Kingdom did at the Yalta Conference; he represents US interests alone.

The United States, in turn, has significant disagreements with the EU, including over Ukraine and broader European security.

China's Xi appears to be in the strongest position among the three partners. With a growing economy, China is leading in many sectors. Xi has consolidated his power, especially following the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, making him one of the most influential leaders in contemporary world politics.

It is worth remembering that at Yalta, the leaders pursued their own interests in shaping the postwar world. In Europe, this contributed to the continent becoming partially communist and partially capitalist, while regions where the leaders could not reach a final agreement were left open to further competition. At the end of the day, Yalta was about dividing spheres of influence and creating a new world order.

That is not what we are witnessing today following the trilateral meeting in China. Although the meeting between Xi, Putin and Trump may resemble the Yalta Conference in its symbolism, the historical and geopolitical circumstances are fundamentally different.

Whether this meeting can serve as a good starting point for future meetings among the three most influential powers in the world is a different question. For now, however, this was simply a meeting involving limited discussions on a few specific topics. After all, the trilateral meeting will last only about an hour, making it difficult to discuss and resolve major international issues in such a short period. By comparison, the Yalta Conference lasted eight days, from February 4 to February 11, 1945, and was concerned with dividing spheres of influence and shaping the postwar world order.



When discussing trilateral meetings among the superpowers, we need to understand who is claiming what from whom. It is obvious that the world has changed fundamentally since 1945, when the Yalta Conference took place and the United Nations was created. After the Cold War ended, the bipolar order gave way to a different international system. China then emerged as a superpower, claiming its place and influence in a world order that had been designed without Beijing.

Russia, the successor state to the Soviet Union, was unable to maintain its spheres of influence in Europe and the post-Soviet space. This allowed the collective West to expand its influence into some regions that had previously belonged to the Soviet/Russian sphere of influence. It is difficult to believe that Russia will ever regain control over the Baltic states, the former Yugoslavia, or other regions.

On the other hand, China is now asserting the influence it believes it deserves, including in Central Asia, Oceania, and other regions. For this reason, global powers may eventually need to sit down, negotiate, and decide how to manage their competing interests and influence around the world. However, it seems too early for such an arrangement, as all these powers are still preoccupied with their own internal and external problems and challenges. Therefore, the meeting in Shenzhen, China, does not come anywhere close to qualifying as a "Yalta 2" event.

Meanwhile, what interests us is whether a potential division of spheres of influence might take shape, and if it did, what place Armenia and the South Caucasus might be assigned in such an arrangement. It is clear that the United States, China, and Russia will each seek to preserve their vital interests across all possible fronts. For China, Central Asia is, of course, of vital importance. For Russia, the same applies to Central Asia, former Soviet republics, as well as Ukraine, whatever its future status may be.

The Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) American project has substantially changed the geopolitical logic of the South Caucasus. However, there are still numerous challenges surrounding its implementation, which Washington has so far been unable to resolve, and it is increasingly clear that the South Caucasus is not nearly as important to China and the US as it is to Russia.

I believe that Russia has no intention of relinquishing its position in the South Caucasus, regardless of how difficult it may be for Moscow to maintain its influence throughout the region. Russia will seek ways to preserve and even strengthen its influence in the South Caucasus.

Of course, it cannot be ruled out that no tripartite arrangements will materialize at all and that global competition will continue across all regions of the world.

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How Syria Is Becoming Unlivable for Christians

By Kevork Almassian

Something very serious is happening to Syria's Christians, and this time it is not only people like me saying it. The leaders of three of Syria's most important Christian churches have issued a joint warning after repeated kidnappings, attacks, extortion and violence against their communities. They say these incidents are not isolated. Because every time a church is vandalized, a businessman is kidnapped, a Christian woman is harassed or a priest is attacked, the response is usually the same: this is random criminality, this is an isolated case, this does not represent the authorities, give the new government time. Fine. How many times does something have to happen before we stop calling it random?

A Christian jeweler, Maher Sankari, was abducted after being struck from his motorbike and dragged away. His kidnappers reportedly demanded an extraordinary ransom in gold and sent his family images showing him beaten and restrained. Then Archbishop Youhanna Abdel-Ahad Arbach of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church was attacked, bound, blindfolded and gagged while his office was ransacked. Churches and Christian institutions have been vandalized. There have been reports of harassment, attempted abductions and growing Islamist pressure in Christian areas. And what did the patriarchs say? That the authorities have failed to provide security and that the attacks continue. Basically, the church leaders are asking whether their communities have a future in Syria.

And this is what people outside Syria have to understand: Christians are not guests in this country. They are not some recently arrived minority that needs permission from whoever controls Damascus to remain there. Christianity in Syria goes back to the first century. Damascus is the place where Saul converted and became the Apostle Paul. Syria has ancient monasteries, Greek Orthodox, Syriac, Assyrian, Armenian, Melkite and Protestant communities, and villages such as Maaloula where forms of Aramaic survived for centuries. We are talking about one of the oldest continuous Christian presences on the planet.

But history does not protect you by itself.

This is something I think people say too casually: "Syria cannot be Syria without Christians." It sounds beautiful. I understand what they mean. But history does not care about beautiful slogans. One hundred and twenty years ago, people could have said that large parts of Cilicia and Anatolia could not exist without Armenians, Greeks and other Christian communities. Then came massacres, deportations, genocide and displacement, and today those communities survive mostly in history books, ruined churches and family memories.

My own family is part of that story. We lived in the area between Kilis and Aintab under the Ottoman Empire. We were forced to flee during the Armenian genocide and eventually settled in Aleppo. Then, generations later, we were displaced again. I had more than one hundred members of my extended family in Aleppo. Today, the number is zero. Everybody left.

So when somebody tells me that Syrian Christians can never disappear because they have lived there for two thousand years, I have bad news for them. Indigenous communities disappear all the time when political systems become hostile enough, when security collapses, when economic life becomes impossible and when leaving becomes more rational than staying. You do not need to physically exterminate every Christian. You only need to create conditions in which each family privately concludes that its children have no future there.

And the economy makes this worse. We keep hearing about reconstruction, investments, malls, international brands and a supposedly new Syria open for business. But where is the productive economy? Where is the security? You can open Louis Vuitton in Damascus if you want. Who is going to buy it? One percent of society? A few wealthy people selling to other wealthy people while the majority of Sunnis, Christians, Alawites, Druze and everyone else remains impoverished? This is not economic recovery. This is simply the proliferation of consumerism.

That is why I reject this sectarian fantasy that somehow Syria has now been "returned" to its Sunni majority and therefore ordinary Sunnis will automatically prosper. No. The vast majority of Sunni Syrians are poor. The vast majority of minority Syrians are poor. This is a class issue. A failed state does not become successful because the president belongs to the majority sect. If people cannot work, cannot invest, cannot trust the police, cannot protect their businesses and cannot send their children safely to school, then what exactly have they won?

Syrians deserve something much more basic than these ideological fantasies. After fourteen years of war, they deserve an inclusive government capable of providing security, stability and the minimum conditions for reconstruction. I am not even talking here about some grand sovereign and independent Syrian project. I am talking about the bare minimum: people being able to live, work, eat and know that if their son is kidnapped, the state will actually do something.

Instead, sectarian and supremacist rhetoric is being normalized again. You see people online openly telling minorities that Syria belongs to Arab Sunnis and that everyone else should be quiet. This mentality cannot build a state. It can build a sectarian farm controlled by whoever has the guns today, until another group gets the guns tomorrow.

If this situation continues, there will not be enough Christians left in Syria — in the near future — to be frightened at all.

(Kevork Almassian is a Syrian geopolitical analyst and the founder of Syriana Analysis. This is an edited transcript of one of his videos, AI assisted with transcription cleanup and editorial editing. The analysis, arguments, and opinions are his own.)